ACHIEVING EQUITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

The unique mental health needs of students of color are poorly understood and severely underserved. We are taking action.
Why we created the Steve Fund

A LETTER FROM STEVE’S FAMILY

In 2014, we began a journey, one which no family should ever have to take. It began with the loss of Steve, our beloved son, family member and friend. After graduating from Harvard College and completing a Masters degree at City University, mental illness took Steve from us. We have established the Steve Fund with the aim of preventing other families from having to take a journey like ours.

Our nation is not meeting the mental health needs of young people of color. While research shows that the differences in ethnic backgrounds of students necessitate culturally sensitive approaches to supporting their mental health, their needs are still significantly understudied, and insufficiently understood. With minorities forming the majority of Americans by 2044, and the majority of children by 2020, the future success of our nation will depend on the mental health and emotional well-being of these young people.

It is our firm belief that colleges and universities should play a vital role in meeting these needs by providing the best support possible for an increasingly diverse student population. Since we established the Fund, we have focused on developing knowledge and thought leadership, launching effective programs, such as the buildout of a text-based crisis hotline with our partner Crisis Text Line, and have built partnerships with renowned organizations in the field to leverage resources and to direct more effort towards our cause.

The Steve Fund is committed to learning about, implementing with excellence, and measuring the kind of best practices that will protect the mental health and emotional well-being of our nation’s college age students of color.

We must create change to preserve the lives and safeguard the well-being and future contributions of every young person.

We invite you to join with us.

Evan M. Rose, President
Why is this issue important and urgent?

Right at this moment, there are students of color who are failing academically, suffering emotionally and/or in some cases facing serious risk, all because population-specific factors influencing their mental health are too poorly understood and not acted upon.

Experts underscore that a perilous mix of factors can pose mental health risks for students of color requiring well-developed responses from colleges and universities. These factors may include culturally unrepresentative campus environments; perceived and experienced racial discrimination; micro-aggressions; social stigma; being marginalized, and difficult transitions from home to campus.

Research shows that students of color are:

1. Less likely to seek help when depressed.
2. Twice as likely to say they are less prepared emotionally for college than their peers.
3. One third less likely to complete college.

Researchers from the University of Michigan have noted a higher prevalence of depression among students of color in comparison with white students. They say that disparities in college persistence and mental health may be interrelated. They state that among college students, the discrepancy between the need for treatment and actual treatment utilization is more marked for students of color. They raise concerns about a cultural mismatch of providers and possible discrimination in treatment settings (biases, stereotyping, etc.).
Recent research by faculty at the University of Virginia finds that black students report they typically experience at least one bias incident within 60 days of enrollment. Each incident contributes to a potent distress that remains throughout their matriculation. Research by faculty at the City University of New York reports that negative impacts of microaggressions on students of color have emotional, physical, and academic costs resulting in disconnection and disengagement from school, weakened social networks and erosion of academic self-concept. This impacts students’ academic achievement and overall well-being. Researchers at the University of Texas/Austin link perceived discrimination by students of color to feelings of “imposterism.” The research team found that such feelings are related to increases in reported depression and anxiety in college students of color.

Though some colleges have mounted individual programs, the responses from higher education institutions are neither well-established nor well-studied. There is insufficient communication across efforts, and most are not documented or evaluated. Despite this, few would disagree that it is a primary responsibility of colleges and universities to not only cultivate the academic talent of all of our nation’s future leaders, but to support their mental health and emotional well-being. More than other institutions in our society, colleges and universities have the ability and the resource base to build and share knowledge that advances best practices to promote the mental health of young people of color, both within the education sector and beyond.

The Steve Fund seeks to address the harmful deficit in effective, broadly-adopted knowledge and programming by: 1) Identifying and sharing relevant research with critical stakeholders. 2) Partnering to design and implement programs that promote the mental health and emotional well-being of students of color in transition to, through, and from college. 3) Communicating strategically to build awareness of relevant challenges and solutions. This is a long overdue moral imperative, with considerable implications for individuals, their families, and society at large.
Our mission

The Steve Fund is the nation’s only organization focused on supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of college students of color.

The Steve Fund works with colleges and universities, outstanding non-profits, researchers, practitioners, and with groups serving diverse populations. It aims to stimulate dialogue and to promote effective programs and strategies that build understanding and assistance regarding the mental health and emotional well-being of the nation’s students of color as they enter, matriculate in, and transition from higher education.
Our strategic focus

OUR STRATEGY FOR BUILDING SOLUTIONS RESTS ON FOUR PILLARS:

1) BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
2) CREATING PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
3) PROMOTING AWARENESS AND DIALOGUE
4) PRODUCING IMMEDIATE IMPACT FOR STUDENTS THROUGH TECH INNOVATIONS
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We believe it is essential to support the development of knowledge and thought leadership, to create and share best practices, to connect scholars and practitioners, and to encourage and help professionals in campus mental health and student services to more effectively assist students of color.
Knowledge-building: Thought leadership convenings and webinars concerning young people of color

The Steve Fund has hosted day-long symposiums at three different universities in 2014, 2015, and 2016, with plans for the fourth annual symposium in November 2017. The symposium called “Young, Gifted, and @Risk” is a convening of outstanding experts in mental health, students, college leaders, administrators and health-service providers to explore the challenges to mental health facing young people of color, as well as the strategies to address them. In conjunction with our experts, the Fund then co-organized four webinars for campus mental health and student services professionals. All events were oversubscribed.

In the fall of 2015 and during 2016, the Fund presented additional thought leadership convenings at Stanford University and in the midwest on similar topics to deepen understanding in this space. In view of the high demand in this area and the distinctive niche we are filling, we are dedicated to playing a high impact thought leadership role. The Fund’s activities include annual national convenings; sponsored sessions for associations, selected campuses, and minority-serving organizations; related webinars; and proceedings/reports in diverse formats for mental health experts, researchers, practitioners, campus leaders, higher education officials, student groups, and organizations supporting students of color.
Growing a generation of scholars and practitioners who understand and support the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color

By supporting a competitive scholarship for research on the mental health challenges facing college students of color, the Fund is supporting the growth of a generation of scholars with the knowledge and the capacity to address the behavioral health needs of our target population. The Stephen C. Rose Legacy Scholarship, part of the Active Minds Emerging Fellows program, aims to support the most promising student research on mental health and emotional well-being of students of color and to connect these young scholars to a network of emerging researchers and national experts in the field of behavioral health. We will also use the mechanism of a prize competition to build awareness of our issue, leveraging the reach and capabilities of mental health associations. The competition is expected to stimulate relevant new research by young scholars and practitioners, and disseminate it broadly.
• Building an online knowledge center

To address the dearth of knowledge and knowledge-sharing opportunities, the Steve Fund has built, and continues to grow, an online knowledge center on best practices and relevant research about our population’s mental health and emotional well-being. The first step was to commission a literature review and survey of relevant programs. The findings from these products were formatted for easy use and reference by mental health and student services professionals. We are cultivating a knowledge “ecosystem” that utilizes varied formats to engage and inform our target populations of professionals, higher education leaders, students, and families.

• Providing speakers and advisors

As we have conducted research on issues, scholars, and well-regarded practitioners in our field, we have begun to build a network of top experts with the passion and ability to effectively engage and motivate our target audiences of higher education leaders, students, and mental health services providers on campus. We have been asked to provide referrals by a number of groups and organizations. Our goal is to provide useful referrals that efficiently connect these important organizations with needed resources and with experts who can help illuminate the challenges and best practices promoting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color.
Pillar two: Creating programs and strategic partnerships

The second critical pillar of our work is supporting programs for students of color that promote effective mental health strategies and practices.
Programs for mental health and emotional well-being

A critical element of our strategy is assisting organizations that serve students of color to access knowledge about this population’s needs regarding mental health and emotional well-being. We have found that raising the issue often touches a raw nerve, and that the current knowledge and resource base is extremely limited.

We are collaborating with a number of groups to position mental health on their agendas, to promote awareness and dialogue, and to inform their constituents about how to obtain help. These include organizations such as volunteer societies on campus, organizations of diverse students, and non-profits that serve diverse populations. The needs we address include panels and guest lectures by practitioners from culturally relevant backgrounds, skill-building in resiliency and stress management, peer support, and online access to mental health support.

Our experience includes providing resources, technical assistance, and advice to develop a mental health initiative with the Harvard Black Alumni Society, with which we have joined forces in a pilot program to promote the mental health of university students and diverse young people transitioning to life beyond college. These years can be turbulent ones, and we aim to replicate the program for young people nationally.
Development of a model framework of best practices for colleges and universities

We are pleased to partner with major organizations in the youth mental health field to address the distinctive needs of students of color. The response to our focus on this population has been overwhelmingly favorable. We endorse collaboration as an efficient and effective strategy to both serve others and to conserve charitable resources. For instance, in partnership with the JED Foundation, we are developing and will promote broadly the Equity in Mental Health Framework, a comprehensive model to guide college decision makers, administrators, professionals, students and families to best support the mental health and emotional well-being of students of color. The model will provide practical, tactical and actionable recommendations for the promotion of the mental health and emotional well-being of this demographic. Together we will promote this first-of-its-kind approach, which will be based on the best evidence, literature and expert input available.
WE ARE DEVELOPING AND WILL PROMOTE A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL FOR COLLEGE DECISION MAKERS, ADMINISTRATORS, PROFESSIONALS, STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.
Pillar three: Awareness and dialogue

Engaging young people of color as leaders on mental health issues is essential to our mission and success.
Young people of color engagement strategy

Offering opportunities now

We believe in the intelligence and power of youth to get the issue of mental health and emotional well-being on the agenda for their generation, their communities, and their country, and to do so in ways that compel the rest of us to follow.

The Steve Fund seeks to eradicate the barriers that keep young people from living healthy, productive, and happy lives. Therefore, we seek to energize and empower them to take charge of the issue of mental health and emotional well-being for themselves and their peers. We are signing up youth leaders of color to work directly with the Fund through a set of programs and initiatives that engage their voices and energy in a cause that deeply concerns them.
Youth advisory board
The Youth Advisory Board provides the student perspective on the Steve Fund’s programs, initiatives, and outreach efforts across the nation. Advisory Board members promote the importance of education about mental health and emotional well-being. They help young people of color access resources on college and university campuses and within their respective communities by acting as Steve Fund ambassadors on the ground level.

Youth media
We realize that as “digital natives,” young people engage with each other in dynamic and evolving ways. We therefore aim to empower them through several activities. In collaboration with tech partners, we will provide them with the opportunity to develop discussions and communities online, and to access cutting-edge online mental health support. Working together with journalists will help them share their views and lift their voices about the factors in their environments and experiences that feel threatening or unhealthy, as well as about those that promote their sense of well-being. Our goal is to make it safe for young people to engage in active dialogue, and to reduce the stigma commonly associated with mental health issues.

Youth speakers bureau
The Youth Speakers Bureau builds the capacity of young leaders of color to engage their schools, campuses, and communities, by developing their organizing skills and presentation techniques. We are eager to engage those with lived experiences of mental illness or mental health challenges.
Pillar four: Immediate impact for students through tech innovations

We believe it is imperative that we create immediate impact and benefits for students. We do so by leveraging the know-how and infrastructure of existing innovative technology and startups to extend their reach to young people of color.
Tech-based mental health innovations

The effective use of technology holds prospects for countering isolation, for building supportive communities, and for extending much needed mental health services to young people of color. It is for this reason that we have teamed up with partners such as Crisis Text Line to explore and use technology to increase access to mental health support for our focus demographic.
Launching a text-based tool for crisis counseling

The Steve Fund is partnering with Crisis Text Line to use text messaging as a means to improve the critically needed access for young people of color to crisis counseling. Advancements in the adoption of mobile technology offer an unprecedented opportunity to positively impact the delivery of mental health services. Today, the average young person sends over two thousand text messages per month.

The Fund views text messaging as a key component of its strategy towards addressing the unmet mental health needs of young people of color.

Through this partnership, we accomplish two goals. First, we recruit, select, and train a group of young people of color to become crisis counselors with Crisis Text Line. They help meet the needs of a diverse set of texters. Second, we have created and are promoting a unique keyword to communities of young people of color to ensure they have access to free, 24/7 support when in crisis - all via text. Young people of color can now text “STEVE” to 741741 to be instantly connected to a crisis counselor of color.

stevefund.org
Target outcomes

OUR GOALS ARE: A ROBUST NATIONAL DIALOGUE; ADOPTION OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS BY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES; GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND UTILIZATION OF CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES; AND THE INCREASED COMPETENCY OF FAMILIES AND MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS SERVING OUR DEMOGRAPHIC.

We are convinced of the importance of directing much needed resources towards the unmet mental health needs of the nation’s college students of color, including those about to enter higher education, and those transitioning from this relatively structured environment to the sometimes uncertain and stressful life beyond. To fulfill their respective missions, colleges and universities must devote concerted and sustained effort to improve conditions, experiences, and services; non-profits in the mental health space must more effectively address our population’s needs; and knowledgeable experts and practitioners must be empowered to inform strategies and decisions on-campus affecting the mental health and emotional well-being of students of color.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE METRICS FOR EACH AREA OF FOCUS TO EVALUATE OUR WORK AND TRACK OUR PROGRESS.

We will know we are succeeding if:

- There is a robust and ongoing dialogue about mental health and emotional well-being of students of color, on campus, online, and in the broader media.

- College and university leaders adopt recommendations based on expert advice and research regarding best programs, practices, environments and policies to meet the needs of students of color.

- Students and young alumni demonstrate significant levels of knowledge about mental health and emotional well-being; stigma regarding these issues is reduced; and help-seeking increases.

- Minority-serving organizations gain knowledge enabling them to recognize early signs of emotional distress and mental illness, and support discussion and mental health care.
The Fund has identified and secured the assistance of outstanding advisors and expert consultants in areas critical to our organization:

**Advisors**

**Vice President Javaune Adams-Gaston**, Ohio State University

**Dr. Jan Collins-Eaglin, Associate Dean**, Pomona College

**President Diana Natalicio**, University of Texas, El Paso

**Dr. David Rivera, Associate Professor of Counselor Education**, Queens College, CUNY

**President John Wilson**, Morehouse College

**Leadership**

Medical/Psychiatric: **Annelle Primm, MD, MPH**

Behavioral Health/Scientific: **Alfiee M. Breland-Noble, Ph.D., MHSc**

Strategy: **Anuja Khemka, MSW**

Communications: **Marc Fest, Atlantic Point LLC**

**Youth advisory board, co-chairs**

Kaela Farrise, Antioch University, Los Angeles

Maya Terry, Washington University in St. Louis

Nushi Yapabandara, University of California, Santa Barbara

“WHEN YOU HELP ONE STUDENT, I THINK YOU HELP ALL STUDENTS.”

**Dr. Gregg Branch**, Director, Health and Human Services, Baltimore County, Maryland
The Steve Fund

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The Steve Fund is the nation’s only organization focused on supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of students of color.

Please visit www.stevefund.org to:
1. Learn more about the Fund
2. Participate in our online emotional support service
3. View webinars featuring researchers and thought leaders
4. Join the Fund’s engagement opportunities for youth leaders