

The Imani Breakthrough Faith-Based Recovery Program

Alcohol Drug Policy Council (ADPC)

August 18, 2026

Presenters:

Chyrell D Bellamy, PhD, MSW

Graziela Reis, BS, MPH

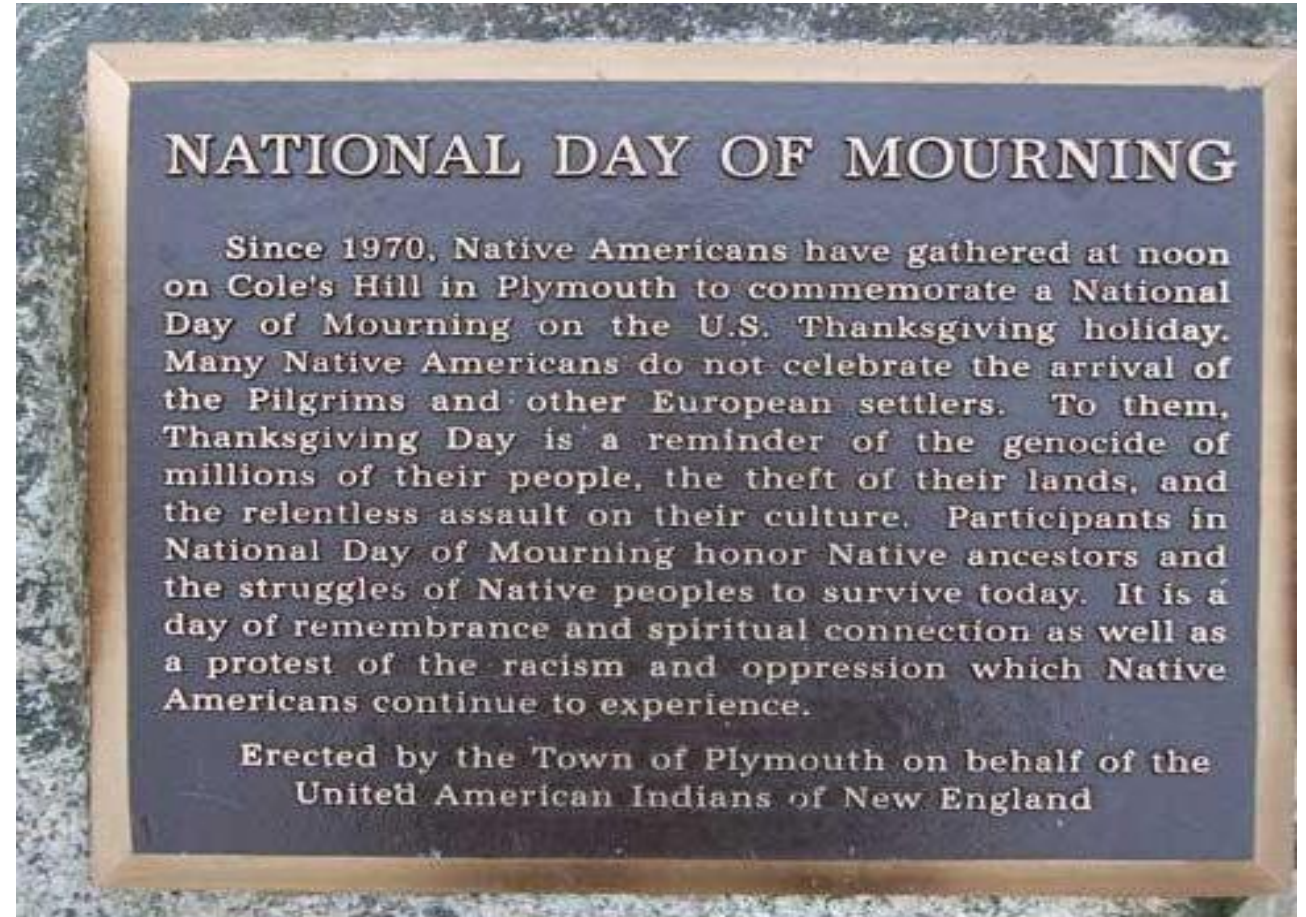
Sylvia Cooper

Alexandra Guzman

Land Acknowledgement

All land in CT was once Native territory. It is our duty to acknowledge that many of the institutions where we work or conduct research are indeed on Native land. GIVE THANKS!

Land acknowledgments do not exist in the past tense or historical context. Colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to be mindful of our present participation.





- Dr. Ayana Jordan, mPI
- Dr. Chyrell Bellamy, mPI
- Rev. Robyn Anderson
- Dr. Mark Costa
- Graziela Reis
- Kimberly Blackman
- Luz Ocasio
- Merarilisse Crespo
- Dr. Esperanza Diaz
- Dr. Nientara Anderson
- Dr. Fabiola Arbelo Cruz
- Dr. Theddeus Iheanacho
- Dr. Andrea Mendiola
- Luiza Barnat
- Kimberly Guy
- Sylvia Cooper
- Ellen Boynton
- Yolanda Herring
- Richard Youins
- Dr. Ariel Sloan
- Dr. Miraj Desai
- Theresa Babuscio
- Dr. Janan Wyatt
- Dr. Larry Davidson
- Charla Nich
- Annette Diaz
- Shellina Toure
- Dr. Chris Pittenger
- Dr. Miriam Delphin Rittmon
- Nydia Rios-Benitez
- Marcia DuFore
- Michelle Stewart-Copes
- Mark Jenkins
- Commissioner Nancy Navarretta



The Imani Organizing Team

Special thanks to the churches, pastors, facilitators, and people with lived experience attending Imani. In memory of the many that we have lost to the opioid epidemic.

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We need you!

We need you our brothers, our sisters and our people!

Help us reaffirm ourselves in

Loving Ourselves;

Hold us

When we can't stand

'Cause soles of shoes have traveled on our backs for so long;

We need you our brothers, our sisters and our people!

Adapted from "I Need You," by Imani Harrington



Why Imani (Faith) Breakthrough?

We aim to promote health and healing for ourselves and our communities!

How is this accomplished?

Through a participatory process, we...

- Create a sense of unity
- Create a sense of collective responsibility

... a sense that we are all in this together!



Why Imani?

The Concern

Communities impacted by high overdose rates:

- Rising mental health and SUD concerns
- Rising overdose deaths
- Lower treatment engagement
- Lower treatment retention
- Limited access to culturally responsive care

Why with the Faith Community?

The Opportunity

- Churches remain trusted institutions.
- Many individuals seek support from clergy before engaging in formal treatment.
- Faith communities represent an untapped recovery resource – building social, spiritual, and recovery capital.



Evolution of Imani Programming

The Imani Breakthrough is an intervention developed to target people addicted to and actively using heroin and/or other opiates and other drugs. This is a state of CT's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services initiative funded by SAMHSA and is part of the Connecticut State Targeted Response (CT STR) to the Opioid Crisis and the State Opioid Response (SOR) funding and NIH U01 funding.



Imani Evolution

Started with...

DMHAS/SAMHSA Funded Community Project to Address Opioid Crisis in

2017/2018

5 major urban cities in CT: Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury, and New Britain



Community Partners



Initially funded as Imani SOR
*In 8 (4 Black Churches and then 4)
Latino churches in CT now in 10
churches in CT*



Additionally funded as Research
NIH U01 Imani U
Randomized Clinical Trial
With MAT Option
In 6 CT churches

2023 new Imani Program initiatives in Rhode Island and New Orleans

2026 brings Imani to Boston

2026 brings Strengthening the Core Project

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**How did we start?
And What keeps it going?**

Creating a Community-Driven Program

Listen. (Community conversations)

Build. (Co-designing Imani)

Learn. (What the community taught us)

Demonstrate. (The evidence)

Grow. (Strengthening the Core)

Listening Before Designing: How was Imani developed?

LISTENING.

- **Community-Based Participatory Research**
- Community conversations with:
 - People with lived experience
 - Faith leaders
 - Community members
 - Researchers
 - Behavioral health providers

Together we asked:

- What would recovery look like if it were designed by our communities?
- How do we bring healing into communities?

Community Decisions

The community selected:

- 8 Dimensions of Wellness
- Citizenship (5Rs)
- Harm Reduction
- Recovery Coaching
- Church-based delivery



Building.

The Original Imani Model

12 Weeks

- Educational curriculum

Based on:

- 8 Dimensions of Wellness
- Citizenship
- Recovery
- Overdose Prevention

Supported by:

- Church facilitators
- Recovery coaches
- Faith communities



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Learning.

Then the Community Told Us We Were Wrong

This is one of our most powerful implementation science findings.

The original model ended after 12 weeks.

But pastors, facilitators, and participants repeatedly asked:

- *What happens next?*
- *How do we sustain recovery?*
- *How do we stay connected?*

Result

Community members co-designed an additional phase.

12 Weeks Education

10 Weeks Mutual Support

=

22 Week Imani Model



Unique from other recovery programs, Imani focuses on...

- Culturally-informed opioid education, Opioid prevention, and naloxone distribution (OEND)
- Addressing the social determinants of health
- Ensuring opioid reduction prevention
- The importance of mutual support
- Intensive wraparound support
- Coaching in a safe and familiar environment
- IMANI philosophies
- Training facilitators who are members of the community/churches, and those with lived experience of substance use

Collaborating with Churches

Connecticut:

- Varick Memorial AME Zion, New Haven
- Blackwell Memorial AME Zion Church, Hartford
- Mount Aery Baptist, Bridgeport, CT
- Mount Olive AME Zion Church, Waterbury
- Right Now Ministries, New Britain
- Prince of Peace Church, Bridgeport
- Casa de Oración y Adoración, New Haven
- IAR Nuevo Comienzo (New Beginnings) Church, Hartford
- Spottswood African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, New Britain

New Orleans:

- New Hope Community Development Organization
- Greater Living Witness Sanctuary
- Christian Fellowship

Rhode Island:

- Vida Church
- Bethel AME Church
- Allen AME Church

Boston:

Twelfth Baptist Church





What is changing?

Recovery, hope, belonging,
citizenship, wellness



From 2018 to 2026, Imani Breakthrough has been provided to approximately 2,000 people in Connecticut to date, and preliminary evidence shows it directly addresses the barriers that impede access to the most effective MAT available.

Overview of Imani Breakthrough SOR

Preliminary Data

Demographic Information

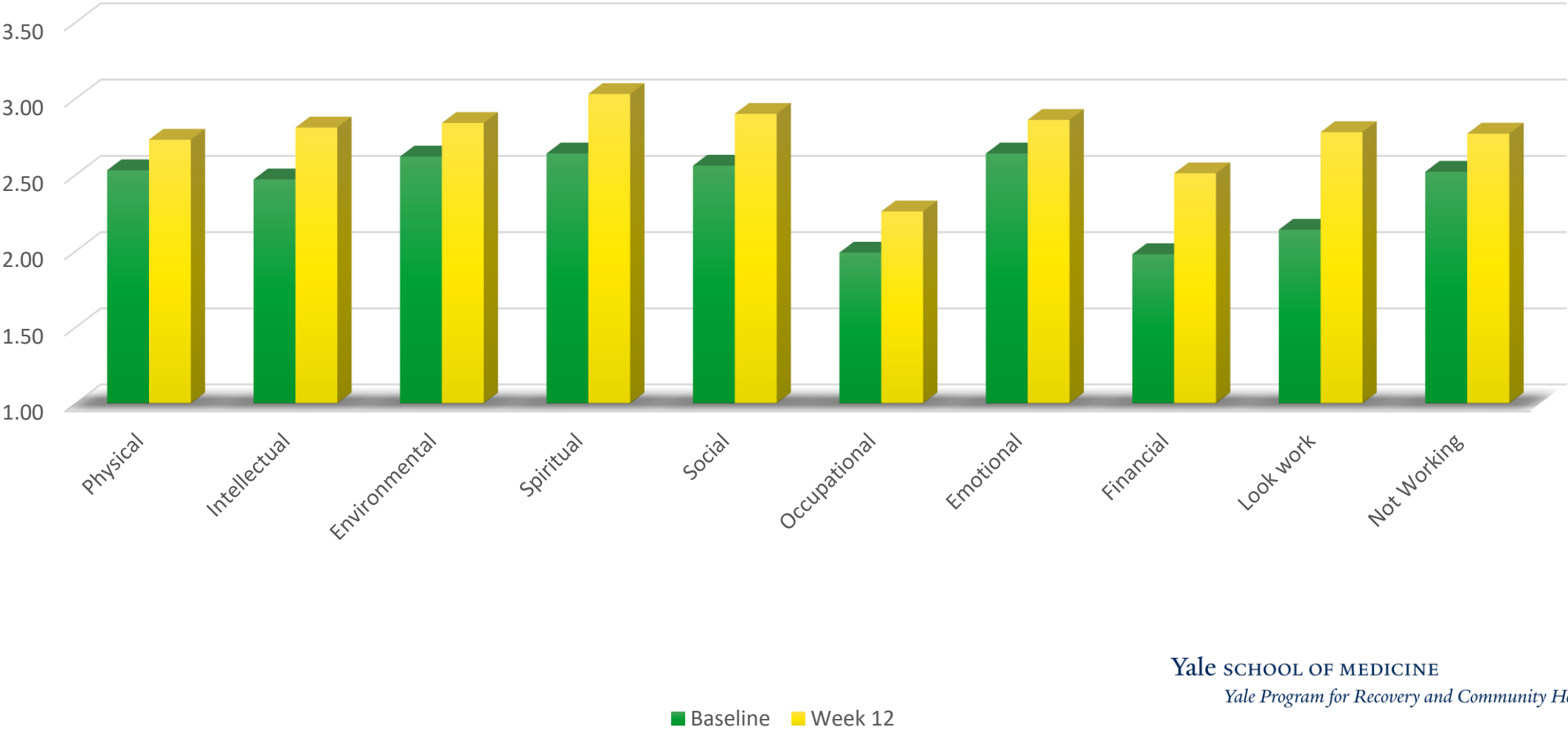


Demographic Characteristics	
43% Female, 57% Male	74% Have experienced homelessness
Mean age – 47 y/o (SD 12)	43% Have experienced childhood physical, verbal, or sexual abuse
22% Latinx/Hispanic	50% Have witnessed physical, verbal, or sexual abuse as a child
61% African American	65% Have experienced violence as an adult
13% White/Caucasian	69% Have witnessed violence as an adult
78% high school diploma or less	47% Attend Religious/Spiritual meetings
81% currently not working	49% Engage in religious/spiritual practice
75% Have been hospitalized at least once	11% Are members of a club or social group
44% - 3 or more times	67% Currently were not receiving substance use services
31% - 5 or more times	25% report use of opioid
65% Have been incarcerated	53% report use of alcohol
14% are currently on probation/parole	43% report use of cocaine and/or crack cocaine

Results – 8 Dimensions of Wellness

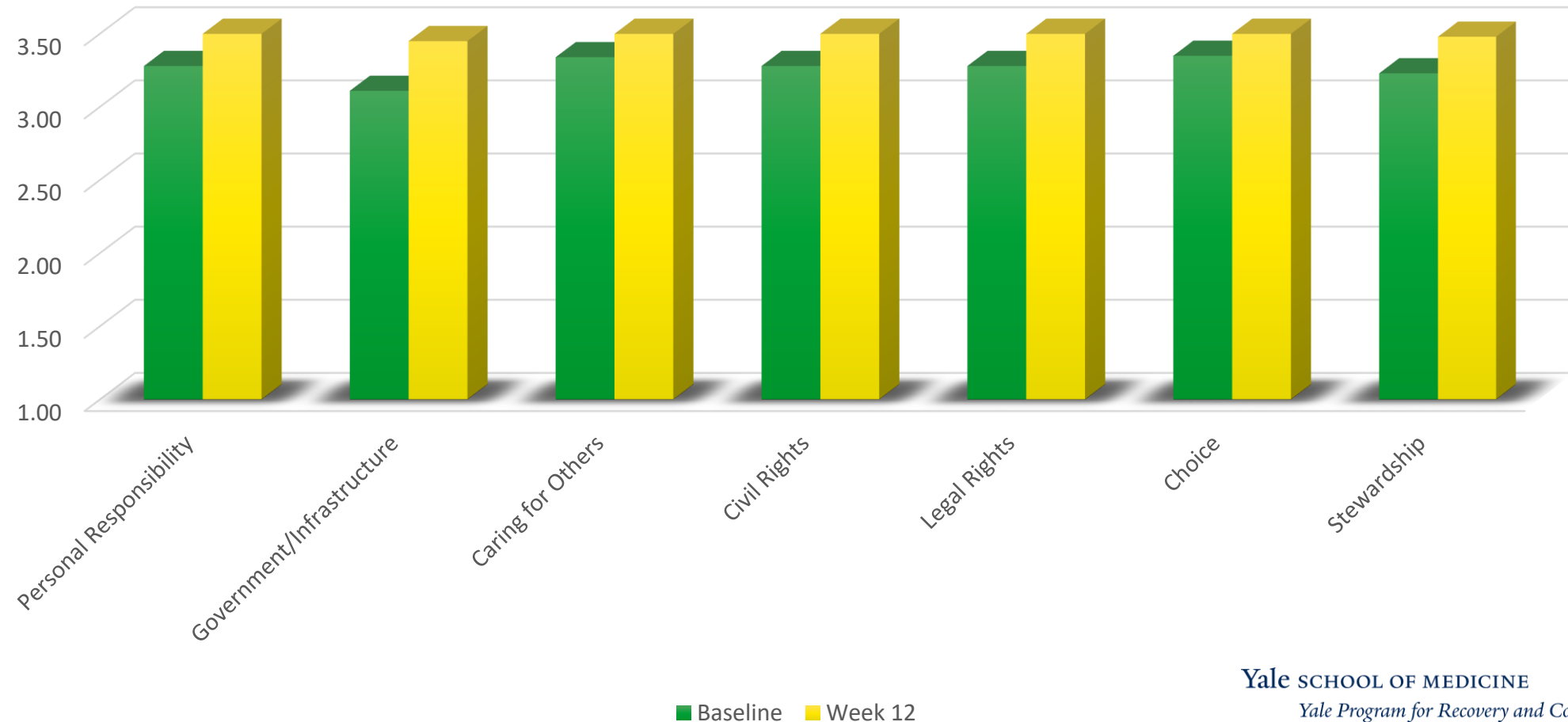


Dimensions of Wellness Change in Score from Baseline to Week 12



Results – Citizenship subscales in Imani

Citizenship Score Change from Baseline to Week 12





What is changing?

Recovery is about more than substance use. Participants work on the parts of life that matter to them.

**Housing & Stability | Health & Treatment |
Employment | Education | Family & Relationships |
Community Connection | Wellness | Recovery**



What Does That Look Like in Real Life?

People are

- entering or staying connected with IOP/treatment
- getting health appointments organized
- obtaining housing
- finding employment
- pursuing college/financial aid
- reconnecting with family
- increasing their knowledge of treatment and life-saving resources
- decreasing or stopping drug use
- using Narcan to save another person's life



And what about treatment?

Imani meets people where they are.

For some, that includes beginning or reconnecting with treatment.

For others, the first steps may be housing, relationships, health, employment, reducing harm, or simply having someone they trust.



What keeps people coming back?

Someone knows my name.

Someone notices when I'm not there.

I can talk about what is happening in my life.

I can get help with the things getting in the way.

I am with people who understand.

I can give back to someone else.

I belong here.

Engagement Works



Lived Experience + Community + Faith
+
Research + Healing/Recovery



019

Steele

Varick Memorial AME Zion Church
1111 Main Avenue
New Haven, CT 06511
varickmemorial.org
Pastor Jones
varickmemorial.org

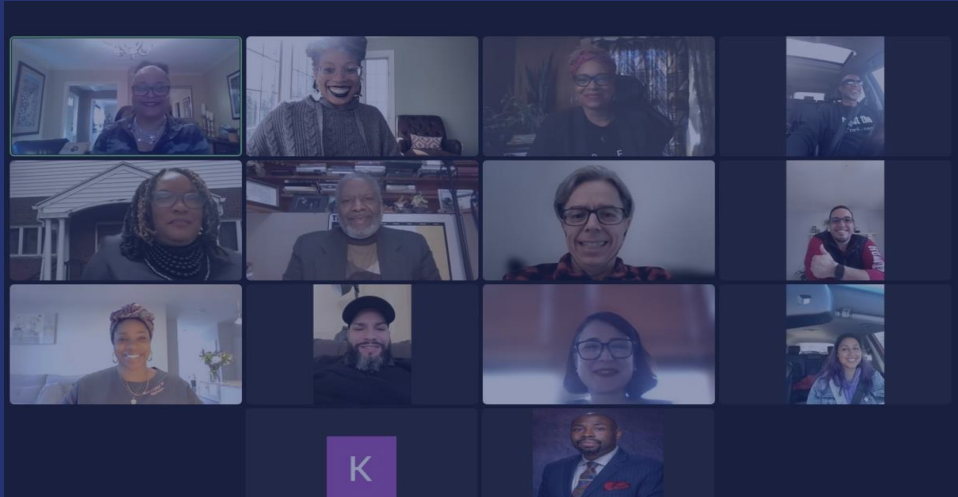
Steele:

Announcements! The Balm In Gilead is excited to honor Varick Memorial AME Zion Church as the recipient of the Healthy Churches 2020 Best Practice Award at the 6th Annual Healthy Churches 2020 National Conference, November 19-22, at the Sheraton Charlotte Hotel. Award recipients will be recognized on November 21, 2019 at 7pm during our Awards Dinner with Special Guest Artist, Israel.

Varick Memorial AME Zion Church has been selected because of your congregation's exceptional health promotion, disease prevention, disease management and service. As 2019 recipient of the Healthy Churches 2020 Best Practice Award, you will receive a plaque and certificate of recognition.

Healthy Churches 2020 Conference
Wholeness & Wellness | Prevention & Care





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Tuesday FEB 7th 7:30PM

Community Conversation

"A Community Conversation to Address Opioid and Substance Use in Our Community."

Pastor Kelly G.L. Steele, M.Div.
Host Pastor

Ayana Jordan, MD, PhD
Professor of Population Health
Associate Professor, Department of Population Health
Pilot Clinical Institute for Excellence in Health Equity
Adjunct Professor, NYU Grossman School of Medicine

Chyrell D. Bellamy, PhD, MSW
Professor of Yale University's Department of Psychiatry, Director of the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health (PRCH), Director of Peer Support Services at Research and Director of the Yale Leadership Academy (LLA) Local

Sylvia Cooper
Site Coordinator
Imani Breakthrough Project

Rokym M. Anderson, MS, LADC, LPC, IMAI
Church Liaison, Executive Director of the Ministerial Health Fellowship

Barbara Wilson, Associate Professor of Psychiatry



Engagement strategies

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Learning.

What Facilitators Taught Us

Facilitators Were Transformed Too

"I found out more about me being a facilitator with Imani... I'm just as vulnerable as anyone else."

Emerging Concepts

- Self-awareness
- Vulnerability
- Self-reflection
- Empathy
- Spiritual growth

This suggested that the intervention was affecting not only participants, but the church itself.





GROWING. Communities continue to teach us.

Strengthening the Core of Churches to Develop and Sustain Faith-based Substance Use Recovery Programming

The CORE = Strengthening spirituality, gratitude, forgiveness, wellness, community citizenship, and recovery and spiritual capital within churches and communities.



April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2029



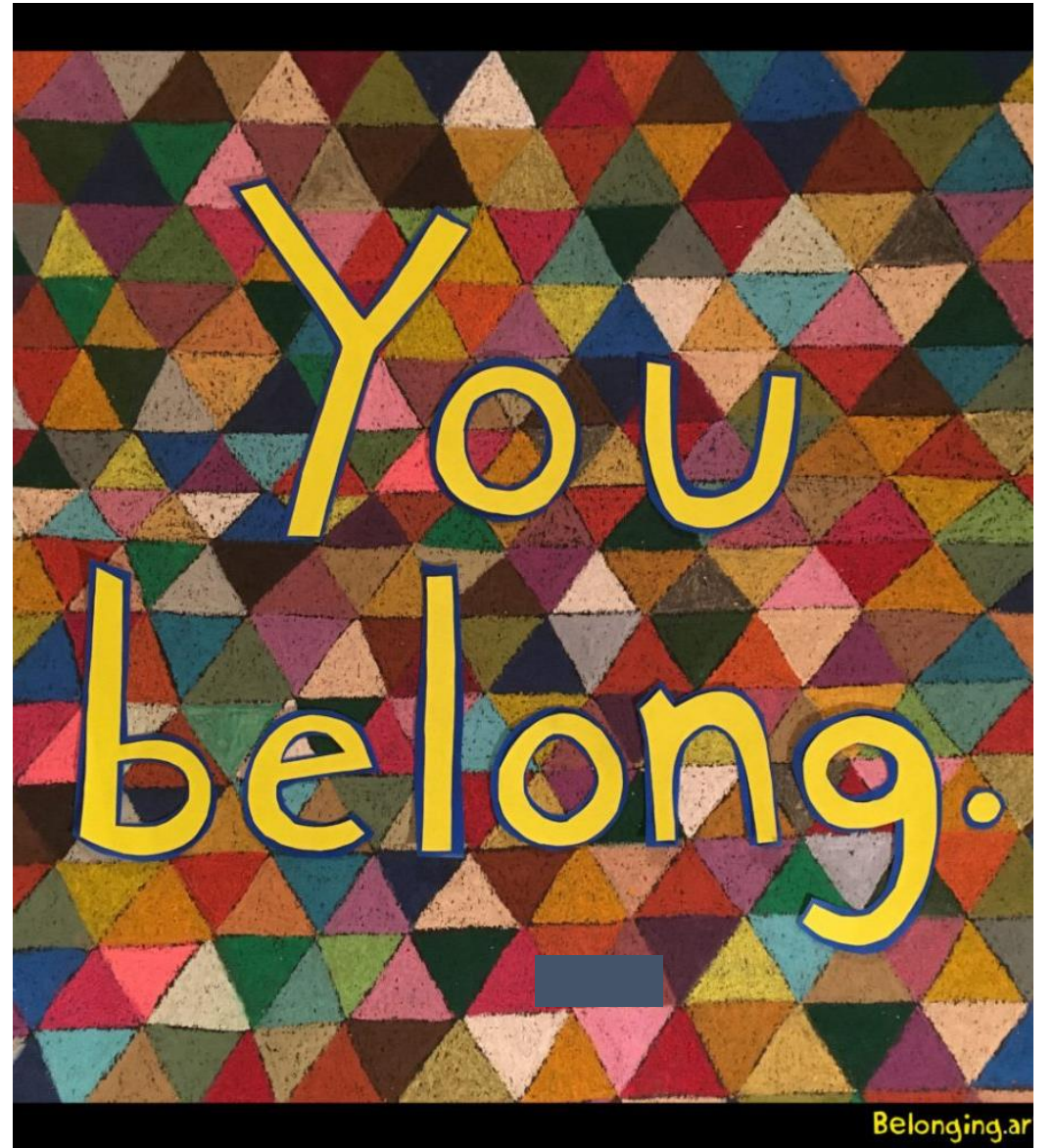
**JOHN
TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION**
Inspiring Awe & Wonder

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For belonging to be real, people need the recognition of others, a message given in words, deeds, and attitudes that says,

“You do belong, you are a valuable member of this community, and we need you.”

Michael Rowe, Emeritus Yale





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Questions/Ideas

Thank you for your time!