

BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY-BASED SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION INITIATIVE

AT HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK

Findings from July 2024 to June 2025



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S
NETWORK

This report was prepared by Indigo Cultural Center as part of an independent evaluation of The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative. The perspectives and interpretations presented here are those of the evaluators and are not intended to represent the official views of Homeless Children's Network.

Detailed information about Indigo Cultural Center, Homeless Children's Network, The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative, and the literature guiding this report are available at the end of this report in the section, Background and Context.

Suggested Citation:

Abidog, C., Matriano, R., Janssen, J., Byars, N., Parker, A., Shivers, E.M. (2025). Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative at Homeless Children's Network: Evaluation Findings from July 2024 to June 2025. Prepared by Indigo Cultural Center for Homeless Children's Network. With funding from the San Francisco San Francisco Department of Public Health.

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Introduction

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report was to evaluate the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative (otherwise known as Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative) at Homeless Children’s Network (HCN). The Initiative sought to expand community awareness of substance-use disorder (SUD) within the greater San Francisco community. The goal of this awareness campaign is to prevent and reduce substance use and fatal overdoses among Black/African American individuals in San Francisco by building capacity within Black-led and Black-serving community-based organizations and strengthening Black systems of care through interconnected, culturally affirming referral and resource networks. This initiative aims to create sustainable change and promote the health and well-being of the Black/African American community.

There were three key components/activities of the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative this year:

- Substance Use and Overdose Community Presentations
- Targeted Public Awareness Campaign
- Amani Mental Health Trained as Peer Educators

The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative’s Contracted Performance Objectives for the 2024-2025 Fiscal Year

The Initiative met and exceeded its goals of creating change and promoting the health and well-being of the Black/African American community.

During FY24-25, this Initiative:

Objective	Actual	Status
Provide 18 community presentations	Provided 21 community presentations	Objective Exceeded
Create six monthly reports for six systems of care	Created six monthly reports for six systems of care	Objective Met
Host 6 Peer Educator trainings	Hosted 6 Peer Educator trainings	Objective Met
Reach 120 unique individuals via presentations	Reached 449 unique individuals via presentations	Objective Exceeded
Reach 120 community members via engagement with Peer Mentors	Reached 198 community members via engagement with Peer Mentors	Objective Exceeded
Engage 20 community leaders in a Comprehensive Community Assessment	Engaged 53 community leaders in a Comprehensive Community Assessment	Objective Exceeded
Complete one 5-part campaign	Completed one 5-part campaign resulting in over 21 million impressions!	Objective Met

For additional, detailed information about the program’s achievement of contracted performance metrics see the table *Black/African American Community-Based Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative Performance Objectives* on page 5.

Throughout these program areas, there were five guiding elements to the Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative efforts this year:

Culturally Relevant Messaging - Embedded in all HCN programs and activities is the use of a culturally relevant approach; campaign materials and activities used affirming language, visuals, and sourced from testimonials that reflected community values.

Strategic Partnerships - The Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative partnered with multiple Black-led and Black-serving organizations to achieve their goals for the campaign, including distributing the community needs assessment, hosting organizations for community presentations, and collaborating with local businesses for the dissemination of campaign materials, among many other partnerships. For example, information about the Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative was shared in Soul of Pride's Black Pride event, and on the event website.

Digital and Media Campaign - A digital advertisement campaign was implemented to raise awareness and target key audiences. This included the use of social media, website banners, and retargeting strategies to drive web traffic and viewer engagement to HCN's Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative landing page, thus providing exposure to HCN's resources. Additionally, a print media campaign targeted pedestrians and commuters using local billboards and convenience store posters.

On-the-Ground Outreach - The Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative employed a team of community members to act as Peer Educators. These educators regularly provided street outreach in high-priority neighborhoods within the community.

Community Engagement - One component of the campaign involved hosting forums and focus groups to gather feedback and ensure strategies aligned with community needs. For the campaign, the Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative provided educational presentations to the community and recruited community members to participate in ongoing focus groups.



Tales of the Fentanyl – a local performance by community partner, SF Recovery Theatre.

The Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative partnered with LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS, a minority-owned marketing agency specializing in culturally sensitive communication campaigns for digital and traditional (posters and billboards) media.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS

Together, with HCN, Indigo Cultural Center evaluated the impact of this year's Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative. In line with a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach rooted in racial equity, HCN's staff, including the HCN Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative team, collaborated with the Indigo Cultural Center team on the interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data collected and provided by HCN and their marketing partner, LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS. Additionally, we utilized HCN administrative data to track performance goals and objectives.

The current evaluation sought to address the following questions:

1. What was the reach of The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative?
2. What is the impact of the Initiative's Community Presentations?
3. What is the impact of the Initiative's Peer Educator Training?
4. What is the impact of the Public Awareness Advertisement Campaign?



Members of the Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative team presenting at a meeting.

Evaluation Findings



THE REACH OF THE BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION & EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative met or exceeded all of its objectives for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, engaging 647 community members through presentations and training, and garnering over 21 million impressions through digital media. The table below provides the performance objective goals for FY 24-25 and details what was accomplished by the Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative. Notably, the HCN team far exceeded expectations for the community presentations and the training program.

Black/African American Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative Performance Objectives			
Performance Objective	Goal	Achieved	% Goal Achieved
Community Presentations	18 presentations	21 presentations	117%
Community Presentation Attendees	120 attendees	449 attendees	374%
Peer Educator Trainings			
Trainings	6 trainings	6 trainings	100%
Peer Educator Community Engagement (in partnership with HCN's Amani program)	120 community members	198 community members	165%
Comprehensive Assessment Summary	Assess 20 leaders	Assessed 53 leaders	265%
One 5-Part Campaign	Completed	Completed	100%

In the following sections, we highlight the impact of the three key components/activities of the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative this year: The community presentations, the Peer Educator training, and the awareness advertisement campaign.

COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS ENCOURAGED COMMUNITY ACTION

One of the primary components of the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative was the delivery of community presentations. These sessions aimed to support prevention by raising awareness, building capacity, and connecting participants to a full continuum of substance use services. These community presentations often included a brief training on the use of life-saving naloxone.



21 presentations were provided



70 presentation feedback responses



449 community attendees

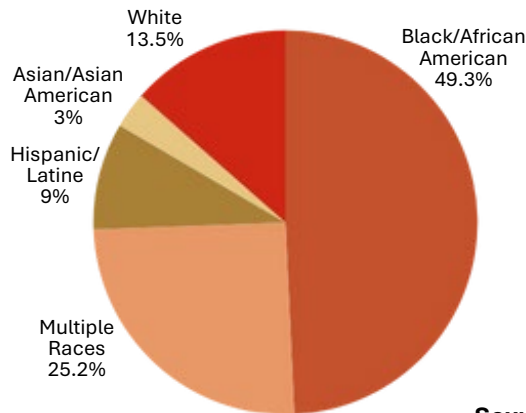


442 doses of naloxone distributed

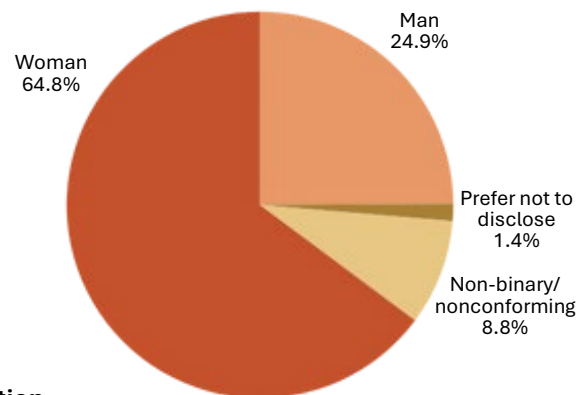
Community Presentations Feedback from Survey Participants

A total of 70 community members responded to the SUD Community Presentation Feedback Survey which was distributed at the end of each presentation. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 73 where the average age of participants was 37 years old. Additional participant demographics can be viewed in the charts below:

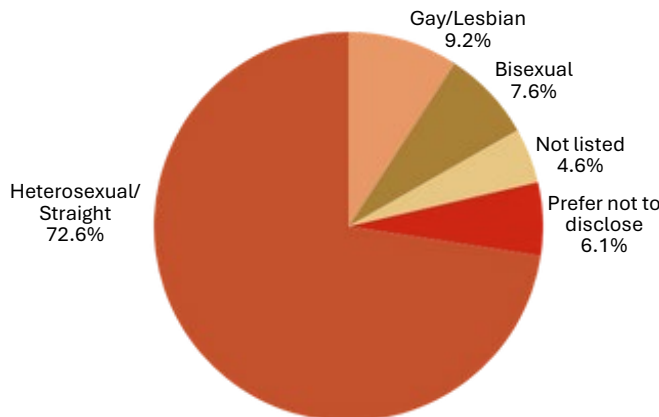
Racial Identity



Gender Identity



Sexual Orientation

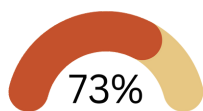


We found that participants reported the community presentations were both engaging and impactful. Participants noted that the information presented increased their knowledge about SUD in the community and was effective in addressing SUD-related issues. See Appendix A for participants' level of reported impacts.

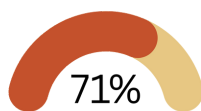
SUD Community Presentation Feedback

- Participants reported learning about the impact of SUD on the Black Community.
- Participants reported that the information presented was extremely relevant to addressing issues faced by the Black community regarding SUD.
- Participants reported a strong understanding of the barriers that the Black community faces when accessing SUD treatment.
- Participants reported they strongly agreed that there were moments during the presentation that resonated with aspects of their culture.

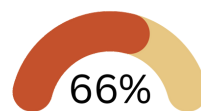
Furthermore, we found that the community presentations motivated attendees to engage in prevention practices. Participants were asked to describe how they envisioned taking action in their communities. **An overwhelming majority of participants (98.5%) indicated that they would take some form of action after engaging in the community presentations.** Importantly, attendees were provided with naloxone to support their ability to prevent SUD-related deaths in their communities.



Of participants said they would raise awareness



Of participants said they would share the presentation content with a community or family member



Of participants said they would carry naloxone

PEER EDUCATOR TRAININGS EMPOWERED LEADERS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The second component of the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative was to host regularly scheduled Peer Educator training. These sessions were delivered to individuals participating in another HCN program – the Amani program (see this year's Amani Program Report). The Peer Educator trainings were hosted between January 2025 and June 2025. Those who participated in the Peer Educator training shared that this experience increased their knowledge of how to serve and help those suffering from substance abuse. On the following page, a Peer Educator shares about their experience.

"[The Program] taught a lot about the effects of drugs and how it affects mental health and how to be of service to people in their time of need, of healing, when going through drug and alcohol abuse..."

-Peer Educator

In addition, select Amani participants from the training were invited to participate further in the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative by becoming Peer Educators. These Peer Educators served as leaders and advocates within the San Francisco community. A total of six (6) trainees participated as Peer Educators and regularly engaged the community through outreach by educating individuals and small groups on the fentanyl crisis.

They also delivered on-the-spot training on the use of naloxone and provided community members with Narcan toolkits.

Many of the Peer Educators expressed that the experience helped them build a sense of connection with their community. Further, they appreciated the aspect of creating connections to their fellow Peer Educators. Collaborating in the context of this campaign enriched their experience by providing opportunities for team building and keeping each other accountable. Three Peer Educators share about their experience,

"My experience with [the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative] was amazing. I was able to bring awareness surrounding drug use in the Black community [...] being able to connect with my community providing resources that the Black community lacks."

"So it became like a team thing where we actually made sure we all hit our goals as a team [...] It made us all just go out there together and just make sure we all outreached as a group and got our, you know, goals."

"[Being a Peer Educator] gave me a lot more purpose while being here. Being in the Program and doing all the outreach just made it easier for me to talk to strangers. I don't know. It was a fun experience. It really impacted my journey in general. It taught me a lot of things. I've actually had to use techniques I learned from the class to save a life [...] But nevertheless, I'm thankful that I did have the class and the experience so I could learn these things."

THE PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ENGAGED OVER 20 MILLION SAN FRANCISCANS

Finally, the largest component of the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative's efforts this year was the public awareness advertisement campaign to the city of San Francisco.

Prior to designing the campaign's creative materials, in fall 2024, HCN and the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative team conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to inform their campaign development. The needs assessment was distributed to multiple leaders across six (6) different systems of care within San Francisco to collaboratively develop culturally responsive strategies for raising community awareness.

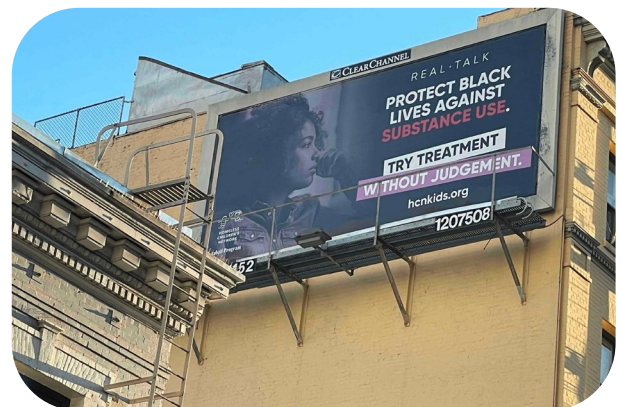
The following themes emerged from the needs assessment:

- Major barriers to recovery support
 - Lack of culturally competent services that reflect the lived experiences of community members.
 - Limited availability of affordable, high-quality treatment options.
 - Insufficient family or community support networks to encourage recovery.
- Rigid, inaccessible service models
 - Many treatment programs lack flexibility in scheduling and service delivery.
 - Barriers such as childcare needs, transportation challenges, and inconvenient service hours make participation difficult for people with substance use disorder.
 - One-size-fits-all recovery approaches fail to address the diverse realities of those seeking help.
- Need for stigma reduction and public education
 - Persistent negative stigma frames substance use as a moral failing rather than a complex issue often rooted in systemic neglect and unhealed trauma (Yang et al., 2018).
 - Public understanding of the difference between substance use and addiction remains limited.
- Youth engagement in harm reduction
 - San Francisco youth are increasingly taking proactive steps to equip themselves with life-saving resources for their peers.

The findings from the community assessment summary were then used by both HCN and LAGRANT COMMUNICATIONS to develop their public awareness campaign. An overview of the public awareness advertisement campaign can be seen in the table on this page, including the specific focus of the campaign communication, the call to action, and the intended audiences.

Awareness Campaign Overview		
Focused Communication	Call to Action	Intended Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the dangers of fentanyl and opioids Highlight lifesaving behaviors – Naloxone Combat misconceptions about fentanyl and opioid users Communicate about recovery Discuss HCN’s Initiative benefits & offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn more. It’s okay to ask for help. Drive traffic to HCN Public Awareness Campaign website; sign up for the newsletter to stay informed and get involved Reach out to receive Narcan 	<p><i>Primary Audience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black Parents & Caregivers, Families, and Community <p><i>Secondary Audience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults 19 and older Parents Community stakeholders and advocates

Creative materials were developed for a breadth of media including social media posts (both static and video), billboards, and posters for small businesses. Focus groups were also used to refine all creative materials to ensure they were aligned and responsive to communities. Subjects depicted in the materials reflected a variety of contexts and identities and the information relayed was presented as “REAL TALK” as a means to keep the awareness campaign relatable. Three (3) types of static visuals and six (6) different videos were produced each using unique messaging approaches. A selection of the creative materials are shown below and on a dedicated webpage at <https://www.hcnkids.org/jabali-awareness-campaign>.



Community-Based Prevention and Education Initiative billboards at 6th and Skyway (left) and Ellis & Jones (right).

IMPACT OF THE ADVERTISEMENT CAMPAIGN

Once all materials were developed, the Public Awareness advertisement campaign ran between February 2025 and June 2025. LAGRANT tracked the reach and efficacy of the campaign by utilizing data on impressions and the click through rate (CTR). Impressions were calculated utilizing a variety of methods. Impressions on electronic advertisements were calculated based on the number of times an advertisement was seen and displayed. For out-of-home advertisements such as billboards and posters, impressions were calculated based on historical traffic data for each respective location. The CTR is calculated by dividing the number of times an advertisement was clicked by the total number of impressions.

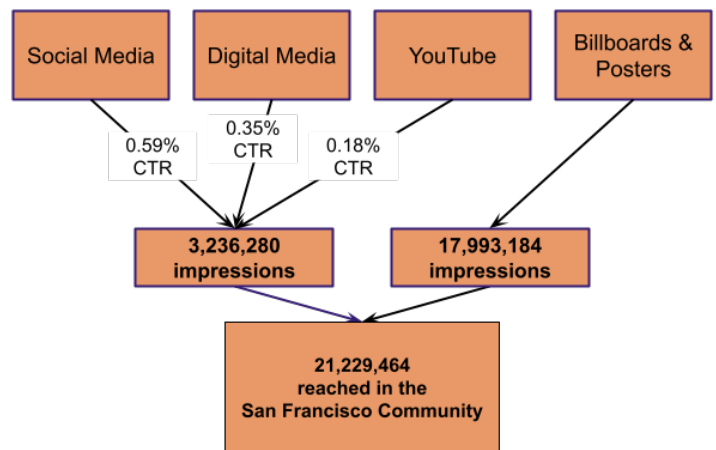


HCN staff with Geoffrey Grier of SF Recovery Theatre.

We detail the reach of the public awareness advertisement campaign in the image below and additional information can be found in Appendix B. Using these approaches, the Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative was able to effectively spread awareness to millions of people throughout San Francisco.

The Advertisement Campaign garnered over 21 million impressions within the City of San Francisco.

Moreover, the campaign garnered high CTRs across the social media (0.59%), digital media (0.35%), and YouTube (0.18%) components of the campaign. For comparison, LAGRANT ran the State of California's COVID-19 awareness and vaccination campaigns for which the average CTR was only 0.14%. These findings further support the incredible impact the Public Awareness Campaign had on the City of San Francisco.



Note: CTR = number of clicks divided by total impressions.

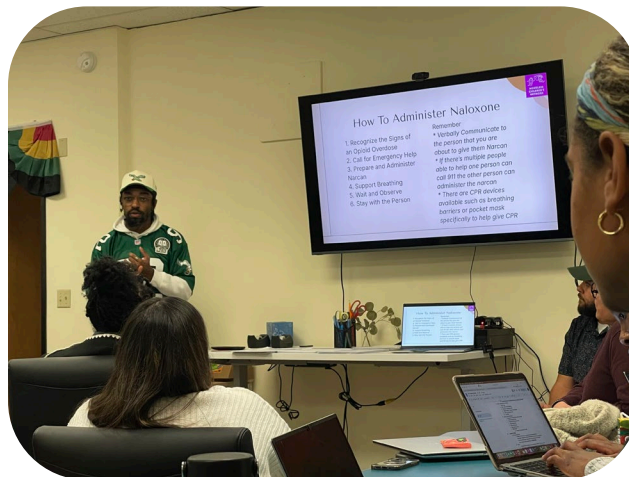
Implications



Findings from this study illuminate the importance of HCN's Public Awareness Campaign in bridging awareness and motivating use of prevention services to address the substance use disorder crisis in San Francisco, particularly in marginalized communities.

The Public Awareness Campaign has garnered high levels of engagement and reach within the community across each level of activities, offering actionable goals and tangible skills to enact change in communities through life-saving strategies such as naloxone distribution and Peer Educator training. Other organizations seeking to make change in the SUD crisis should look to HCN's Public Awareness Campaign as a model for educating the community and providing community members valuable skills, tangible resources, and motivation critical for healing and empowering themselves.

Moreover, the strategic use of a variety of activities— from digital marketing to presentations and training to making deep connections through small groups— the Public Awareness Campaign amassed widespread reach, which has direct implications on the community's knowledge of and access to SUD-treatment-related resources and supportive networks. Thus, continued investment in the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative is not only needed to maintain momentum and widespread reach of the program, but to continue bringing awareness and driving access to life-saving treatments and interventions among people who use drugs in San Francisco. Investing in the campaign is an investment in the wellness of the San Francisco community in bridging awareness and access to life-saving resources and treatment.



Conclusion



It is critical to ensure that the San Francisco community is aware and equipped to address the SUD crisis. The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative provided essential awareness and information to the San Francisco community, providing the community with the tools and knowledge to engage in healing from SUD. More than just bringing awareness to the SUD crisis, this initiative offered community members tangible resources to support one another, and built community connections to establish networks of organizations ready and equipped to support people who use drugs. This campaign not only spread awareness, but empowered community members regardless of proximity to substance use, to look out and care for one another, building resilient communities and establishing effective community-embedded pathways for recovery.



*Members of HCN's Community-Based Prevention and Education Initiative team with local podcast, *Storied San Francisco*.*

Appendix A

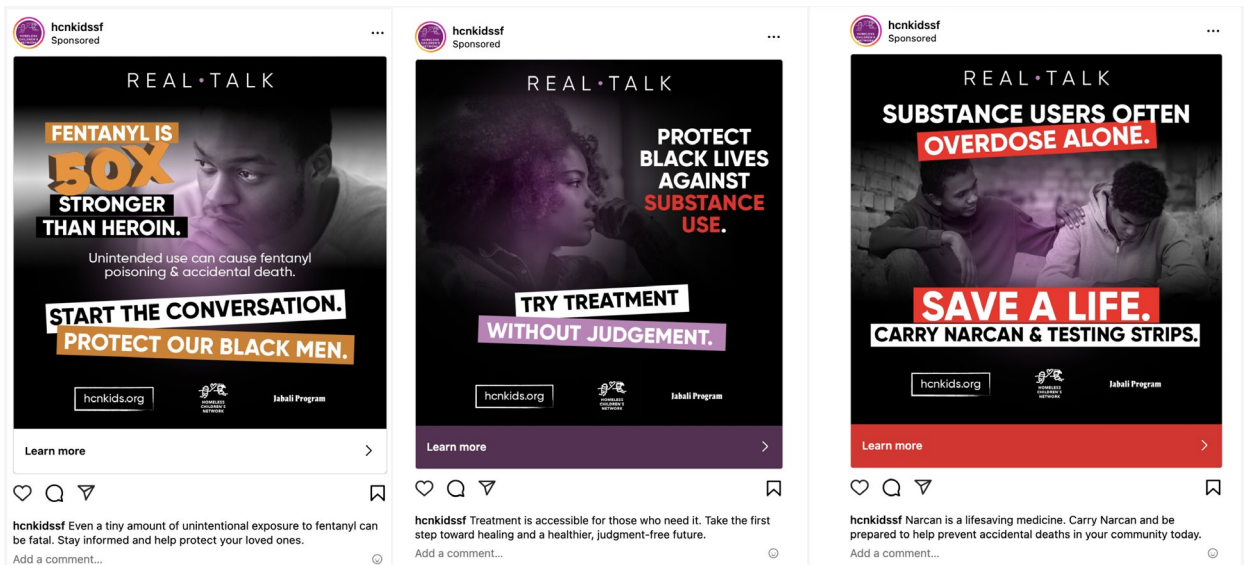
SUD Community Presentation Feedback Responses

The table below reflects the average response reported by the attendees of the SUD Community Presentations. Responses ranged from 1 to 5 and are detailed for each question below.

SUD Community Presentation Feedback (Scores Ranged from 1 to 5)	
Question	Average Response
How much did you learn about the impact of Substance Use Disorders (SUD) on the Black community from this presentation? <i>Scores ranged from 1 = Nothing new to 5 = A great deal</i>	4.41
How relevant do you think the information presented was to addressing issues faced by the Black community regarding SUD? <i>Scores ranged from 1 = Not relevant to 5 = Extremely relevant</i>	4.65
Do you have a better understanding of the barriers that the Black community faces when accessing SUD treatment? <i>Scores ranged from 1 = No understanding to 5 = Very clear understanding</i>	4.41
How much do you agree with the following statement: "There were moments during this presentation that resonated with aspects of my culture." <i>Scores ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree</i>	4.61

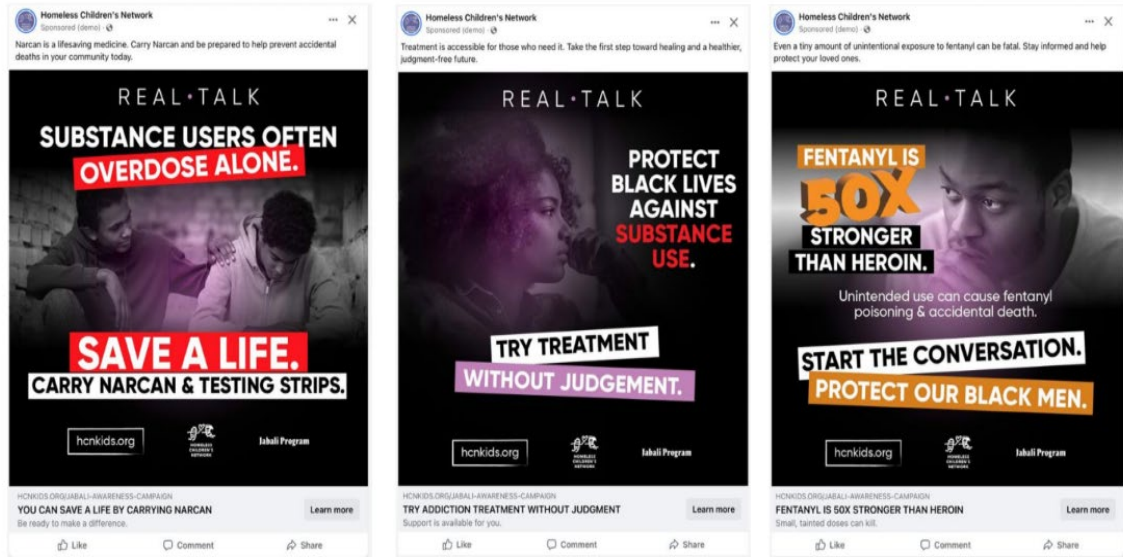
Appendix B

The pictures below display the Instagram advertisements in circulation during the campaign.



Appendix B (continued)

The pictures below display the Facebook advertisements in circulation during the campaign.



The pictures below display the billboard advertisements in circulation during the campaign.



Appendix B (continued)

The pictures below display the campaign posters in convenience stores during the campaign.

STAR MARKET
4400 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124



DOUBLE ROCK GROCERY
2830 Ingalls St San Francisco CA 94124



MIKE'S MARKET
2200 Silver Ave San Francisco CA 94124



SAABIS GROCERIES
1599 Revere Ave San Francisco CA 94124



EL AQUILA DE ORO
5201 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124



TORINO MARKET
4830 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124



LEE'S FOOD MARKET
1397 Revere Ave San Francisco CA 94124



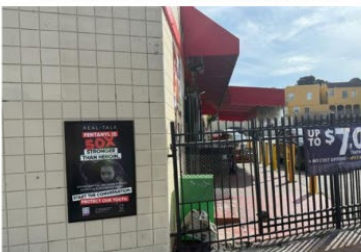
BAYVIEW LIQUOR
4700 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124



BIG SAVE MARKET
5001 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124





SUPER SAVE INC
4517 3rd St San Francisco CA 94124



H&K MARKET
1300 Fitzgerald Ave San Francisco CA 94124





**Background and Context
Supplementary
Materials**



Literature Guiding this Evaluation Report

While alcohol and illicit drug use frequency is comparable across racial groups, individuals belonging to marginalized communities have a greater likelihood of experiencing negative consequences (e.g., incarceration, health crises, etc.) (Windsor et al., 2018). Substance use disorder (SUD) interventions that create equitable intervention opportunities and are responsive to the cultural and social needs of the target population are necessary (Skewes et al., 2020). Additionally, stigma, and social and cultural norms may deter individuals from engaging in SUD interventions. Substance use disorder interventions which utilize community-based participatory research methodology such as stakeholder engagement, community partnerships, and compensation for collaboration to shape interventions is a promising way forward that can support the existing body of knowledge on the stigma of SUD (Sheehan et al., 2022).

Harm reduction intervention tools challenge binary choices in addiction recovery and instead partner with the person wherever they are at on their recovery journey, providing them with compassion and empathy (Taveras, 2025); harm reduction strategies emphasize engaging people in the intervention on their own terms. An example of this can be providing Naloxone medication to reverse an overdose; providing Naloxone allows people that are using substances to reduce harm from a substance through safety measures. Moreover, utilizing a multi-pronged approach to address the life cycle of addiction and substance use at different touch-points in the community is necessary (e.g., youth groups, partnership with community groups, community events, posters, pamphlets, print media, etc.) (Malick, 2018).



Literature Guiding this Evaluation Report (continued)

Key References

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Indigo Cultural Center

A Note About the Agency and People Conducting this Evaluation

Indigo Cultural Center (a predominantly BIPOC- staffed organization) is led by executive director Dr. Eva Marie Shivers, who identifies as a bi-racial African American, cisgender woman. The Institute of Child Development Research and Social Change at Indigo Cultural Center is an action-research firm that specializes in infant and early childhood research and evaluation conducted with an anti-racist lens. The Institute is led by director Dr. Jayley Janssen, who identifies as a white, cisgender woman. The evaluation of HCN's Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative was led by Ronae Matriano, a Filipina woman and a small team that consisted of a Black multiracial woman, two Black bi-racial women, a Black woman, and a white woman.

Indigo Cultural Center's mission is to conduct rigorous policy-relevant research on mental health, education, and development by partnering with community agencies and public agencies that are dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth, and families in BIPOC communities. Since its inception, Indigo Cultural Center has employed the use of community-based participatory research in all our evaluations. What this means is that we use a collaborative model and working style that involves our clients – who we prefer to call 'partners' – in the planning, implementation, interpretation, and dissemination processes of evaluation. We recognize the strengths that our partners bring to each evaluation project, and we build on those assets by consulting with our partners initially and at key milestones throughout the project, integrating their input and knowledge into all aspects of the project, asking for feedback on a regular basis, and seeking consensus on key issues and outcomes.

Our Voice and Terminology used in this Report

Our evaluation team employs the use of feminist methodology and the use of first-person voice when writing reports (e.g., 'we', 'us'; Leggat-Cook, 2010; Mitchel, 2017). Throughout this report, we use the terms Black and African American interchangeably. We use LGBTQIA+ as an acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual" with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community. We use queer to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. We use gender rather than sex as an inclusive term that acknowledges that gender is socially and contextually constructed and is a multidimensional facet of identity.

Homeless Children's Network

HCN's trusted provider status among historically marginalized communities in San Francisco is built on 33 years of innovative, relationship-based, and culturally responsive approaches to program development, community outreach and engagement, service delivery, and evaluation. Our culturally responsive programs, citywide partnerships, and visionary leadership deliver services to 2,500+ community members annually at no cost to youth and their families. As a city leader in programming development and delivery, HCN is dedicated to advancing systemic equity and reaching the most underserved youth, families, and communities that remain overlooked and marginalized by many systems of support including mainstream philanthropic agencies. HCN offers programs and extensive services providing San Francisco's historically marginalized youth, families, adults, and communities with the tools, resources, and support needed to navigate complex systems and overcome challenges through collaborative efforts.

Three decades ago, leaders from six shelters recognized a critical gap in services for San Francisco families experiencing homelessness. These organizations provided emergency shelter, domestic violence assistance, and transitional housing, but because of their structure, they could only serve families for a short time. This limited period of care created a cycle of attachment and loss—youth and families would build relationships with staff, only to be uprooted again. This instability made it hard for families to remain open to accessing support. In 1992, the community came together to break this cycle. They founded HCN to provide SF families in crisis with a lasting source of connection and care. Over the next three decades, in close collaboration and communication with our community members, community stakeholders, and community partners, HCN has evolved into an organization that directly addresses inclusion, community empowerment, and systemic equity.

What began as a network of six shelters has now grown to a vibrant hub of an HCN Collaborative of 60+ service agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) serving the hardest-to-reach youth and families, including those with experiences of or at risk for homelessness and violence. Our robust Collaborative network includes childcare and education centers; San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) schools; primary care; LGBTQIA+ services; substance use treatment; transitional and permanent supportive housing; Family Resource Centers; domestic violence and family shelters; foster care, and others. HCN is positioned in every San Francisco neighborhood and has worked with SFUSD providing onsite and mobile case management and mental health and wellness services for students and their families since 1997. We provide Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) via an MOU and currently have HCN therapists onsite in 20+ SFUSD schools.



Homeless Children’s Network (continued)

Homeless Children’s Network’s Programming and Approaches

HCN welcomes and affirms everyone, while engaging an Afri-centric lens to address the historical legacy of intergenerational racism, inequity, and trauma. This approach embraces all historically marginalized communities based on community-defined evidence based practices, which include: affirmation of cultural inclusion, trauma- and love-informed practices, self-acceptance and resilience focuses, identification of clients’ unique strengths and normalization of their experiences, reframing of mental health stigma, acknowledgement of a range of spiritual practices, family and community member integration into services, collective grief processing, fear without judgement, and addressing resource and basic-need access barriers.

The heart of our Afri-centric approach lies in holding space for cultural rhythm and nuance while creating a sense of home—a safe, culturally grounded space where people can fully express themselves and be seen without judgment. All of HCN’s programs and services provide SF’s most marginalized children, families, providers, and communities with the tools, resources, and support needed to navigate complex systems and overcome challenges through collaborative efforts. The seven cardinal values of HCN’s Ma’at model are our core values: 1) Balance, 2) Order, 3) Righteousness, 4) Harmony, 5) Justice, 6) Truth, and 7) Reciprocity. Our approach is unapologetically culturally affirming, soul-inspiring, and grounded in a shared commitment to holistic wellness.

Over the past several years, there has been a call to decolonize the field of mental health. One important way to achieve this is by expanding the construct of wellness to include a more explicit focus on community mental health in historically marginalized and underserved communities, including in Black and Brown communities. It is increasingly important that we avoid reinforcing mainstream narratives that pathologize our communities by failing to recognize the broader systemic forces affecting the well-being of those who have experienced historical and ongoing marginalization and oppression. Community-based programs designed to promote healing, wellness, and positive mental health do not simply unfold in isolation. Homeless Children’s Network’s vision embodies emergent work that always reflects the time and space in which it is happening. Indeed, African and Pan-African philosophy encourages the tenets of Ubuntu - “I am what I am because of who we all are” - and teaches us that, universally, “all things have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal” (Marumo & Chakale, 2018).



The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative

Rising unintentional overdose deaths are not only a nationwide crisis but a crisis among San Francisco's populace, with Black/African American residents disproportionately affected. Black San Franciscans have an opioid overdose death rate that is over five times that of the citywide overdose rate. Known differences in access, barriers to care, and healthcare mistrust exacerbate inequities in substance use and accidental overdoses even when treatment is available in the community.

Local leaders, acknowledging the integral role of community activism in the history of the Black community in San Francisco, have come together to formulate a communal approach to wellness. HCN's CEO, Dr. April Y. Silas, is a leading public voice insistent on centering Black voices to ensure the development and implementation of culturally-responsive, trauma-informed strategies that take into account the complex interplay of mental health and substance use; Black/African American experiences with the failed War on Drugs; and community norms.

In 2024, Homeless Children's Network launched the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative, a set of comprehensive programs that provide education and awareness, prevention, and treatment centering community-based, Black/African-American strategies and leadership in response to the wide racial disparity in fentanyl use and overdose deaths in San Francisco, further widened by the lack of community input from the communities most affected by the fentanyl crisis.

In response to the increasingly urgent need to address the opioid crisis, substance use disorders (SUD), and the systemic overcriminalization of substance use in San Francisco's Black/African American community, Homeless Children's Network launched the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention and Education Initiative: an initiative that provides culturally-affirming primary (preventative), secondary (early detection) and tertiary prevention (minimizing the impact of existing crisis) resources for reduction of substance use and fatal overdoses. Similarly to HCN's Jabali Youth Advocacy Committee (see this year's report) – a youth-led organizing model for community-level substance use prevention – creativity, community voice, and traditionally clinical prevention efforts coalesce to form a unique approach to SUD prevention in San Francisco. This campaign intends to be a part of the solution to systemic inequities pervasive in social and generational conceptions of the relationship between substance use and Black/African American communities.



The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative

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Working at the intersection of substance use, mental health, and spiritual wellness, this initiative leverages community voices, partnership, and insights to provide tailored support to all Black/African American residents in San Francisco with an emphasis on underserved populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, individuals that are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, people involved in the carceral system and parenting persons. HCN is the first Black-led organization to receive funding under this program.

The Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative bridges the gap between healthcare and culturally appropriate resources - a significant contributor to overdose. The campaign engages the community in substance use and overdose prevention through three avenues:

1. Substance Use and Overdose Community Presentations

Homeless Children's Network's program team provided substance use and overdose community presentations to community members and Black-Led and Black-serving community-based organizations and leaders to support primary, secondary, and tertiary substance use prevention, raise awareness, and built capacity around prevention while connecting participants to a full continuum of substance use services. The Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative team identified target audience members/groups through outreach, word-of-mouth promotion, and advertisements (e.g., leaflets, social media). HCN also partnered with The SF Recovery Theater to provide role-playing seminars and theatrical events to the broader community and create awareness through culturally-affirming, community-led approaches.

Workshop attendees were introduced to community resources and harm reduction interventions such as Naloxone for additional support that they may need post-involvement for themselves, a loved one, or a fellow community member. HCN's community presentations encourage attendees to engage in additional outreach efforts within their community, thus broadening the reach of the content that HCN provides. Attendees are also offered continued access to resources and referrals within Homeless Children's Network's programs for mental health or substance use services.



The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative

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2. Public Awareness Campaign

Homeless Children’s Network has partnered with LAGRANT Communications, a marketing communications agency based in Los Angeles, to develop a comprehensive digital and media campaign strategy that lifts up the voices of San Francisco’s Black/African American community and shines a light on our lived experiences. HCN staff began laying the groundwork for campaign development through multiple avenues: community conversations, collaborations with peer organizations and City department staff. When making decisions about campaign content, staff prioritized the lived experiences and perspectives of community voices, and a strengths-based approach which uplifts the tenets of community healing while rejecting negative byproducts of substance use such as isolation.

In November 2024, HCN consulted with community leaders, surveyed youth and adult San Francisco community members, and facilitated focus groups to tease out community sentiments and develop a community-informed strategy for curating key messages that would resonate with the target population. HCN launched the digital campaign (social media advertisements) in January 2025 and launched the print campaign (billboards, posters) in March 2025. The Community-Based Prevention & Education Initiative was featured on billboards located at Divisadero at Grove, Ellis & Jones, and 6th and Skyway. C-store posters were featured at the following local convenience stores: Star Market, Double Rock Grocery, Mike’s Markey, Saabis Groceries, El Aquila de Oro, Torino Market, Lee’s Food Markey, Bayview Liquor, Big Save Market, Super Save INC, and H&K Market. Throughout the duration of the campaign, HCN engaged in a continuous, iterative learning process, surveying community members to understand their opinions and sentiments about the campaign materials; this feedback provided valuable community insight for future iterations of the awareness campaign. Moreover, HCN collaborated with LAGRANT to create promotional materials that brought further awareness to campaign key messages and uplifted community voices. Promotional materials included branded water bottles, branded totes, and branded baseball caps.



The Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative

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3. Amani Mental Health Training - Substance Use Prevention and Overdose Response Education

This element of the Initiative emphasized capacity-building in the mental health field. For six months, students of HCN's Amani Community Mental Health Workforce Development Program, a health services training program, engaged in monthly Substance Awareness trainings that incorporated relevant strategies for prevention, such as holistic wellness, addressing stigma, substance abuse, and overdose prevention through culturally relevant methods like storytelling and restorative justice. These trainings empowered Amani graduates to deliver community-based education and support to fellow community members, no matter the field of work they entered after graduation from the Amani program. Amani students interested in leveraging their lived experiences and providing holistic peer support to community members had the opportunity to apply to become a Peer Educator; on a weekly basis, Peer Educators conducted street outreach, connecting with community members and spreading awareness about San Francisco's City-wide resources and HCN's suite of programs.



Gratitude

We express deep gratitude to the San Francisco Department of Public Health whose generous funding made this program possible.

Thank you to the Black/African American Community-Based Substance Use Prevention & Education Initiative participants who shared their experiences and perspectives with us to use as data.

Thank you to the HCN staff, including Dr. April Y. Silas, Dr. Kenneth Kim, Cameron Smith, Malik Parker, Sarah Griffiths, Isatou Gaye, Daniella Severs, and Sara Ferree who supported the design, implementation, and interpretation of this evaluation. Your thoughtful insights, dedication to the process, and genuine belief in our approach have been deeply appreciated.

Thank you to our amazing Indigo Cultural Center team for their assistance and amazing attention to detail in gathering, entering, managing and analyzing various aspects of the vast amounts of data for this evaluation. And for all the administrative and emotional support required to move this work to completion.

