



Chicano Legacy Mural by Mario Torero

## Social Justice & COVID-19 Recovery

By Tabia Akintobi, PhD, MPH



This time of year, is often spent taking a “break”, getting outside, and enjoying hot, longer days and nights. Summer 2021 is different from all those before. This year we are in recovery from the COVID-19

pandemic. Many of us are still reeling from the loss of loved ones, navigating how to safely reengage as our country opens, and making vaccination decisions. We are promoting and grappling with the social (in) justice of our country as well as the horrific senseless losses of George Floyd and Ahmad Aubrey, our Asian American sisters, and brothers, among many others. These realities also remind us of the collective toll of our times and the importance of attention to our mental and behavior health. We are also amidst a new presidential administration bringing renewed attention to the social and political determinants of health and the policies and systems that represent the paths towards health equity for all!

Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center (MSM PRC) leads or collaborates on several community-led and centered initiatives that promote COVID-19 testing, communication, and vaccination. The Georgia Community Engaged Research Alliance (GEORGIA CEAL) Against COVID-19 focuses on research and outreach to increase vaccine confidence and uptake. For more information email [georgeceal@msm.edu](mailto:georgeceal@msm.edu) or visit [Community Engagement Alliance \(CEAL\) Against COVID-19 Disparities | Community Engagement Alliance \(nih.gov\)](https://www.projectpeach.org). Project PEACH (Georgia Peers for Equity Against COVID-19 and for Health (GA PEACH) focuses on increasing COVID-19 testing for people affected by diabetes in rural and urban Georgia. To learn more please visit <https://www.projectpeach.org>.

The National COVID-19 Resilience Network promotes awareness and linkages to critical health information and services, helping families recover from difficulties that may have been caused or worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic <https://ncm.msm.edu/>. All of these initiatives include a community governance/coalition board modeled

after MSM PRC, to ensure that approaches are community-led and translated.

In this newsletter, we highlight MSM PRC initiatives over the past year designed to listen, respond, and take action through training, capacity building, and resources that address the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this initiative reminds us to attend to our mental and behavioral health, promote father engagement, create awareness on the realities of epilepsy, and build strong families.

For more information on the MSM PRC please email [prcinfo@msm.edu](mailto:prcinfo@msm.edu), visit [Prevention Research Center | Morehouse School of Medicine \(msm.edu\)](https://www.msm.edu/prevention-research-center), or follow us on all social media platforms: @msm\_prc (Instagram), @msmprc (Twitter), MSM Prevention Research Center (MSM PRC) (Facebook).

I strongly believe that where there is breath, there is hope for recovery with new opportunities to reboot, reset and reclaim our health and communities. We stand with you as we work together towards the path forward!

# Retiring Community Coalition Board Member

By Daniel Crimmins, PhD

Daniel Crimmins, PhD, has been the representative for Georgia State University (GSU) School of Public Health to Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM), Prevention Research Center (PRC) Community Coalition Board (CCB) for more than ten years.

He joined the CCB when it was chaired by Mrs. Ella Trammell and the MSM PRC was directed by Dr. Daniel Blumenthal. He has been a proud partner in its continued evolution to the leadership of Mr. LaShawn Hoffman and Dr. Tabia Akindobi, as the

MSM PRC has been recognized for its commitment to engaging communities and neighborhoods in improving health.

Dr. Crimmins retired from his position as Director of the Center for Leadership in Disability (CLD) and Clinical Professor of Public Health at GSU at the end of May 2021.



He served as the CLD Director, since 2008 and proudly leaves a legacy at CLD of developing the next generation of leaders for Georgia and the nation; promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion of people with disabilities from all backgrounds; and working diligently for systems and society to adopt practices that enrich the lives of the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

# Unlearning Church

By Pamela Merritt



Have you ever had to unlearn something? It's the worst. It's similar to how our cellular devices come with built in apps that cannot be uninstalled. It's called

"hardwiring." The data is ingrained into the device much like information can be ingrained into us. Hardwiring helps to explain the difficulty of unlearning, working through, and healing from toxic theology. In the same way, some apps can't be uninstalled, some indoctrination cannot be undone because it is too deeply ingrained. Instead, we learn how to work around those unhealthy behaviors.

Last summer, my husband Kristian A. Smith and I presented on this topic in our Therapy N Theology segment for Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center. As the Religious Trauma expert, I expounded by examining the effects of toxic theology on our mental health and wellness. I explored how the routine of trying to maintain rule-keeping theology wears on our nervous systems, causing

depression, anxiety, and other post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Since that presentation, I have branded and launched Therapy N Theology, and seen an increase in my religious trauma clients. As we are all aware, churches and other ministries all over the US suspended in-person gatherings due to COVID-19 restrictions. I discovered not having the option to gather in person significantly affected the mental health of the religious community. Therapy N Theology provides a space for my clients to work through the immense sense of loss they feel without the consistent presence of their church community.

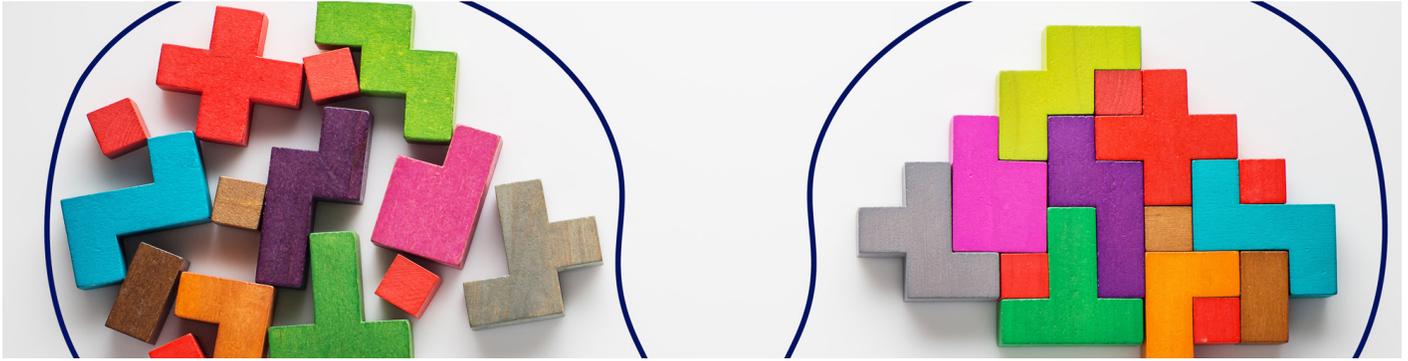
I have walked them through ways to connect and find community safely during the pandemic. Other clients, while sitting in virtual churches from home, discovered they had more loyalty to the routine of church than they had relationship with The Divine. Congregants are agonizing mentally because they don't feel the need to return to the building for every weekly gathering. Many of my religious trauma sessions are spent helping clients lean into the personal expression of their faith.

Many people are unknowingly walking around with Religious Trauma every day. That's why Therapy N Theology exists.

Check us out at [www.therapyntheology.com](http://www.therapyntheology.com). On the site, you can read more about my background in community-based mental health. There are also several blogs I've written on my personal experiences with toxic indoctrination. For the sake of our mental and emotional health, it's time we acknowledge that religious trauma is more than just church hurt.

**Transformation is often more about unlearning than learning.**

Richard Rohr



# Mental Health First Aid Program: A National & Local Partnership to Enhance Mental Health Awareness

By Daphne Byrd, Executive Director and  
Kedrick Williams, Former Preceptor Coordinator



For many years, Southeastern Primary Care Consortium, Inc. (SPCC) Atlanta Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) has proudly partnered with Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM), Prevention Research Center (PRC) to implement and evaluate community health awareness and education programs. In Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, SPCC Atlanta AHEC, in partnership with the National Council for Behavioral Health provided two Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) trainings to a blended audience of community members, students, and staff at MSM PRC.



In addition to participants learning a wealth of knowledge on mental health, substance use issues, and first aid responses, this training rendered each participant with full certification as

a Mental Health First Aider at the end of the course. In accordance with the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Council for Behavioral Health developed a virtual instruction format, which participants of both PRC courses were able to utilize by completing 2.5 hours of self-paced pre-work prior to attending a 5.5-hour instructor-led session via the Zoom platform.



These trainings were taught by certified Instructors, Mr. Kedrick Williams, Dr. Kimberly Williams, and Dr. Sharon Jones. They offered participants a skills-based, theoretically sound curriculum.

At the conclusion of these trainings, participants shared “I feel prepared to be an effective Mental Health First Aider in my community,” and “I feel informed and ready to be a change agent in my school.” Without a doubt, this organizational partnership and instruction of the MHFA course has opened minds of participants, challenged health education professionals, and showcased knowledge and best practices of how best to address mental health needs and crisis in our communities.

## Mental Health First Aid Testimony

By Terry Ross

Attending the Mental Health First Aid Responder training seemed like a no brainer, or so I thought. Turns out the course was intensive with required reading and studying! Mental health issues are present within my family, community, myself and even my church. Time after time, I witnessed individuals experience episodes, myself included.



**MENTAL  
HEALTH  
FIRST AID®**

Course highlights included noted resources/tools available and that there are always resources for support. Prior to the training,

some issues seemed beyond assistance, but that is never the case-- #GoodNews. Since the training, results experienced led

to self-reflection to apply self-care and to better understand my own intentions, approaches, and paths. Most notably, we formed a non-profit organization

(expected launch Winter 2021) to train community members as Mental Health First Aiders within the community.



# Fathers Matter Initiative: A Community Mobilization Approach Employed in Metro Atlanta to Support Father Involvement

By Latrice Rollins, PhD, MSW

Georgia Department of Public Health (GA DPH), Maternal and Child Health partnered with the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) to support the work of its Strong Fathers, Strong Families Georgia Coalition (SFSF GA). SFSF GA Coalition utilizes NFI's Community Mobilization Approach (CMA), a framework to effectively manage a community-wide collaborative process and create an obtainable vision for mobilizing around fatherhood. Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM), Prevention Research Center (PRC), an academic partner of the



SFSF GA Coalition, served as the lead agency for the CMA process.

First, a [community needs and assets assessment](#) was conducted to document the need to promote or support father involvement, the

services and programs for fathers that exist in Metro Atlanta, the gaps in services and programs for fathers, the assets in metro Atlanta that can be mobilized to promote father involvement, effective strategies to promote father involvement in metro Atlanta, and barriers that exist within metro Atlanta that hinder father involvement.

The [Fathers Matter: Mobilizing Fatherhood in Metro Atlanta Leadership Summit](#) was then held March 2021. Embracing a strength-based perspective for the fathers, 186 leaders from multiple sectors developed strategies to support father involvement. After the summit, leaders worked together to [develop action plans](#) for each strategy. Currently, each action plan has its own multi-sector implementation committee to carry out and evaluate with the support of the SFSF GA Coalition.

## Fathers Matter Testimony

By Carl Route

I was totally honored to have the opportunity to be a part of such an awesome and timely initiative, where I got to share space and time with many subject matter experts on fathers and families. Being able to engage with and hear the perspectives of leaders from many different sectors of society made the experience even more valuable. We are in a time where these types of collaborations are needed if we are to be successful serving fathers, families, and communities.



We all have specific tools in our toolboxes to aid us in doing our jobs effectively and efficiently. When we share these tools with others who are serving in the same ecosystem, it takes our work to an entirely different level and scale. One thing I took away was the fact that we did

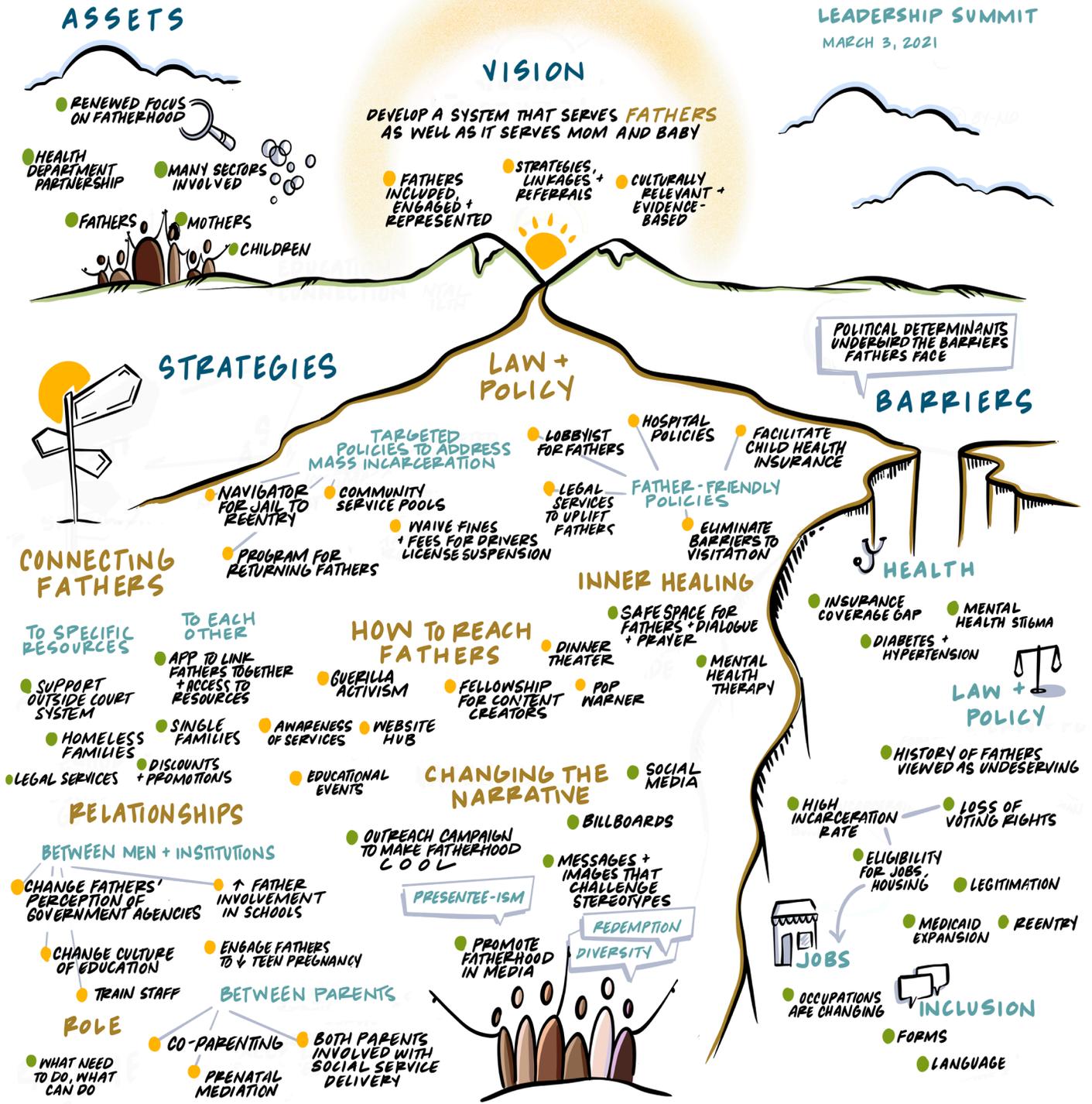
not have to "reinvent the wheel" with regards to programs and services, because many of the Summit participants were already doing some things we discussed. Also, I learned the importance of seeking to do things on a larger scale, instead of doing a program here or there. When we find something that is working, we should work together to institutionalize it for the greater good by pursuing local city, county, and state government.

The information shared during the Summit has equipped me and my colleagues with evidence and research-based facts to help us serve our constituents and each other in more practical ways. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have had to create ways to engage our stakeholders consistently, so we decided to host regularly scheduled and relevant webinars of interest to meet their needs.

Currently we offer Reaching Our Brothers Everywhere (ROBE) Boy, Man, Father Talks, where males come together to discuss maternal and child health related topics every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the year. Also, when the mapping of certain areas showed gaps in services to that area, we were able to share knowledge of each of our partners and other service providers who could help to close or eliminate those gaps in services. The collaborations afforded us the opportunity to work across state lines and other jurisdictions. For example; we had someone in another state that requested help with a co-parenting relationship issue, and our organization was able to connect them with our colleagues in that state for assistance. The Summit and initiative positioned us all to take our leadership in these efforts to an entirely different level of effectiveness.

# FATHERS MATTER: MOBILIZING FATHERHOOD IN METRO ATLANTA

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT  
MARCH 3, 2021



GRAPHIC RECORDING BY RIO HOLIDAY © BY-ND

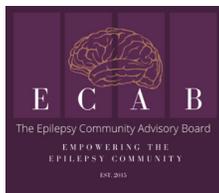
The schematic visual above is a graphic recording of the Leadership Summit takeaways. It displays the path towards the vision “to develop a system that serves fathers as well as moms and babies”. The seven primary strategies are in gold with some connecting ideas around each. Also included are some identified pitfalls/barriers on the right. Assets are included on the top left.

# The Unexpected Benefit of Seizure Recognition and First Aid Training

By Jocelyn Martin, Alexis Bell, Demetrius Geiger, and Rakale Collins Quarells, PhD

The MSM Epilepsy Community Advisory Board (E-CAB) was established in 2015 as a part of an epilepsy research study to improve epilepsy self-management behaviors such as reducing depression for Blacks living with epilepsy. The study found Project UPLIFT to be successful in reducing depression in Blacks with epilepsy. Since the completion of that study, the E-CAB has been committed to increasing epilepsy awareness for people of various communities.

Mrs. Joycelyn Martin is an epilepsy advocate and support person for her sister and mother, who both experience seizures. Mrs. Martin accepted an invitation to join the E-CAB after her sister's doctor suggested sharing her epilepsy experience with others. Through the E-CAB, she was able to take a Seizure Recognition and First Aid (SFA) training, which taught her about different seizure types, symptoms, and safety tips. Shortly after obtaining the certification, Mrs. Martin had a lifesaving experience. One night before putting her mother to bed, Mrs. Martin noticed that her mother was staring off into "space." She recalled staring being a symptom from the SFA training and immediately began timing the seizure.



research study to improve epilepsy self-management behaviors such as reducing depression for Blacks living with



Mrs. Martin contacted emergency services once her mother experienced two seizures. Her mother was admitted to the intensive care unit due to uncontrolled seizures for a week before being discharged. If not for the SFA training, Mrs. Martin believes that she would not have been able to save her mother's life. She recommends general and epilepsy communities be SFA certified to help save lives. To learn more on about Seizure Recognition and First Aid, please visit <https://learn.epilepsy.com/>.



E-CAB members at the Epilepsy Resource Day they hosted at MSM in September 2019

## Seizure First Aid

How to help someone having a seizure

- 1 STAY** with the person until they are awake and alert after the seizure.
  - ✓ Time the seizure
  - ✓ Remain calm
  - ✓ Check for **medical ID**
- 2** Keep the person **SAFE**.
  - ✓ Move or guide away from **harm**
- 3** Turn the person onto their **SIDE** if they are not awake and aware.
  - ✓ Keep **airway clear**
  - ✓ Loosen **tight clothes** around neck
  - ✓ Put **something small and soft** under the head
- Call 911 if...**
  - ▶ Seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes
  - ▶ Person does not return to their usual state
  - ▶ Person is injured, pregnant, or sick
  - ▶ Repeated seizures
  - ▶ First time seizure
  - ▶ Difficulty breathing
  - ▶ Seizure occurs in water
- Do NOT**
  - ✗ Do **NOT** restrain.
  - ✗ Do **NOT** put any objects in their mouth.
  - ✓ **Rescue medicines can be given** if prescribed by a health care professional

Learn more: [epilepsy.com/firstaid](https://epilepsy.com/firstaid)

**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION** | [epilepsy.com](https://epilepsy.com)

24/7 Helpline: 1-800-332-1000

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