

In our own words: 'The BCS community has helped me to dream bigger'

Submitted by **C.B.**

I came to Brooklyn Community Services PROS not knowing what to expect, but what I got was even more unexpected.

Let me explain. You see, I have been diagnosed with schizophrenia and major depression. This was not easy for me as I have always prided myself in being "together" and "independent." So, when I started to experience the effects of these two "illnesses," I, as well as my family, was flabbergasted.

At one point I was inpatient at the psychiatric hospital and the doctor there suggested I go to a community based program, which lead me to finding this PROS. For a split second I resisted but then I agreed. What a decision that was!

BCS PROS has been more than anything I could have asked for. First of all, all of the staff is so patient and respectful. Their kindness has been greatly appreciated. Next, the groups are really helpful. You learn how to deal/cope with your mental illness, learn things about the world, and learn about other people's experiences.

There are groups where you can be creative, which I love the most. Some of the groups that I have found helpful have been Women's Group (CRS-Coping Skills Training), Gardening (CRS-SSDS), Adult Children of Chaos (CRS-CST), and Watercolor Meditation (CRS-CST).

In Women's Group we discuss historical female achievements, body issues, and even current events (as they pertain to women). I get to learn a lot about the world, which is something I love to do. In Gardening, we take a hands-on approach to learning by planting seeds and watering plants. This helps me relax, unwind, and clear my head of unwanted negative thoughts. In Adult Children of Chaos we take turns talking about relevant experiences that have shaped our lives.



In this group I get to speak up and expound on ideas that are on my mind. I find this liberating. And lastly, there is Watercolor Meditation. This is a group where I can express myself in unlimited ways through watercolor painting. Any and all of these groups have helped me with one of my life goals: socialization. I've met new people, given presentations, and used my voice as a tool for change.

This has truly been a journey. Currently, my life goals are wellness, education, employment, and as I stated earlier socialization. BCS PROS has aided me on my quest for all of these.

Whether it be a check-in during a group to see how I'm feeling, handouts loaded with information, computer skills classes that will aid me in retouching my resume, and the chances I get to interact with my peers, BCS has been the catalyst and reason for so many improvements in my life. I have found out that you just never know what to expect in life. I've bonded with new friends, met clinicians who I can confide in, and am a more open person. When I walked into BCS I felt to a certain degree that I didn't belong. There's no place I'd rather be but the BCS community has helped me to dream bigger.

Now I have started training at a top-tier program in hopes of becoming a peer specialist. We'll see what the future holds, but for now things are looking up. BCS has helped me to create a new path to happiness. I just hope to continue to "pay it forward."

Editor's Note: *CB, your life experience and writing skills will serve you well in your career as a Certified Peer Specialist! Thank you for sharing!*

Save the date!

The NYAPRS Rehabilitation and Recovery Academy will be held November 8 & 9, 2022, at the Albany Hilton. The theme will be ***Raising the Bar for Rehabilitation, Self-Determination, and Inclusion.*** Watch for details!

A wealth of CRS BFM options

Benefits and Financial Management (BFM) is a CRS service that is designed to enhance understanding and skill in handling financial resources and activities, and may include basic counseling on income maintenance, eligibility for benefits, and assistance in managing a personal budget and finances.

A BFM class or group might focus on how to attain benefits such as SNAP or heating assistance, debt reduction strategies, and/or personalized budgeting skills. Many people hesitate to seek employment if they fear losing their Social Security (SSI/SSDI) benefits, so this service can be used to connect them to accurate information about **work incentives** to keep their benefits while working.

Staff may facilitate a colorful discussion on what money means to an individual through an exercise such as [this one](#). This can be a helpful tool to explore insights into what motivates us to want money and what inspires us to spend it, as well as finding ways to work with a partner with a different money management style.

PROS programs may also want to check out the [2018 PROS BFM curriculum](#) developed by OMH and the Center for Rehabilitation & Recovery. We know that financial stress can exacerbate symptoms and lead to crises. By including BFM classes on your group schedule, you can offer participants useful skills to reduce stress and improve their mental health as they learn how to access resources and stretch their budget further.

Engaging through news

We each decide how much news we consume on a daily basis, hopefully striking a balance between feeling informed and overwhelmed. Sometimes, news may support us - such as this newsletter you are reading. This OMH PROS Newsletter is written with the intention of connecting a statewide workforce of PROS staff through shared information and ideas.

Creating a PROS newsletter for your program can be a wonderful engagement tool that helps build a stronger sense of community. The Access Supports for Living (ASfL) Union PROS program staff member **Amanda Parish** began a PROS newsletter to communicate vital information to participants early in the pandemic when no one was on site.

Online classes and local resources were promoted. Soon the program added the Nurse's Corner feature in each edition, which identified wellness and health topics offered via Zoom, helping further engage participants.

They quickly discovered how empowering a newsletter can be! New staff **Natasha Nieves** continues to expand the scope of their newsletter, and what began with announcements from staff about different PROS services and Covid-19 updates has grown as participants who were previously active on their Peer Advisory Council got involved too. Now, PROS participants are submitting their artwork and poetry to enhance the community's newsletter. (Featured at right is artwork from **Nilus**, which was shared in their program's newsletter).

The newsletter helps promote Movie Nights that have become a popular virtual social experience for participants to watch examples of different coping skills and ways people express emotions. These creative virtual activities help alleviate the isolation people experience while social distancing.



*Thank you to **Nilus W.** from ASfL PROS for sharing their powerful artwork!*

Michelle Martell, a ASfL Team Leader, who coordinates the monthly newsletter by reviewing content and design, says it does not take much time to gather the content and review it before it is distributed. Each participant is mailed a hard copy to their home and can sign up for an electronic version. Now that more people are returning on site, the newsletter will continue because everyone enjoys the sense of community it has helped establish.

The mental health effects of racism

When a person experiences discrimination of any kind, including racism, there are both emotional and physical impacts. OMH encourages providers to have open discussions about these impacts.

There are a number of resources that might be helpful to incorporate into a PROS curriculum or 1:1 service, including an infographic on [The Mental Health Effects of Racism](#) and [OMH's Spotlight series](#) which highlight the challenges faced by different New York populations.

The OMH Office of Diversity and Inclusion also offers [resources](#) to help providers learn more about the unique challenges faced by minority communities.

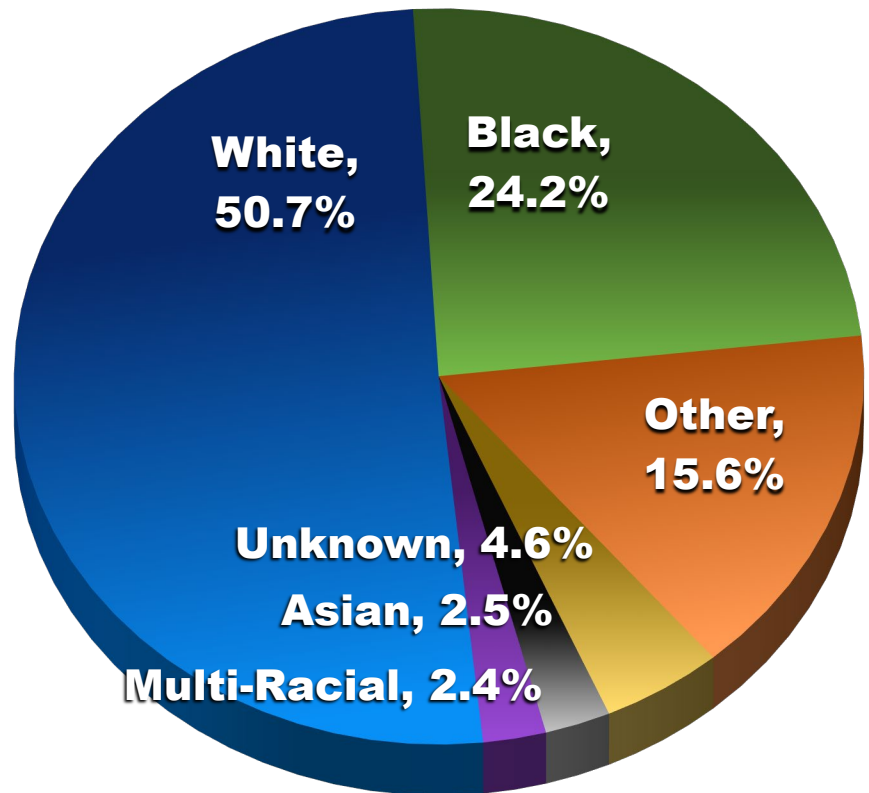
One resource, from the American Psychiatric Association, identifies best practices for serving Black individuals, and shares research that shows that African American or Black individuals are:

- more likely to receive treatment for mental health in emergency and hospital settings;
- misdiagnosed at a higher rate with schizophrenia spectrum disorders, and
- less likely to be offered antidepressant therapy — even when they have access to insurance or financial resources.

These factors, in addition to low rates of access to mental health services for Black individuals, can negatively impact their mental health and their relationship with the mental health community.

The chart above presents **the race of people served within the public mental health system**. Factors influencing the service rate may be directly and indirectly related to race and ethnicity, including access to service settings apart from the public mental health system, such as private practice or primary care. Other factors that influence the service rate may include insurance type and coverage, language barriers, and various cultural dynamics related to mental health.

Source: [July 2022 Profile of the New York State Public Mental Health System \(visme.co\)](#).



Races of people served within the public mental health system

NEW resource for PROS

The updating of the OMH PROS website continues! We are pleased to share that a new resource section is available to help PROS staff identify the different OMH databases that a program is required to use, as well as access instructions. Check out https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/pros/pros_db_resources.html for basic information about CAIRS, MHPD, PSYCKES, NIMRS, and NYESS.

CAIRS tip: Transferring CAIRS caseloads

There may be times when it is necessary to transfer a caseload assignment from one case manager to another. This may be a temporary transfer, such as when a case manager goes on vacation or a permanent transfer, such as when a case manager terminates. There is a CAIRS function that allows a Local Administrator to transfer the appropriate client records to another case manager. To find step-by-step instructions on how to use this feature, go to the **CAIRS Adult Programs Manual** found under the Help tab in CAIRS and see page 42/65. (Note, this not the CAIRS PROS Users' Manual.)

Resources

- **OMH webinar: Addressing Community Grief and Trauma Caused by Racism and Violence.**
Access this archived webinar at: [Addressing Community Grief and Trauma Caused by Racism and Violence](#).
- **Sawubona Healing Circles**
OMH is partnering with the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), Inc., to provide specialized “healing circle” support groups for individuals and families traumatized by the racially-motivated mass shooting in Buffalo earlier this year and increased incidents of hate crimes in general. [mediacontact \(ny.gov\)](#).
The Black-led healing circles, which are non-clinical, provide culturally relevant ways for people to express thoughts, feelings, and stories in a healing way. Culturally grounded in African-centered practices, the model helps address racial and other forms of trauma in communities of color. If you want to attend a Sawubona healing circle, please sign up [here](#).
To grow the Sawubona healing circle effort, OMH is looking for New York State residents interested in becoming trained Sawubona Healing Circle facilitators. This is a perfect opportunity for volunteers, retirees, students, advocates, and mental health service providers interested in supporting resilience in the Black community. If you are interested in this free training opportunity, go to [this link](#) and apply.
- **Increasing Diversity in the NYS Mental Health Workforce**
<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-4-million-increase-mental-health-workforce-diversity>.
- **How I Stay Resilient** journal:
<https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/booklets/how-i-stay-resilient.pdf> - free download.
- **CPI: The Best Practices for Suicide Prevention in LGBTQ+ Youth and Adult Communities Training** is a two-part webinar that was created to provide guidance for mental health providers in developing an LGBTQ+ inclusive clinical approach. You can earn a certificate for viewing this archived two-part webinar series. 2 continuing education units will be available for SW, LMHC, CASAC, Psychology, and medical professionals (CME). To access: you must login through [CPI](#).

To access past newsletters since 2022: <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/pros/newsletter.html>. Newsletters from 2015-2021 are archived at: [Resources – Rehabilitation & Recovery Clearinghouse \(nyaprs.org\)](#).

