

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PREPARED BY
Choose to DO, Inc.

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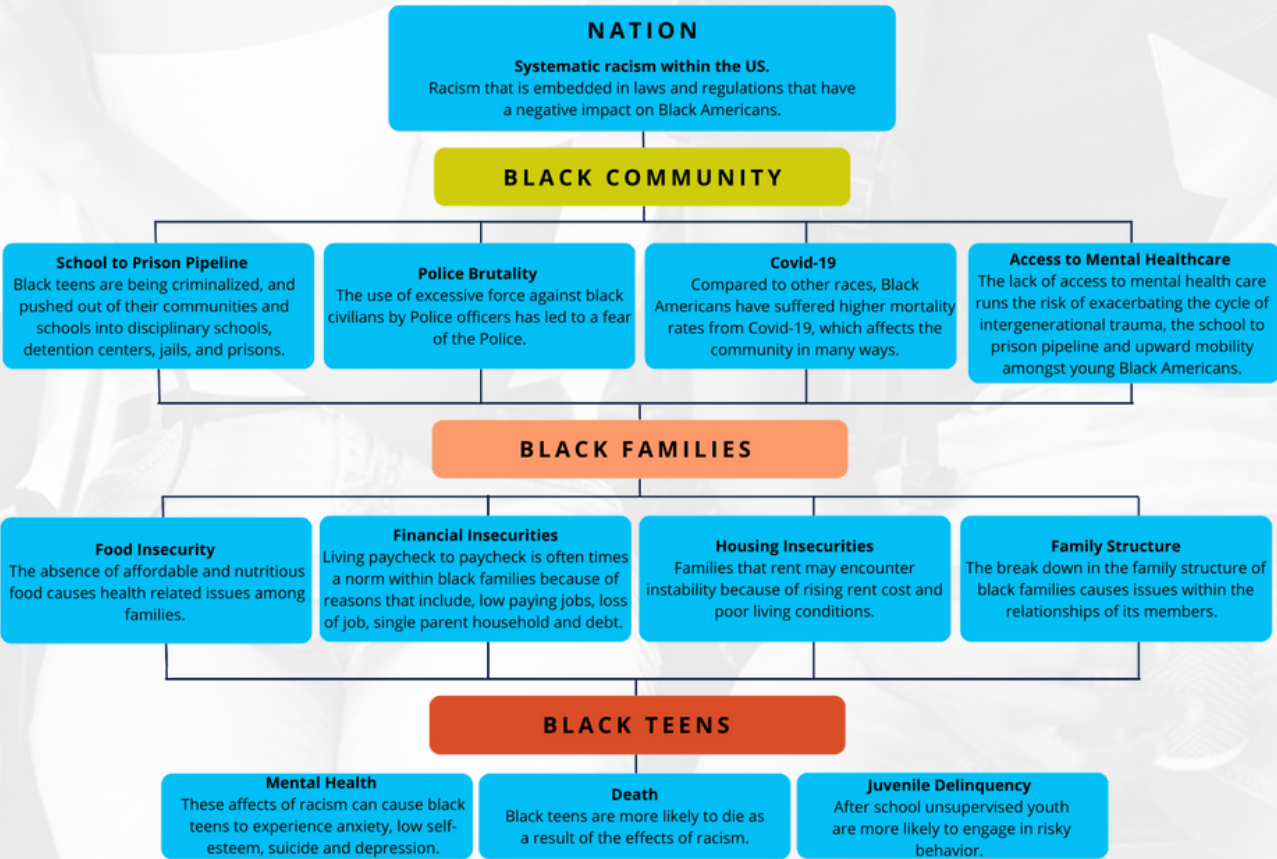


Choose to DO, Inc.®

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The community is impacted greatly when African American youth mental health is not being addressed and talked about. Intergenerational trauma is passed down generation after generation when there is not someone who can break the cycle. Black trauma affects the entire community of Houston as we see a lack of access to healthcare, greater crime and drug use as well as disruptions in education. Choose to DO, Inc. serves as a catalyst for culturally appropriate personal development related to mental health education for African American youth. In the following essay, we discuss the effects on society, community and the individual when this need is not being met in Houston Texas, and what Choose to DO, Inc. does to fill the need.

HOW RACISM AFFECTS BLACK YOUTH



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In 2019, suicide was the second leading cause of death for blacks or African Americans, ages 15 to 24 (OMH, 2021). Mental health awareness and acceptance is a new popularized idea as more research is drawing connections between mental illness, physical illness, life expectancy and life satisfaction. Research states, black youth are more likely to experience intergenerational trauma, parental incarceration, family history of mental illness, disadvantages in education, as well as disruptions in social and emotional development in their adolescent years which can drastically affect their mental health over time.

Intergenerational trauma, per [GoodTherapy.org](https://www.goodtherapy.org), is defined as, *"trauma that gets passed down from those who directly experience an incident to subsequent generations. Intergenerational trauma may begin with a traumatic event affecting individual, traumatic events affecting multiple family members, or collective trauma affecting a larger community, cultural, racial, ethnic, or other groups/populations (historical trauma)."*

Intergenerational trauma is a cultural-based issue that affects the entire community. Though the lives and experiences of African Americans vary tremendously, there are shared cultural factors that directly affect the development of black youth in both positive and detrimental ways. One half of this positive shared cultural experience, which can promote support and mental strength, is the intersections between family connections, values, expression through spirituality or music, reliance on community and religious networks. On the flip side, which negatively can affect mental health and community resilience, is the reality behind facing racism, discrimination, and inequity.

We tend to the cultural uniqueness by ensuring our staff and volunteers reflect the population we serve, we have established standards and prerequisites for program locations and we partner with organizations

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that also tend to the needs of our target audience. With the rich culture of African Americans, It is important to facilitate programs that reflect the experiences of the youth we serve. Research shows mental health interventions targeted to a specific cultural group were four times more effective than interventions provided to culturally diverse groups of clients (Michael Lindsey, 2010). Our programs are geared toward the overall development of mental stability and healthy thinking patterns designed specifically for African American experiences.

According to Mental Health America, Texas ranks 50th for access to mental health care. This is substantial because Texas is considered one of the most ethnically diverse states, 37.3% Anglo, 36.5% Hispanic, 16.9% African American, 7.5% Asian/Other, 1.8% Other. Within this subset of diversity, African American youth reportedly are less likely to receive mental health treatment following depressive episodes and other mental health crises. The gap is evident between mental health services and African American youth in particular. Without African American youth having access to health care or mental health intervention, as a community we run the risk of exacerbating the cycle of intergenerational trauma, the school-to-prison pipeline, and upward mobility amongst young African Americans in general.

Choose to DO, Inc. intends on filling this access need by taking a proactive approach to mental health and wellness by providing and focusing on social-emotional learning(SEL) opportunities. SEL is beneficial for youth by increasing self-awareness, academic achievement, and positive behaviors both in and out of the classroom. We create a safe place where students receive mentorship and self-development with an emphasis on having fun. We take pride in fun-filled activities as we understand information sticks when children don't realize they are

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intentionally being taught information. Also, un-filled environments provide a space void of conflict and disappointment as many of our youth experience this at home and in schools. Lastly, In low-income neighborhoods, filled with African American youth, access to enrichment activities often cost more than families can afford.

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects African American youth but also exacerbates crime in the community. Research suggests, when it came to African-Americans, engagement in delinquent acts was significantly reduced when they utilized mental health services. The possibility that service use decreases delinquent acts is not surprising as mental health service use has been shown to be a protective factor against juvenile delinquency.

Choose to DO focuses on addressing community crime and juvenile delinquency by holding programs in the community as an afterschool extracurricular activity. After school, unsupervised kids may engage in risky behavior. By having programs at local community centers and schools, we are providing access to enrichment that is free for families because youth access to enrichment activities is highly dependent on family income. As Choose to DO, Inc. is being funded, we can fill this gap in access to services but also in decreasing community crime rates.

COVID-19 has affected everyone in some way, but African American families have taken one of the hardest hits. According to the National Library of Medicine, approximately 97.9 out of every 100,000 African Americans have died from COVID-19, a mortality rate that is a third higher than that for Latinos, and more than double than that for whites and Asians. Due to the higher mortality rate for African Americans

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affected by COVID-19, black families report higher rates of financial insecurity (57% of black adults), food insecurity (20% of black adults) and housing insecurity ($\frac{1}{3}$ of black renters) (Mitchell). This family instability is projected to lead to long-term negative effects for children of color. Black youth are disproportionately facing the loss of family members, unstable housing, and sustained poverty (Mitchell).

Choose to DO, Inc. dedicates its time to investing and supporting the next generation of black youth, dealing with the unique challenges presented by COVID-19. All programs offered by Choose to DO, Inc. are brought directly to black youth living within the Houston area or virtually for those living uncomfortably in a physical environment. Choose to DO, Inc. can best support black youth post-pandemic because 100% of its efforts support black girls and boys. Choose to DO, Inc. offers volunteers with professions in health and wellness, self-esteem building, leadership building, or youth development the opportunity to teach self-help classes on our YouTube channel. This program is offered virtually, without physical commitment, for those uncomfortable with face-to-face assistance post-pandemic. Keeping in mind black youth's heightened experience and sensitivity toward COVID-19, Choose to DO, Inc. has created specialized programs to uplift black teens within a virtual space. Unlike other local competitors, Choose to DO, Inc.'s decision to offer entirely virtual programs enables black youth to strengthen their self-image in the most comfortable environment.

Amongst all youth, black teens disproportionately battle with mental illnesses, intergenerational trauma, incarceration, and the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are faced with these issues far more, at times double the amount, of their caucasian counterparts. In sum, the need for mental health development and support for black teens is

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apparent and underserved. To compensate for the disadvantages and lack of resources black youth grapple with, specialized services curated specifically for black teens are the most efficient way to address their need for mental health support. Choose to DO, Inc. is dedicating all its resources to creating these programs specifically targeting black youth. Unlike their local competitors, Choose to DO, Inc. is committed to solely servicing black youth because they are the demographic with the highest need for mental health development.

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