

our

NOVEMBER 2022

HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE  
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LIVING

matters™

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TM

# BLACK MEN SPEAK

HEALTH STRENGTH & HOPE

SPECIAL EDITION



A close-up, profile shot of a Black man with short hair and a beard, wearing a plaid shirt and a black face mask pulled down to his chin. He is holding a black microphone to his mouth and appears to be speaking or singing. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor setting. A diagonal white line cuts across the image from the bottom left to the top right.

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# Table of Contents

## Publisher's Greeting ..... 4

Jeron L. Ravin, CEO & President  
Swope Health Central ..... 5

U.S. Congresswoman  
Frederica S. Wilson, FL D-24 ..... 6

U.S. Congressman  
Emanuel Cleaver, II, MO-05 ..... 7

Mayor Quinton D. Lucas..... 8

FOREWORD:  
MEDICAL EDUCATION  
Michael L. Weaver, M.D. ....10

OP/ED John W. Bluford, III.....11

FOREWORD:  
MENTAL HEALTH  
Vladimir Sainte, LCSW ..... 12

FOREWORD:  
EDUCATION  
Anthony S. Lewis, Ph.D. ....13

FOREWORD:  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
Sherman Thomas, BA, MA .....14

FOREWORD:  
LAW ENFORCEMENT  
Sheriff Darryl Forte'.....16

CONSUMER PROTECTION  
Know Your Rights ..... 17

FOREWORD:  
WORKFORCE  
Frank White, III ..... 18



FOREWORD:  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
Mark A. Dupree, Sr. Dist. Attorney  
Wyandotte County, KS.....20

FOREWORD:  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
Judge Ardie Bland ..... 21

## FEATURED PROFILES

These men and boys lend their voices to offer a personal glimpse into their challenges, strengths and desire to make a difference in communities where they live, work, learn, play and worship.

Larry Lester ..... 22  
Andrae Smith ..... 23  
Kenneth Yancy ..... 24  
George Ramsey, III..... 25  
Donald Sims ..... 26  
Walter B. Ramsey ..... 27  
Ollie Gates..... 28  
Rev. Steven D. Graves .....30  
Walter Pearson .....31  
Marvin Lyman..... 32  
Deaveon Williams ..... 34

Keith Brown ..... 35  
Gary Maltbia..... 36  
Jasper Fullard, Jr., M.D..... 37  
Rev. Donald W. Givens ..... 38  
Jorge Fuller..... 39  
Eric L. Wesson, Sr.....40  
James (Jim) Nunnally .....41  
Ebrima Abraham Sisay .....42  
Marquise Shelton .....44  
Lewis Walker.....45  
John Dunn .....46

Terrence Ramsey..... 47  
Lewis W. Diuguid ..... 48  
Gregory Parr .....49  
Kelvin L. Simmons.....50  
Keith Harrison ..... 51  
Christopher Peacock ..... 52  
Erik Keith Stafford .....54  
Screenings for  
Men Ages 40-65..... 55

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# BLACK MEN SPEAK

HEALTH STRENGTH & HOPE

## RUTH RAMSEY

Publisher, *Our Health Matters* Magazine

## Phenomenal. Heartfelt. Encouraging.

These are the words that come to my mind after reading the Forewords in this special edition of *Black Men Speak: Health, Strength and Hope* from experts in the field. They share the realities and perspectives of what lies ahead in healthcare, education, law enforcement, criminal justice, policy and government, mental health and youth development. And, add to that the privilege of speaking with diverse Black men and boys, who each share intimate and personal experiences and perspectives on their professions, healthcare, vision for their family, and more. They are not wasting any time on obstacles that seem to find their way into their personal and business lives. In fact, they become more determined and empowered to make a difference.

*Our Health Matters* and *Swope Health Central* knew this partnership was a good fit. Stay tuned—this inaugural edition is just the beginning. We eagerly await 2023 and will share our strategic plan on how public and private partnerships can help us create actionable solutions to support the needs of Black men and boys in the region. Our work has just begun. We are better together.

  
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To your health,

**Ruth Ramsey**, Publisher and CEO

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**JERON L. RAVIN, JD**

**CEO & President  
Swope Health Central**

## Speaking Truth to Empower

I am the proud son of a union truck driver. My father, Jesse Ravin, will be 82 years young this year. Never known to take a day off, he often refers to his career as 50 years of an honest day's work.

What my father will rarely mention is his two separate bouts with cancer. A survivor of both colon and pancreatic cancer, he is a walking miracle. While you can't convince him of it, he is an anomaly. Not only for his surviving, but because early disease detection in Black men is exceptionally uncommon. This is true for a number of reasons, including barriers to care like abhorrent rising health care costs, and unemployment, as most Americans receive healthcare benefits through their work. For my father, routine cancer screenings led to an early diagnosis and ultimately saved his life.

Black men in the United States suffer worse health outcomes than any other racial group in America. As a group, Black men have the lowest life expectancy and the highest death rate from specific causes compared to both men and women of other racial and ethnic groups. In 2019, the top five causes for Black male deaths were heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury, homicide, and stroke.

Improving outcomes requires focus. Yet, the health disparities of Black men rarely get the attention needed. Until now.

As the president and CEO of Swope Health, Kansas City's voice for community health, we are committed to advocating for action against health injustice. That is why we are teaming up with *Our Health Matters*™ in this publication: **Black Men Speak: Health, Strength and Hope**. This edition creates a platform for the voices of Black men in Kansas City, addressing heartfelt experiences and sharing wisdom about gaining health, wealth and sustainability for Black men and their families.

It is an extension of our mission, which since 1969 has been to serve a population centered in the urban core, in communities of color, and in communities where men die prematurely. We advocate for our community's health, in our clinics and also in speaking truth to power about inequity and injustice in our community — in housing, employment, education, policing, access to capital and more.



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This edition of *Our Health Matters* is personal. On behalf of my father and our entire Swope Health team, I hope you'll join the dialogue and act with us to nurture "Health, Strength and Hope" for the men of Kansas City.

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A portrait of Frederica S. Wilson, a Black woman wearing a black cowboy hat, a dark blazer, and a large pearl necklace. She is smiling and standing in front of an American flag and the U.S. Capitol building.

**FREDERICA S. WILSON**

**U.S. Congresswoman, FL District 24**

## Creating a Brighter Future for Black Men and Boys

**A**s a lifelong educator who's served as a public school teacher, principal and school board member in Miami-Dade County, I've seen firsthand the disparate treatment of young Black boys from elementary school to adulthood. Simply, Black boys don't have the same access to educational opportunities as other children their

age. They are ostracized, criticized, and punished by teachers at higher rates and more severely than other students. This unequal treatment has had a tremendous impact on their self-esteem and ability to perform, and I could not stand by. Someone had to stand up and be an advocate for Black men and boys in our community, state and society. So, I founded a mentorship program, the 5000 Role Models of Excellence.

My vision was to create a healthy, sustainable and productive living environment for the 20 million Black men and boys in America. They have been significant contributors in our society since Africans hit the shores of the New World in 1619. America would not be America if it were not for the skills, intelligence, contributions and resilience of Black men and boys.

In 2020, the ***Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys*** was created to address the disparities and social conditions impacting Black males in America. The goal is to address the resounding lack of support and total disregard from this society for one of its key contributors — Black Men. The Commission wants to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline that has made it extraordinarily difficult for Black males to become upwardly mobile to reach their full potential. Target focus areas are: Education, Justice & Civil Rights, Healthcare, Labor & Employment and Housing. It includes, but is not limited to addressing police brutality, gun violence, fatherhood challenges and promoting the recruitment of Black male teachers who play an important role in the lives of Black boys. Welfare reform and the 1994 crime bill that includes the controversial three strikes provision and harsh sentencing guidelines will also be under review.

The Commission invites advocates around the nation to follow and promote its work through social media, print, online blogs and more. This is not a Black agenda; this is an American agenda. A healthy state of Black men and boys will result in a more powerful union.

To learn more about The Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, visit the United States Commission on Civil Rights at [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov). For more information about the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, visit [www.5000rolemodels.com](http://www.5000rolemodels.com).



**EMANUEL CLEAVER, II**  
U.S. Congressman (MO-05)  
[cleaver.house.gov](http://cleaver.house.gov)

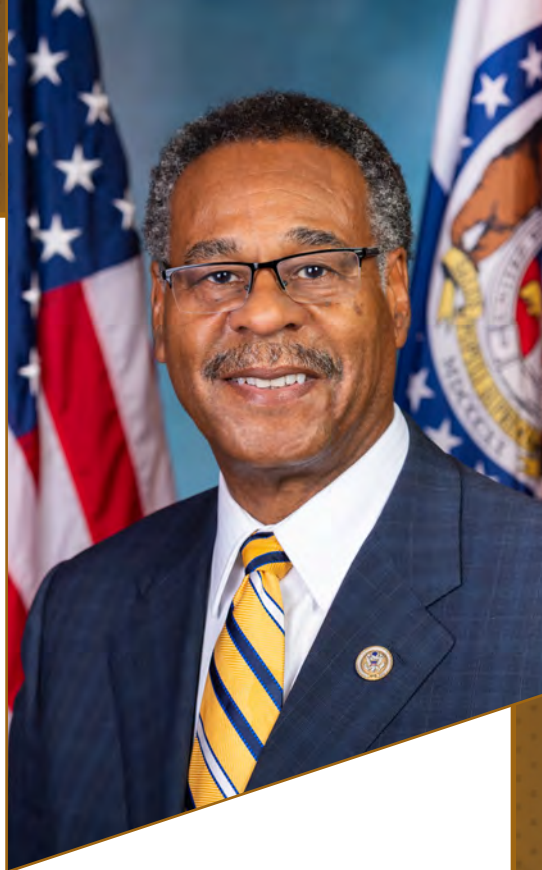
## Men, We Can Do This!

In 1977, Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy, the successor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stepped down from the presidency of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Dr. Joseph Lowery became the organization's third president.

Lowery quickly launched a youth movement by elevating the Rev. John Nettles as National Vice-President and me as the Mid-West Regional Vice-President. We both felt less than confident in our new roles in an organization with a vaunted history of esteemed and brilliant leaders.

As time moved on, Nettles, a Baptist pastor in Anniston, Alabama, and I, a United Methodist pastor in Kansas City, became good friends. Eventually, we cautiously accepted our role as future SCLC leaders. Then, on March 25, 1995, I received a phone call that my buddy Rev. John Nettles had just died from prostate cancer. I was dejected and gloomy for a few days, but when I learned that prostate cancer is one of the most curable of the malignant tumors—in fact, more than 80 out of 100 men will survive their prostate cancer for 10 years or more—my eyes were opened to the importance of preventative care and routine checkups. I actually felt a strange anger toward John for failing to undergo the common screening which generally detects anything abnormal.

Many African American men die prematurely from treatable conditions. Premature death from treatable conditions disproportionately impacts communities of color—particularly Black men. Expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act is crucial in reducing these fatalities. While Missouri has been woefully slow in implementing a lifesaving program which will cost the state essentially nothing, I'm proud of the work the Biden Administration and Democrats in Congress have done to place health equity at center stage. James Baldwin astutely observed that “anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.” House Democrats, with no help from our GOP colleagues, have fought to right this fatal wrong by capping insulin prices and lowering prescription drugs.



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“Many African American men die prematurely from treatable conditions.”

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**QUINTON D. LUCAS**  
Mayor, Kansas City, MO

## Make a Difference in Your Community

I was born and raised in Kansas City, with a hardworking mother and two older sisters. Growing up, my family faced bouts of homelessness and evictions, and I saw the unjust policies and issues our Black community continues to face, including access to safe and affordable housing, access to fair wages, and gun violence. I knew change needed to happen.

There is no better way to make change in your community than to participate in local government. Local government exists mostly to create solutions that impact Kansas Citians most directly. As we look at the most pressing issues impacting Black men in Kansas City, we see gun violence and suicide continue to top the list. With more of us engaging in local government, city leaders are better able to create legislation reflecting our needs and interests.

One of the best ways to make a difference in your community and engage with local government is to join a board or commission. Kansas City has more than 100 boards and commissions made up of appointed members who propose recommendations to elected officials on important issues affecting our daily lives, including streets, public health, housing and transportation. Consider running for office, or make your voice heard at neighborhood meetings. We need more Black men in these spaces, and we need to lift our voices as we strive for increased racial equity in our City, state, and nation.

Very truly yours,



Quinton D. Lucas





Quality Care for the  
Whole Person

This is what  
**HEALTHY**  
feels like.



## *Why should I get a COVID-19 booster?*

**Boosters offer significant protection from severe, long-lasting illness, hospitalization, and death.**

It is recommended that everyone age 12+ get the COVID-19 vaccine and a booster. Some people should also get a second booster.

For current booster recommendations, visit [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to schedule a vaccine or booster near you.



**MICHAEL L. WEAVER, M.D., FACEP, CDM**  
President and CEO  
Mission Vision Project KC

## Black Doctors Matter

I am a Black male who grew up in the urban core, attended medical school and completed residency here in Kansas City. I practiced Emergency Medicine and championed health equity in various roles over the last four decades. All of these experiences taught me a few things about why we need more Black males in medicine and the work that we must do today and every day moving forward.

You've read the statistics about the disease burden and low life expectancy for Black males. You've read the research that says Black males have better clinical outcomes when Black male physicians provide their clinical care. Yet, only about 2% of physicians in our country are Black males.

### **WHY ARE BLACK MALES SO UNDERREPRESENTED IN MEDICINE?**

Black males face historic systemic challenges and often come from backgrounds with fewer resources than other students. This leads to challenges such as lack of support, lack of social capital, lack of mentorship, feelings of isolation, race-related concerns and financial insecurity. Many have limited exposure to Black male professionals and mentors who understand the unique pressures on their ability to access education with academic rigor.

### **HOW THE COMMUNITY CAN HELP**

I'm proud to say Black doctors in Kansas City support medical students. My physician colleagues have been showing up at mentoring events for the past 17 years. They invite med students to shadow

them and share their network to increase each student's vision of career options.

In order to ensure that more Black males succeed in medical school, we must do more. We must provide a wide range of resources to help them navigate academic and professional pathways in the medical profession. Additional ways include:

- Create experiences that elevate resilience and expose students to medical career options and ideas about how to pursue them.
- Address systemic challenges by collaborating with community partners to create a supportive network of interaction with professionals and extracurricular experiences.
- Work with schools and universities to raise awareness and mitigate bias and stereotypes that limit access and impede student success.
- Solicit corporate donors and philanthropists to fund scholarships for Black males that address students' financial insecurity and build an effective pathway.

I thank the community in advance for doing its part to make sure more Black males enter Medicine and work to improve health equity in the metro area.

*Michael L. Weaver, M.D., FACEP, CDM, is Past Chairman; Department of Emergency Medicine, Past Medical Director; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Past Chairman; Healthcare Equity Council; Saint Luke's Health System Clinical Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, UMKC School of Medicine; President/CEO, Mission Vision Project KC (<https://www.mvpc.org/>)*



**JOHN W. BLUFORD, III**  
**President, Bluford Healthcare Leadership Institute**  
**President Emeritus, Truman Medical Centers**



## Cultivating Potential Early is Key to Success

**S**ome 25-30 years ago, I served as a preceptor for Healthcare Administration graduate school programs, the University of Minnesota and University of Alabama-Birmingham, to name a couple. My job was to mentor the program's young professionals and expose them to the rigors of Healthcare Management. Black students were seldom exposed to what I had to offer because they were not in the graduate school pipeline.

Since 2012, I have dedicated most of my time to cure that deficiency of diverse talent by recruiting, teaching, mentoring and coaching young adult Black and Brown Scholars (men and women) to the virtues and earning power of professions in the healthcare sector.

Over the past ten years I have found many young African American men to be extremely bright, classroom smart, creative, responsible and in fact, inspirational. A common theme has been that they are focused on community engagement and servant leadership, although they may not totally understand what the term "servant leadership" means.

Unfortunately, one problem that I see is that there are still not enough Black men coming through the pipelines. The interview gender ratio when I am on college campuses interviewing for leadership opportunities is often five to one, women to men. In fact, school enrollments at major Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) plus UMKC and Rockhurst University are often 65% women and

35% men. Similar ratios are also prevalent in medical schools, business schools and law schools across the country. When those selected underrepresented men do get to the interview room, there is not a lack of intelligence, but sometimes of "readiness." As I often say, "on time ready to play." Sometimes it is a

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**"...one problem that I see is that there are still not enough Black men coming through the [graduate schools] pipelines."**

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lack of maturity relative to age or a lack of physical presence commensurate with the role they wish to pursue, and sometimes it is an inability to resist the gravitational pull to remain average. There is often discussion about individualized personal branding. I am reminded that one's brand can be defined as "common sense rebranded."

I think if the collective Black community is to achieve many of the attributes espoused by ***Our Health Matters***, including reduced health disparities, gainful employment, wealth sustainability, home ownership, etc., we need to raise the bar—focused on expectation versus "potential" and never grade on the curve. These expectations need to start in pre-school to cultivate the pipeline early and continue to the college or job interview room.



# MENTAL HEALTH

## VLADIMIR SAINTE, LCSW

Senior Project Coordinator – BH Employee Wellness  
Behavioral Health  
University Health Kansas City

## Nothing Can Be Changed Until It Is Faced

**M**y name is Vladimir Sainte, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I am also the proud parent of two biracial children, and the writer and illustrator of the “Just Like a Hero” book series (a collection of diverse children literature that focuses on increasing mental health awareness and emotional literacy in early childhood). In addition to my many successes in life, I am also a Black man living with depression, ADHD and anxiety. My journey of coming to terms with my mental health has not been a straightforward path. Part of the acceptance has come from years of

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“There is a cultural shift occurring within our community; more and more men of color are openly talking about their mental health...”

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attending and participating in therapy, working on my own identity and learning self-worth. Growing up as a first generation Haitian American, mental health conversations were not common.

In the Black community, we often hear the rhetoric that your best bet to cure what mentally ill you is to go to church. You would be viewed as “crazy” if you felt depressed or expressed any other mental health symptoms. From an early age, I was taught that there is weakness in this form of vulnerability. It took me years to learn that this thinking error began long before my parents’

misunderstanding of mental health and that it derived from slavery.

We know our history that Black and African Americans in this country for generations have been plagued by deep-rooted trauma and oppression. Egregious diagnoses, such as drapetomania, were attributed to slaves in order to keep them oppressed. This label meant one would have to be mentally unstable if they wanted their freedom. It is my personal opinion that this long-felt internalized shame and trauma has played a role in the reluctance of Black and African American men to seek mental health services.

The more we change the narrative of mental illness to mental wellness, the more validating and destigmatizing it becomes. We normalize the experience in order to alter the negative societal labeling of it. James Baldwin said it best: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

There is a cultural shift occurring within our community; more and more men of color are openly talking about their mental health. I am glad to be a part of the forward movement. I’m very proud and happy to have such a supportive wife and family who compassionately pushed me into starting therapy. She knew my health mattered before I could see it for myself.

*Vladimir Sainte, LCSW is currently employed with University Health Behavioral Health as Senior Project Coordinator of Employee Wellness and Engagement. Learn more about him at [www.vladimirsainte.com](http://www.vladimirsainte.com)*



**ANTHONY S. LEWIS, PH.D.**  
Superintendent  
Educational Support Center  
Lawrence, Kansas



## HIGH PRIORITY— Equitable Outcomes for All

**T**he time has come for all Black men to speak about their health, their strength and the hope that lies ahead. We just need people to listen—and listen to understand, not just to respond. I applaud *Our Health Matters* and *Swope Health* for creating this space to address what we have known for far too long. Black men and boys' health and education deserve more attention.

I am proud to serve as a Black leader in a predominantly white community. It is important for my Black boys to see someone who looks like

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“Creating truly equitable schools is no longer a matter of choice, but a moral and ethical imperative.”

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them leading their school district. With this comes great responsibility not just to simply disrupt, but to dismantle systems of oppression and racism. As a school system, we are doing the work that is also embedded in our equity policy: to ensure educational policies, practices, interactions and resources are representative of, constructed by and responsive to all people so that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in and has positive outcomes from high-quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group membership.

To disrupt systemic racism and other forms of injustice that profoundly impact students' current and future quality of life, our Board of Education commits to applying an equity lens to school governance and resource allocation. Our board, district administrators and certified and classified staff will work together to aggressively and efficiently eliminate inequitable practices, systems and structures that create advantages for some students and families while disadvantaging others. I am proud to serve alongside a Board of Education that recognizes the importance of making and supporting significant shifts in mindset and practice to provide and sustain equitable outcomes for all students.

When we examine research, we find that Black men and women face many of the same challenges; however, Black women generally have a longer life expectancy than Black men. The culprit—structural racism. There are currently many areas around the country working to declare racism a public health crisis. Structural racism puts Black men and boys at increased risk of serious illnesses at personal, interpersonal and institutional levels. Schools are not exempt, as they are complex ecosystems designed within the context of structural racism. Schools, as we know them, do not serve as the “great equalizer,” nor were they ever intended to be. Creating truly equitable schools is no longer a matter of choice, but a moral and ethical imperative. Our Black boys' lives literally depend on it.



# YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

**SHERMAN THOMAS, BA, MA**  
Unit Director  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City  
Thornberry Unit  
[www.helpkckids.org](http://www.helpkckids.org)

## Be All You Can Be

**W**orking with youth is the most satisfying part of my career. I have worked in the field of youth development for over 10 years. It has always been my dream to help others reach their highest potential regardless of their background. When I was growing up, I had numerous role models who showed me steps to overcome adversity. I want to do the same for the next generation of youth.

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“We can’t spend every waking day trying to convince others that they are straight out wrong about “most of us.”

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From what I see, it depends on who you speak to about how some in society view African Americans and specifically Black men and boys. Individuals who have been exposed to, or who have experienced being in diverse social environments (community, school, work, etc.) would more than likely not make negative statements about a race. However, individuals who have not had the benefit of these experiences might cast disparaging comments about how they view Black men and boys—labeling them as emotional, prone to violence, lacking discipline, misguided, and other

stereotypes often portrayed in the news media. Some challenges many Black men and boys face daily is dispelling these misconceptions. As Black men, we can’t spend every waking day trying to convince others that they are straight out wrong about “most of us.” Not all Black men are absentee parents, lack a high school education, abuse themselves or others, or have a criminal record. However, for those who are lacking in these areas, perhaps early intervention would have helped them.

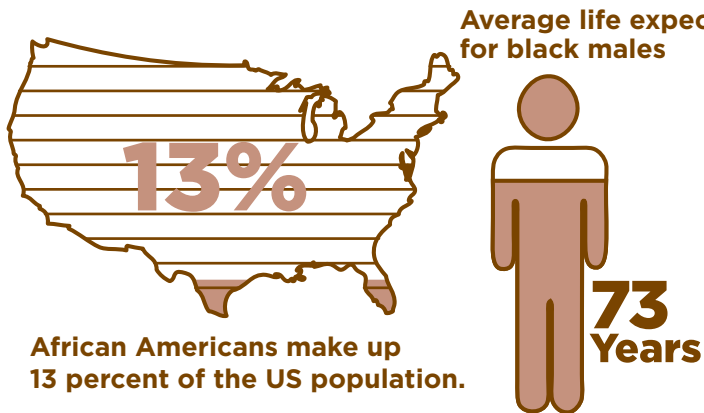
We must pay more attention to young boys earlier in their development in order to head off future behaviors of disrespect, anger and many other bad influences they may encounter. All of us can impact how well Black boys grow up with a mindset and heart to build up and not destroy themselves and their community. When a young Black male experiences strong leadership and interest from people who look like them, they are more likely to listen, learn and adopt healthier behaviors. Representation matters! Is mentoring in your future? Reach out. I’d love to hear from you.

*Sherman Thomas has a BA in Rehabilitation Services with a minor in Recreation at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and MA from Webster University in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.*

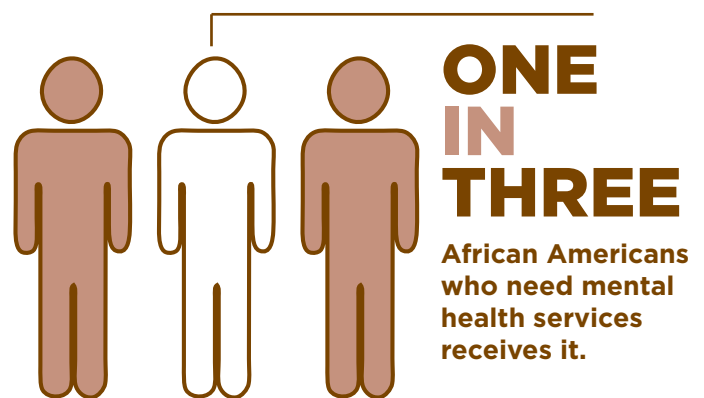


There are approximately 21 million Black men in the United States. They experience far worse health than any other racial group in America. There are a number of reasons for this, including racial discrimination, a lack of affordable health services, poor health education, cultural barriers, poverty, employment that does not carry health insurance, and insufficient medical and social services.

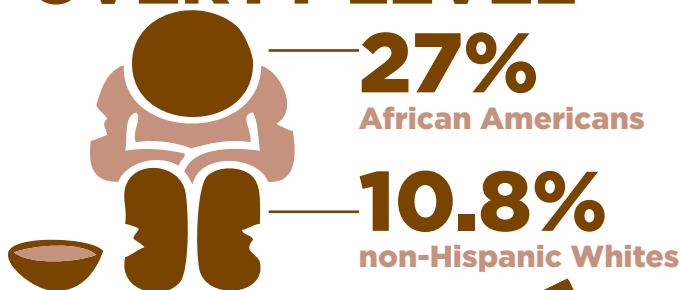
## DID YOU KNOW



African Americans are more likely than whites to die from heart disease, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and homicide.



## LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL



## HOME OWNERS

**72%**

White Americans

**42%**

Black Americans



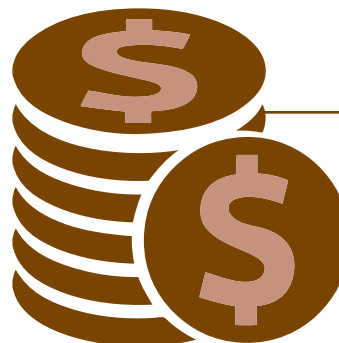
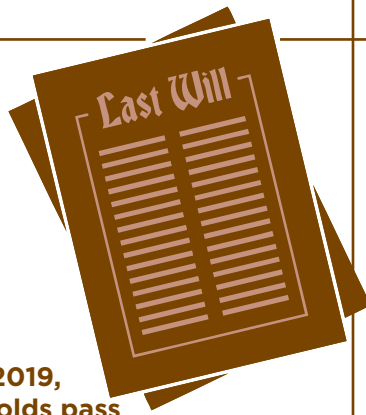
**30%**

White Households at \$195,000 Average

**10%**

Black Households at \$100,000 Average

received an inheritance in 2019, showing that Black households pass on less wealth, if any, to their heirs.



**\$57,616**

White Males Annual Salary

**\$42,120**

Black Males Annual Salary

Data from March 2021 states that Black men made an average annual salary of 73.1% less than White men earned.



**DARRYL FORTÉ**  
Sheriff, Jackson County

## I Am Optimistic About the Future

I encourage everyone to develop relationships with law enforcement officials and for every law enforcement official to develop relationships with members of our diverse community.

Upon being appointed Chief of Police of the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department in 2011, the practice of de-escalation and tactical disengagement was emphasized. Many officers thought this was being soft on criminals and thought officers would be perceived as being weak if they backed away from an incident. To

---

“Never be afraid to speak up even if what you must communicate might not be popular or well received. Your goal should never be to satisfy man.”

---

build trust and develop relationships, officers were asked to give more warnings to minor traffic violators, rather than cite them. The minority community, where violent crime is higher than in other segments of the community, must not feel targeted if law enforcement officials truly desire community support.

Racial profiling is practiced by some law enforcement officials. Although it is difficult to

prove, internal unfair treatment of officers of color is not difficult to prove. I speak from personal experience as a former chief of police and as a current sheriff. What happens inside an organization occurs outside an organization. Law enforcement officials are not void of biases and are a microcosm of the general community. I encourage everyone to exercise their right to protest and make known any wrongdoings.

As we move forward, I will continue to seek opportunities to build and nurture relationships, increase accountability, as well as be personally available to our entire community. The Jackson County Sheriff's Office deputies are now required to wear body-worn cameras, adhere to a duty to intervene policy, as well as participate in more diversity training than is required by the state.

What I observed during my 31-year career at the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department was a practice of highlighting the hiring of Black males, while not valuing the service of the Black males. Upon joining the Sheriff's Office in May 2018, I noticed one Black male had been hired in six years. Since I became sheriff, over 11 Black males, and as many white males, have been hired at the Sheriff's Office.

I am optimistic about the future of law enforcement. Even though the law enforcement profession has caused self-induced harm to its reputation, many servant-minded individuals are applying to join the ranks of public service.



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## HOUSING

The Missouri Human Rights Act (Act) makes it illegal to discriminate in any aspect of housing because of an individual's race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, familial status (children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians, pregnant women, and people securing custody of children under the age of 18), and disability including:

- Refusing to rent or sell housing
- Refusing to negotiate for the sale or rental of housing
- Setting different terms, conditions, or privileges for sale or rental of a dwelling
- Making housing unavailable to certain individuals
- Falsely denying that housing is available for inspection, sale or rental
- Providing different housing services or facilities to certain individuals
- For profit, persuade owners to sell or rent (blockbusting)
- Denying certain individuals access to or membership in a facility or service (such as a multiple listing service) related to the sale or rental of housing.

Learn more about housing rights and what action you can take if you feel that you have been discriminated against. Visit <https://labor.mo.gov/mohumanrights/discrimination/housing>

## CONSUMER RIGHTS

As consumers, we have basic rights. These basic rights include the right to safety, the right to be informed about a product, the right to choose between competing goods, and the right to have your concerns heard. If you feel that these rights have been violated, you may be able to file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission or your state attorney general's office.

### Buyer's Remorse: The FTC's Cooling-Off Rule May Help

If you've ever asked yourself, "what have I done?" after buying something, you're not alone. Maybe you signed up for a pricey sales training program at a multi-level marketing company's recruiting meeting. Or you made a large ticket purchase (vehicles, home improvements, etc.) and changed your mind after you signed the contract.

The FTC's Cooling-Off Rule allows you time to void the agreement before it goes into effect.

Visit <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/buyers-remorse-ftcs-cooling-rule-may-help#top> to learn what your rights are under this rule.

## HEALTHCARE

### What are my healthcare rights and responsibilities?

As a patient, you have certain rights. Some are guaranteed by federal law, such as the right to get a copy of your medical records, and the right to keep them private. Many states have additional laws protecting patients, and healthcare facilities often have a patient bill of rights.

An important patient right is informed consent. This means that if you need a treatment, your health care provider must give you the information you need to make a decision.

Many hospitals have patient advocates who can help you if you have problems. Many states have an ombudsman office for problems with long term care. Your state's department of health may also be able to help.

If you are looking for an insurance-related bill of rights, you might be interested in this information: A patient's rights and responsibilities under the Affordable Care Act are found on the HealthCare.gov website at: <https://www.healthcare.gov/how-does-the-health-care-law-protect-me/>

Your Medicare rights are explained at: <http://www.medicare.gov/claims-and-appeals/medicare-rights/medicare-rights-overview.html>.

Source: <https://www.hhs.gov/answers/health-insurance-reform/what-are-my-health-care-rights/index.html>



**FRANK WHITE, III**

**President & CEO  
Kansas City Area Transportation Authority**

## Public Transportation the Great Equalizer

**A**s a kid that grew up on the east side of Kansas City, I saw first-hand the challenges young people, especially young Black men face in securing that stable job, or completing their education, in order to take care of their families.

In August 2022, I took the helm as President & CEO of the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority. I am invigorated by the challenges we face fulfilling the full depth of our regional responsibilities. Part of those responsibilities

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**“We are transforming KCATA  
into an employer of choice.”**

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are to help people connect to jobs, healthcare, education and affordable housing. Public transportation is the great equalizer.

At KCATA we encourage people of color to join our ranks. Time and again we see people who begin as a bus operator and rise through the ranks to leadership positions at this agency, and even move on to larger agencies where they now lead. We are transforming KCATA into an employer of choice. We have assembled a

top-notch leadership team that is diverse, experienced, and committed to connecting our riders to opportunities.

The KCATA is a rare gem. We are a bi-state agency enacted by U.S. Congress with broad and diverse powers. I believe that those powers are tools that should be used to uplift our communities. In July, KCATA was named the top public transit agency in North America for midsize agencies. More than 600 dedicated people make the Authority run. To those frontline workers who have persevered through the challenges of the pandemic and still come to work every day to serve the public, I tip my hat. It is that foundation on which this agency’s momentum continues to build.

KCATA has been — and will remain — a leader on a national scale. We have initiated advancements that demonstrate our ability to connect people to opportunities beyond simply providing bus service. Whether it’s developing facilities that enable people to live and work closer to multi-modal transit; or it’s applying our expertise to the NFL Draft and World Cup. We are committed to ensuring that people and commerce flow seamlessly throughout the region.

**For more information about KCATA visit: [kcata.org](https://kcata.org).**





*Congratulations*

RideKC on winning  
Outstanding Public Transit System

NORTH AMERICA MIDSIZED AGENCIES



"In my six years at the KCATA, I've had the honor of working with some of the most dedicated and hardest working people in our industry," said Frank White III, CEO of the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority. "I am grateful to now be leading this organization and am excited for what the future holds for public transportation for our community."

**RideKC®** Kansas City Area  
Transportation Authority



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE

**MARK A. DUPREE, SR., DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
Wyandotte County, Kansas

## Leading with Conviction and Integrity—Inside and Out

**D**riving while Black, running while Black, playing while Black, just being Black can be a death sentence due to biases, prejudices and stereotypes. Our Justice system is flawed, and George Floyd (2020), Philando Castile (2016), Freddie Gray (2015), Tamir Rice (2014), sadly are clear examples of how those flaws affect the health of Black people—which is why this office has worked diligently to change that from the inside out.

We must work together if we want to change the system by changing the narrative. We must value education to obtain positions in which we are traditionally excluded. Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” We must put Black and Brown people in positions of authority to make substantive change.

In the Spring of 2017, I was sworn in as the first Black elected District Attorney in Kansas. My goal, from the beginning, has been to be a Minister of Justice. My office has changed tremendously from what I knew it to be growing up in the same community in which I now prosecute cases. Since my first term, we have recruited and hired attorneys and staff of color. This priority, among many, has turned my office into one of if not the most ethnically diverse prosecutor’s office in the state and region.

We have given the community a more transparent look into prosecution and reviewing prosecutorial decisions of the past. We created the first Conviction Integrity unit in the state, which reviews potential wrongful convictions. Those changes have led to two exonerations of individuals who served more than 30 years

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“The criminal justice system needs more of us to make it fair for all of us.”

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in prison collectively for crimes they did not commit. These are the type of changes that are necessary to make this system better. The only way to make this kind of change is to be in the room.

As the only Black D.A. in the state, I never imagined being here, but I have certainly made it my business to not be the last one here. The criminal justice system needs more of us to make it fair for all of us.



**ARDIE BLAND**  
Judge



## “Please Put Him in Jail.”

“Judge, I need your help with my son! Please put him in jail!” This is a cry that I heard all too often, from mothers in Kansas City, Missouri, where I served as a municipal judge for 14 years. Although I understood the law, I soon discovered that I would become an expert in the areas of economics, public policy, mental health and substance abuse. No great judge can truly dispense justice without a firm grasp of these concepts while presiding over cases for those involved in the criminal justice system. Dreams of simply dispensing justice could not be effectuated without considering these factors if I was going to be successful at serving the community.

Presiding over Mental Health Court and Veterans’ Treatment Court taught me things that most people never think about until their lives are impacted. In fact, incarceration studies report that approximately 80 percent of those incarcerated suffer from co-occurring disorders (mental health and substance abuse issues), which those crying mothers truly understood.

The problem is that unfortunately, many individuals in positions of power to make law and policy changes lack understanding of the issues to bring about the necessary change. I observed the city shed a 400-bed self-controlled facility that provided treatment, services and programming reduce capacity to a 125-bed jail system, that then exported inmates over an hour outside of the city

to provide little to no services, and often would turn away inmates with mental health or substance abuse problems. This lack of treatment and services left the mentally ill and substance abusers free on the streets to reoffend. All of this has left the courts powerless to address the concerns of victims in the cases of assault or property destruction.

The answer is that we understand and accept that mental health and substance use disorders have an impact on all lives regardless of race, color, religion or economic status. They are no

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“Approximately 80 percent of those incarcerated suffer from co-occurring disorders (mental health and substance abuse issues), which those crying mothers truly understood.”

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longer just the problem in “that neighborhood.” The community also needs to demand that its leaders develop and allocate funding to programs for mental health and substance treatment. I continue to have transcendent hope. I am confident the articles in this publication will increase consciousness and resolve in the minds of the readers to take action.

*Ardie Bland is a mental health court judge with Jackson County.*



# Q&A

## LARRY LESTER

Sports Researcher and Historian, Author

© Samuel Jordon, Jr., Royal Photography

# Legacies Matter

**L**arry Lester has so much to share. Read more online at [kcourhealthmatters.com](http://kcourhealthmatters.com).

### **Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Larry Lester:** I trust the healthcare system for the most part. But I find some doctors lack in some areas of communication, especially when they only spend a few minutes with us. Some people lack the skills to understand what doctors are trying to tell them. And sometimes they don't know what our level of understanding is regarding health conditions.

### **OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Larry Lester:** Growing up I was taught never to cry. I find that unacceptable today as I've gotten older. I think it's healthy to express grief. I have a better understanding today of mental health. When my father died of an aneurysm in 1998, I was 48 years old. I probably should have had grief counselling then. It took me a year and a half before I could get back to normal, to be an efficient employee, a better husband, a better father. I was really upset with God for taking my father from me too soon. Today, I would seek mental health therapy. I'd put my ego aside long enough to address why I feel so depressed when I wake up every morning. I've been married 46 years. The last two years my wife has been in a skilled care facility. That impacts me some days emotionally. It can be depressing, so it's

important that I maintain my mental health without the use of drugs or alcohol.

### **OHM: Do you feel a sense of connection to support or mentor younger males?**

**Larry Lester:** Yes, I'd like to mentor younger Black males. I welcome their questions and their concerns. I'm happy to share my experiences and help someone when they have challenges. When I was a kid, I had Black men from the neighborhood who shaped my thinking. They would stop me and ask how I was doing in school, tell me I needed to shine my shoes and held me accountable. These were my dad's friends. I was fortunate. I knew I better not get into any trouble because I never wanted to come back to Kansas City from college or anyplace else and have to explain why I messed up.

### **OHM: What have you learned about money and wealth development?**

**Larry Lester:** One thing for sure, money allows me and perhaps others to access better healthcare. Health is wealth. We can pay for what we need rather than put things off. I've met all of my financial goals. I don't really have any financial concerns. I've been advising my family about how to build wealth while they are young. Some listen, some do not. My home is paid for, my two cars are paid for and I have no debt whatsoever. I have a Living Will and a Durable Power of Attorney for healthcare and finances. So, I've got things situated in case something unexpected happens.



**ANDRAE SMITH**  
College Student



## I'm Not the Stereotype

**M**any of us talk to our teens regarding how they carry themselves and what they should say and do depending on settings in which they may be involved. Meet Andrae Smith, a 2022 graduate of Raytown High School. He attends Longview, Metropolitan Community College in Lee's Summit, MO. He is pursuing a career as an EMT/Paramedic. A few of his insightful responses follow.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Andrae Smith:** I think it's how well you understand yourself. For example, when you're going through a rough patch and have problems dealing with it. Mental health is really important, and a lot of people don't realize that. I know I can share my problems with my grandparents or teachers. It's really just talking to someone about things that may be making us feel sad or lost.

**OHM: If you knew someone who was off balance, how would you help them?**

**Andrae Smith:** I obviously would be asking them what's wrong and what's troubling them. I have a friend who's going through something like that right now, where he just feels like he doesn't know what he wants in life, and I was like, you know, you're not always going to know right away, sometimes you just got to keep moving and opportunities will present themselves. I'll also try to get him to talk to someone older, who can help.

**OHM: How do you protect your mental health and find inner peace?**

**Andrae Smith:** Whenever I feel like I'm doubting myself, a good way for me to balance it is to work out at the gym, which strengthens my mind at the same time. I also distance myself and find a quiet place, something I do a lot.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**Andrae Smith:** I think they don't view us particularly well; I think they see us as reckless and dangerous. There's just a really bad stereotype towards young Black men; we are viewed as being dangerous people to be around. I walk into a store and I notice I'm being instantly watched by everyone.

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to young men like yourself?**

**Andrae Smith:** Probably just proving everybody wrong. It's hard when some of us are being kind and respectful, and then you have a small percentage who are not trying to grow themselves, for some reason they think it's cool. They make it bad for most of us.

**Read more of Andrae's responses online at [www.kcourhealthmatters.com](http://www.kcourhealthmatters.com).**



## Q&A

### KENNETH YANCY, CEO

Essential Families and Third Wave Marketing

3rdwave-marketing.com

efamilies.org

## Creating More Opportunities to Thrive

**K**enneth Yancy's resilience and forthright approach to life is evident in all he does.

**Our Health Matters (OHM):** What are some preventative things you do to support optimum health?

**Kenneth Yancy:** I take my health serious. I get my annual physical and mental evaluations every year. And I share with my doctors everything that's going on with my health.

**OHM:** What is your understanding of mental health?

**Kenneth Yancy:** I know the mind controls the body, okay, not the body controlling the mind. I say that because I used to build computer networks. In the technology world there's two aspects—software and hardware. The brain is the software. The body is the hardware. I understand the challenges of mental health personally. Most Black men will never admit this. We have triggers—events that give us either anxiety or depression, so we hide these feelings and don't know how to respond to them. More Black men need to seek mental health support for issues that may be hurting them personally and professionally. I protect my mental health and find inner peace by getting rest, exercising and dancing. More importantly, I surround myself with good people.

**OHM:** Describe an experience that shaped your view of your community.

**Kenneth Yancy:** When I was going through a personal matter, the late pastor Charles Briscoe of

Paseo Baptist Church invited me to his home for Bible study. I was hesitant and nervous, but he was patient, encouraging and helpful. His support said a lot to me about my community support system.

**OHM:** Do you have a desire to support or mentor younger Black males?

**Kenneth Yancy:** Yes, I will be working with young men through our connection with Amazon. We will be offering developer training courses that prepares them to qualify for good-paying jobs, offers stability and a chance to advance in this field.

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“I want to help people realize their potential by creating opportunities for them to thrive.”

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**OHM:** What is your vision for the future?

**Kenneth Yancy:** I've been a software developer and telecommunications professional for over 38 years. I have weathered many ups and downs. I was a dot.com millionaire at age 35, and by the time I was 37, I had lost it all. I can say that I have been rich, and I have been poor. Looking ahead our goals are to grow our non-profit to provide digital equity across urban communities.

My vision for family is personal and professional growth. For my community, I want to help people realize their potential by creating opportunities for them to thrive, whether that is through training and workforce development, or increasing awareness around mental health.

**GEORGE RAMSEY, III, BA, MA**  
 Senior Program Manager  
 Micron Technology



## How Do You Handle a Challenge?

**G**eorge Ramsey recently joined a large global tech company, serving as the senior Program Manager for Veterans Outreach and Diversity Recruiting. There is not enough space to capture his journey and perspectives. Read more about Ramsey's experiences online at [kcourhealthmatters.com](https://kcourhealthmatters.com).

### ***Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?***

**George Ramsey:** Yes, I do. I spent 30 years in the Army. After retirement I used the Veterans Administration (VA) system. Recently, I moved away from the VA because my primary care physician changed too often. I want to see the same doctor, so I don't have to start my care at the beginning every time I go.

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“Go over it. Go through it.  
 Go around it. Whatever you do,  
 continue the journey, and make  
 something happen.”

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### ***OHM: What can the healthcare system do to better address your needs, questions or concerns?***

**George Ramsey:** They need to be consistent. I'm very loyal. I get my car serviced at the same shop and go to the same grocery stores. When it comes to my health, I want the same type of consistency.

### ***OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?***

**George Ramsey:** For me it's just having the balance you need to be productive; to lose the anxiety that exists that prevents me from accomplishing a lot of the things without feeling regret or experiencing feelings of anxiousness. It's refreshing to be able to have a therapist's perspective. If I didn't have someone I could talk to, it would be much harder. I think men have this false sense of masculine pride that keeps them from seeking help.

### ***OHM: How do you protect your mental health and find inner peace?***

**George Ramsey:** I enjoy traveling. I like mentoring youth and doing word games. One of the biggest things is knowing when the rucksack gets heavier than it needs to be and asking somebody for help.

### ***OHM: How do you think that society views Black men?***

**George Ramsey:** I think they're afraid of us. I have worked in corporate America, and it's often a challenge. We go to work different every day. Many of us don't feel that we can bring our true self to work. I've often been called arrogant, and I've wondered if I were white, would I then be viewed as ambitious as opposed to being perceived as arrogant? So, we tend to hold back and just do the things we need to do so you don't scare or intimidate folks. It also happens in the Black community. Some Black folks are intimidated by the confidence other Blacks bring to the workplace and community.





## Q&A

### DONALD SIMS

Licensed HVAC

United Auto Worker Ford Assembly Plant

## Right Now, I Just Want Peace and Balance

**D**onald is focused on being a good husband, father and grandfather.

#### **Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Donald Sims:** Yes, I trust the healthcare system, but I also know how to insist on quality care. I started prostate PSA tests and colonoscopy screenings at 45 years old because of my family health history. My dad had it. Mine was detected early. I am fine now.

#### **OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Donald Sims:** Some people grow up with things they never resolved that could be causing difficulty in their relationships. They probably should talk to someone in mental health to help them get through it. If I was experiencing a life-altering event, I'm sure I would want to talk to someone so I could direct my feelings in the right way.

#### **OHM: How do you protect your mental health or find inner peace?**

**Donald Sims:** I like to ride my motorcycle and just feel the wind and vibration of the road—just being free. When I get back home, I'm a lot calmer. In the past I would have done negative things and made things worse. My motorcycle removes the bad vibes.

#### **OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**Donald Sims:** The biggest challenge to Black men is building wealth. The other is violence and drugs. Black men fall for these traps and end up economically and socially oppressed.

#### **OHM: What have you learned about money and wealth development?**

**Donald Sims:** I've learned credit ratings are important and need to be as high as possible and stay that way. Don't spend every penny, put a little away and invest in something. I'm focusing on retirement, paying off my mortgage and building on land I inherited. I'll get with a financial planner to figure these things out.

#### **OHM: Have you experienced barriers to your career?**

**Donald Sims:** I was my own barrier. I started a family early and had responsibilities so I acquired my GED in order to go to trade school to get an Associate's Degree in HVAC.

#### **OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family, and your community?**

**Donald Sims:** I've had a lot of nonsense in my life, but right now I just want peace. For my community I want people to slow down and respect one another and do positive things. I love spending every moment with my family. Whenever I have time to be with them, I take it. We cannot get time back; once it's gone, it's gone.

**WALTER RAMSEY**  
Ford United Auto Worker



## My HEALTH Matters, My FAMILY Matters

**W**alter opens up about his perspectives on healthcare, family and community.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Walter Ramsey:** Yes, but it depends on the doctor. I used to have a doctor that I felt wasn't very thorough during my visit. He wasn't asking any questions or inquiring about things. So, I changed my doctor. I found a doctor who listens, asks questions and shows interest.

**OHM: What is your understanding of mental health and how do you feel about seeking counseling or therapy?**

**Walter Ramsey:** If I have an issue and I can overcome it I'm not going to go into a depressed state of mind. I'll do something to take my mind off it, recreationally or other things. To be honest I probably would have to be convinced by someone to go rather than going on my own. I don't put my emotions out there. I wouldn't want anyone to know. It's not that I don't trust family or a friend to listen, I know they care. It's me just being a man. I think I'll know when it's the right situation and time.

**OHM: : What do you think are the biggest challenges for Black men today?**

**Walter Ramsey:** Some brothers don't understand

they can have what they want if they go after it the right way. They need to look beyond the victim mindset. And, Black youth need exposure to groups of people and families who are doing positive things.

**OHM: What have you learned about money and wealth development?**

**Walter Ramsey:** When I was younger, I had credit preached to me. I heard, "you need to have good credit, you need to keep good credit," but no one ever taught me how to get credit and maintain it. After working in banking for more than six years, I learned "good credit" takes you from one world to a better world. I bought a home last year and I've invested in a business, so I've learned a lot.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**Walter Ramsey:** I want to have good physical and mental health. I want my community to prosper. I want my overall family to be closer and not just the ones I see all the time. I want to get back to everybody visiting each other, like our grandmas, aunties and uncles used to do. We came together and not just at funerals. Nowadays, everyone's kind of in their own world. I look forward to reconnecting with family.

Photo Credit: Ruth Ramsey, Ramsey & Associates Design



## Do What You Love and Be the Best You Can Be

**OLLIE GATES, OWNER**  
Gates Bar-B-Q, Kansas City, MO

Ollie Gates is the owner of five Gates Bar-B-Q Restaurants, which are some of Kansas City's most popular barbeque venues. Mr. Gates has witnessed the rise and fall of the prosperity of the Black community. At 90 years young, Mr. Gates is optimistic about the potential of Black men "that is in plain sight," as he dispenses nuggets of "common sense" to anyone who will listen.

### **OHM: What are your thoughts about the Black community today?**

**Ollie Gates:** For our community to thrive, we need money coming from many sources, not to mention that our money needs to turn over more than once in our community for people to thrive. We need to spend more of our money in our community. Back in the 50's and 60's we had to buy and sell goods and services from Black folks mostly because we were segregated and not welcomed in other parts of the city. We went to Black doctors and we were restricted in where we could live and work for the most part. We need to be intentional about buying the goods and services of Black businesses; we haven't done enough of that yet. There has got to be one thing that binds us together and that's the fact that we are descendants of slaves. I think something good should come from that—resilience and success despite how we got here.

### **OHM: What would you advise young people to focus on for their future?**

**Ollie Gates:** Do what you like to do. Try to make a living out of what you like to do. If you don't like what you're doing, you're not going to be good at it nor will you succeed economically.

### **OHM: What can Black men do to ensure a better future for their families?**

**Ollie Gates:** I say reverse the culture. I know what was good for us back in the day. Ain't nothing new about that. One thing we need to do is build more respect. However you do it, build more respect. Live the kind of life that's accepted by everybody, anybody, anywhere, any time. That's about it. I'm not



saying you have to be perfect. What I'm saying is do the best you can to better yourself under conditions that you're in. That's all.

**OHM: What should parents focus on for their children's future?**

**Ollie Gates:** There are many variations to that. Parents should expose their children to as many occupations, professions, and experiences as possible. When I was coming up in the '50s you could be a doctor, a lawyer, a preacher or teacher. That was about the size of it in Kansas City. Then we had a great brain drain during the '50s and some Black folks left because there were not enough opportunities in Kansas City to increase their wealth or their intellect. Today, there are many things young people can do to build wealth and contribute to the success of our community. They just need to use their abilities and take them to the max.

**OHM: Do you have a business motto or words to live by?**

**Ollie Gates:** Yeah, don't serve anything that you wouldn't eat or pay the price for, that's my motto. And, my words to live by comes from what God says in the Ten Commandments. That's the basics, you know? That's all you need. Pay attention to these in life and you'll get along.

**OHM: What would you like *Our Health Matters* to do to make a difference in Kansas City?**

**Ollie Gates:** Thank you for what you have already done in 17 years of educating not just Black people, but all people about taking control of their health. You know, I think one of the things that *Our Health Matters* could do is help everybody appreciate each other more as a human race. Stop running from each other, see the good in everybody, make something good happen by merging all our good ideas into one.



*"Hi, May I Help You?"*

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# Q&A

## REV. STEVEN D. GRAVES

Youth Pastor

Evangelistic Center International Ministries

Kansas City, Kansas

Captain, Kansas City, Missouri Fire Department

## I Found My Purpose

### **Our Health Matter (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Steven Graves:** I trust the healthcare system because as a firefighter I get to see how it works on the patient's side and on the hospital side. There is room for improvement like anything else. I think we need more Black doctors because representation is very important. I personally sought out a Black primary care physician because I knew he would understand me. One thing the healthcare system can do is give us more doctors that look like us. And then the other part is they need to listen to us.

### **OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Steven Graves:** My understanding of mental health is it's the totality of what's going on in your life that affects you emotionally, physically and spiritually. It involves how it's impacting your daily life. When my grandmother and my aunt passed, life got heavy for me. I was off balance and had to do something. I started seeing a grief counselor and it helped a lot. Seeing a therapist erases the stigma. I made a video of my thoughts on how I felt about getting mental health support. God and therapy saved my life. Many people let me know they have been helped. They were on the fence,

but after seeing the video, they felt it was okay to seek therapy.

### **OHM: Do you have a connection to older Black men who are mentors?**

**Steven Graves:** Yes, one is Pastor Jarvis Collier of Kansas City, KS, who was my pastor when I was a teenager. He poured a lot into me. He's big on education and appearance. But what really did it for me was my first year in college at Lincoln University where I met Mr. Walter Pearson. That dude took me under his wing and just loved me and has supported me even up to now. He's an awesome guy. He taught me a lot about life and success and never judged me when I dropped out of college. He didn't scold me or anything; he just asked me what I was going to do. I didn't quit, and most of all with God's grace, I turned out to be a successful man.

### **OHM: How did you come into the firefighter profession?**

**Steven Graves:** One day I was making a delivery to City Hall in downtown Kansas City and a lady asked if I was there to take the firefighter exam. She said, they're taking applications and you look like you'd make a great firefighter. I applied, and out of some 2,000 applicants I was number ten, and here I am 15 years later. This was God's plan.

**WALTER PEARSON**  
Retired Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Administration, State of Missouri



## Black Men Matter— Perception is Everything

**W**alter Pearson has been a mentor for many years to young men in whom he saw promise. Mr. P, as he is affectionately called, shares some life experiences that have shaped his views.

### **Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Walter Pearson:** I would say yes and no. I learned about the healthcare system in 1963 at the age of 16 years old when my dad died at the age of 42. Something happened that caused his tongue to swell. A local white doctor was called, who examined him and left. He didn't rush him to the hospital. My dad choked and died in front of me. In 1963, doctors made house calls. Black people only went to the hospital for a life-threatening emergency or surgery. To this day I believe the doctor rendered poor care by not sending him to the hospital. Clearly my dad was in a life-threatening situation. A lot has changed over the years. Today, we have more choices in doctors but not many who are Black. I often wonder if the outcome would have been different if my dad had been attended to by a Black doctor. Today in my mid-70s I have found doctors I like and trust to manage my care. I pay close attention to what they prescribe and recommend for my treatment.

### **OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Walter Pearson:** Mental health is very complex, because it encompasses behavior, how we treat people, how we treat ourselves. I think a lot of times before people knew the term mental health, they used to say people were crazy. But over time, probably in the last ten years, mental health has received more attention particularly in our community. Black men have a lot to contend with such as discriminatory practices, career and business challenges, their health, financial instability, family relationships and more. We need to learn more about the signs of mental illness so we can understand how to get the help we need.

### **OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**Walter Pearson:** I think society views Black men as unequal and in the professional world, as a threat. I knew when I applied for a job, I had to compete beyond the normal requirements. However, once I got the job, there were people who thought I shouldn't have gotten it for whatever reason. I think overall it's because of the inherent superiority some people perceive they have. It just boggles my mind, why people treat you differently because of the color of our skin.



**MARVIN LYMAN**  
**HDFP/CCIM-CANDIDATE****Principal, Equitable Development Partners, LLC**

## Create a Pathway for Black Healthcare Professionals

**M**arvin Lyman knows first-hand the importance of his representation on corporate boards and his duty to ensure that policies are fair and equitable.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**M. Lyman:** You know, the answer is not simply yes or no, because there are some institutions which understand the healthcare needs of Black people and Black men in particular. There are others that don't necessarily understand or give equitable service. So, for me, when I think about specific doctors, specific institutions, those are the folks that I actually trust, not necessarily the system itself.

**OHM: Are you familiar with chronic conditions that impact Black men and what preventative steps are you taking?**

**M. Lyman:** I know stress, hypertension and diabetes are extremely prevalent among Black men in terms of leading to chronic health problems. And because of my family health history, I'm keenly aware of my diet. I pay attention to what I eat, and I try to eat less meat. I try to consume more green vegetables than what may exist in a person's ordinary diet. I try to drink plenty of water to make sure I stay hydrated. And I make sure that I spend time outside in the sun to absorb natural Vitamin D.

**OHM: How can the healthcare system better serve the needs of Black men?**

**M. Lyman:** I think it starts with the recognition that

the healthcare system, the whole process, is inept when it comes to Black people in general. There's a distrust among the Black community when it comes to doctors and medicine because of the way that we have been treated in this country. Secondly, we must have Black professionals at every level of healthcare. From the CEO to the director of nursing, the director of operations, the chief medical doctor, throughout the whole operation there must be a representation that is conscious of the health differences of Black people. Next, create a pathway to include Black doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, clinicians, and Black healthcare professionals in general. Lastly, open neighborhood clinics to increase access to care and reduce health and quality of life risks.

**OHM: What experiences have shaped your view of your community?**

**M. Lyman:** My parents owned a restaurant in Kansas City. Papa Lew's opened in 1982 in the historic 18th and Vine Jazz District. They made money, but they weren't rich by any means. Many meals were provided on credit. I learned about business and the community from my parents. I didn't just learn things in a Eurocentric construct, but I learned from an Afrocentric construct even though my father only had an eighth-grade education, my mother an eleventh grade education. But I learned those Afrocentric concepts growing up that said people are more valuable than profit, that humanity is more important than money.

Cornell Gorman, COO/Co-Founder (left)  
and Brandon Calloway, CEO/Co-Founder (right)



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## Q&A

**DEAVEON WILLIAMS**  
High School Student

# Now, I Pay Attention to What's Happening

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Are there areas of your health you are working on?**

**D. Williams:** Yeah, I was chubby as a kid and as I got older, I wanted to work on that. So far, I have lost 50 pounds. And I'm still on track to losing more.

**OHM: Have you had any healthcare screenings and what has been your experience with doctors?**

**D. Williams:** I don't know if it counts as one, but I do see a doctor for my severe eczema. They were very caring about what I had to say about my body. So I would say that they really did care about getting

“I think racism can be a thing of the past, like dinosaurs.”

my eczema under control so it's not so itchy. I have been screened for other health conditions as well. I have a Black doctor and he helps a lot. I think for now, they're doing an excellent job on helping out Black teens like me.

**OHM: What is your understanding about mental health?**

**D. Williams:** I would have to say mental health is about what is going on with your mind, your body and your soul. Stuff like that. Mainly it's a way to judge if you

are feeling up or down. If I wasn't feeling my best, I would reach out to my mom or to some friends. They help me a lot through some rough patches.

**OHM: What are the biggest challenges you think Black youth face today?**

**D. Williams:** George Floyd's murder opened my eyes to reality. Before he was killed, I really wasn't paying attention to the real world. But as soon as he was killed, it really opened my eyes to things that can happen to me just because I'm Black. I'd say one of the biggest challenges Black kids face is racism. I think racism can be defeated at some point. If we could just talk to people to figure it out together. I think some people are raised to hate certain cultures and certain races. I don't know if they can be changed. I feel like if we actually try hard enough, we can probably get rid of racism. I know some people just don't care, and they will be racist until they die. Because I guess they were born that way. I've known some people that were racist, and they were able to change. I think racism can be a thing of the past, like dinosaurs.

**OHM: What do you think you want to do when you grow up?**

**D. Williams:** I plan on going to college to study in the technology field. I really like to mess with computers and tech stuff. I think I will go to college to learn how to do coding for robots.



**KEITH BROWN**  
 Director of Parent and Community Involvement  
 Genesis School



# I Stand on the Shoulders of Strong Black Men

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Keith Brown:** It's a mixed bag because in some areas they are there to take care of us when we are sick, but — just my opinion — it looks like they are in the business of sick care and not as much in preventative and healing care. The strong relationship between medical providers and the pharmaceutical industry drives profits. Some people have to choose between paying for food, rent or health-sustaining medicine. We need to advocate for natural medicine alternatives from other countries that are successful in this space.

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“My mentors were easy to talk to and full of insights on how to survive as a Black man.”

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**OHM: What is your understanding about mental health and counseling?**

**Keith Brown:** Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act, including how we handle stress and relate to others. If I needed it, I would seek help. I know there are some excellent Black therapists and counselors out there.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**Keith Brown:** I think Black men are viewed as a nemesis or long-standing rival, an archenemy. No matter how successful we are, it's not enough to change their views. Black people are doing great

things. We need to celebrate our own achievements. Mainstream media doesn't get it. All Black men are not committing Black on Black crime. However, some in society want to debate us on this every time we say their system is designed to limit or slow our progress.

**OHM: Do you feel a sense of connection or desire to support younger Black men?**

**Keith Brown:** Absolutely, and here's the reason why. I stand on the shoulders of strong Black men. Starting with my dad. His name is Ralph Brown and he's the owner of Sportsman's Barber Shop on Swope Parkway. He's a retired fire captain and he is 85 years young. He suffered a stroke three years ago, but his mind is good. There was also Fred Curls, one of the five original founders of Freedom Incorporated, and Attorney Basil North, retired attorney. These men were easy to talk to and full of insights on how to survive as a Black man. I have an obligation to make sure that I support young Black men.

**OHM: What have you learned about money and wealth development?**

**Keith Brown:** I've learned that we have to start educating our young guys early to get an understanding about creating wealth.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**Keith Brown:** I want to live a healthy life and I want my family to be safe. My vision for this community is that we will become financially and economically healthy.



# Q&A

## GARY MALTBIA

Certified Substance Abuse Counselor

Certified EAP (Employee Assistance Professional)

# Our Biggest Challenge is Trusting Each Other

### ***Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?***

**G. Maltbia:** I do trust the healthcare system. Now, growing up as a young man, I did not trust it because there was a lot of distrust that came from my parents as we were sitting around the table and listening to them discuss their distrust of doctors. Today, my trust is more evident since I have personally been involved with the healthcare system. And one of the biggest things is I have a primary care physician I trust.

### ***OHM: What can the healthcare system do to better address the needs of Black men?***

**G. Maltbia:** I believe there needs to be more health education, primarily directed to Black men. We don't see enough messages and services directed toward Black men. It's non-existent as far as healthcare systems are concerned. A big plus would be to receive more health education from Black doctors and organizations that have the resources to promote healthcare to Black families. I'm grateful for the work ***Our Health Matters*** has been doing for more than 17 years to increase health literacy and now with this amazing spotlight on Black men's health. And it doesn't cost us anything other than our time.

### ***OHM: How do you think society views Black men?***

**G. Maltbia:** I still feel that our society views Black men as a threat. In just about every situation that I see, we are looked at as a threat until they get to know us as individuals.

### ***OHM: What do you think are Black men's biggest challenge?***

**G. Maltbia:** I feel our biggest challenge is trusting each other. Another part is mentoring. We need more of that between Black men. From my counseling perspective, our relationships as far as Black men are man to man. Once trust is broken between Black men and there is disrespect it turns into a Willie Lynch Syndrome, which is understood by Black people. Men need to get past misunderstandings and keep hope alive.

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*"We teach young Black men to never let someone else's opinion of them become their reality."*

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### ***OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?***

**G. Maltbia:** My vision is to continue, in partnership with my wife, to give back through counseling and volunteerism.

I hope that our five children, who have all been volunteers in their various communities, will continue to do that work.

And I am most hopeful that more and more people in our community will step forward to mentor young Black youth, teaching them to never let someone's negative opinion of them become their reality.



**Jasper Fullard, Jr., M.D.**

## Men, Your Health Matters

**B**lack men are dying at a rate that is two to three times greater than that of their white counterparts. Although there are many causes of increased death in Black males, some of them are avoidable, if we could get more Black men to get annual examinations.

### ONE LEADING CAUSE

It's well known that prostate cancer is detected much earlier in young Black males than in white males. It is recommended that Black men start getting prostate exams as early as age 30 or 35, as opposed to age 50 for white men.

### EARLY DETECTION MATTERS

I encourage Black men to get an annual rectal examination and blood test to monitor the status of their prostate. Having a family history of prostate cancer can increase your risk greatly. Also, low Vitamin D levels increase your risk of

prostate cancer. African Americans with darker skin pigmentation are at greater risk for Vitamin D deficiency or insufficiency because the higher presence of melanin reduces the body's natural ability to produce Vitamin D. These are things that can be detected and treated early, during an annual medical examination.

### SCHEDULE ANNUAL PHYSICALS ON YOUR BIRTH DATE

A good idea is to set the date for your annual physicals on your birthday. This will always remind you of your annual appointment with your doctor. Another point to remember is that if you have a health concern and believe additional screening should be administered, demand or insist that your doctor request them. It could save your life.

### MEN, TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH. YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT.

*Dr. Jasper Fullard retired in 2017 from private practice in Internal Medicine. Academic achievements include:*

*Masters, Tuskegee Institute; Professor, Stillman College as Head of the Math and Science Department; Started first pre-med program; Taught Embryology, Zoology, Histology, and Anatomy and Physiology; University of Wisconsin-Madison, PhD in Anatomy and Physiology; School of Medicine University of Wisconsin, MD; Residency at the*

*University of Kansas Medical Center, KCKS.*

*Dr. Fullard has received many honors and awards recognizing his advocacy for improving the health of African American families. One of his proudest accomplishments is co-founder and President of the Black Health Care Coalition, from 1987 through 2006. In 2022, Dr. Fullard released his first book, "The Impossible Dream," an autobiography about why he became a doctor. The book can be found on Amazon and at Barnes and Noble.*





**REV. DONALD GIVENS, PASTOR**  
Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church

## Strong, Resilient and Determined

**R**ev. Donald Givens has learned a lot about himself and the community since coming to Kansas City in 1996.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Donald Givens:** Yes, I do trust the healthcare system. It is my belief that the majority of doctors and healthcare workers are doing their best to understand and care for our individual healthcare needs. I really like my doctor and go to office visits prepared with a list of questions concerning my health. I like that my doctor informs me about things to watch for as I age. One concern I have is he sometimes wants to rush my visit so he can move on to the next patient. I stop him and say, I have a few more questions before you leave.

**OHM: What chronic health conditions do you know about that impact Black men?**

**Donald Givens:** I know about heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, prostate cancer, colon cancer and diabetes. Sadly, Black men rank the highest in prevalence of these chronic diseases. Some are related to family health history over which we have no control. However, making unhealthy choices also plays a role.

**OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Donald Givens:** Mental health has to do with how we think, how we process information, how we react in

certain situations. It measures our emotional wellbeing. I would seek mental healthcare if my behavior demonstrated that I needed professional counseling.

**OHM: Have you ever experienced racism?**

**Donald Givens:** I worked with a national retailer as a loss prevention specialist at an executive level position for nearly 20 years. I remember being passed over for promotions and special assignments when I knew I was more qualified than others, and my performance demonstrated my capabilities and success. I had to work much harder and had a

“I remember being passed over for promotions and special assignments when I knew I was more qualified than others and my performance demonstrated my capabilities and success.”

higher degree of success but still was not rewarded with the same benefits as my white counterparts. I felt it was unfair, but I did not dwell on it. I felt it was more important to focus on my goals.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**Donald Givens:** Black men and woman have made and continue to make great contributions to society. Yet some in society view Black men as unintelligent, lazy and troublesome. I don't hold any animosity towards people that have these beliefs and views, but I know they exist.

**JORGE FULLER**  
Fuller for the People LLC  
Recruiter, Kansas City Public Schools



## The Right Fit

I grew up in a household of women. So when I was 13 and in a summer program and found myself in the company of Mr. Morgan Fight, a Black man who was in charge of the program, I really looked up to him. He recognized I was the only Black male in the program, so one day he said to me, “Hey guy, we can do this.” We walked around together and had lots of conversations. It was so enjoyable to me as a young boy and something I’ll always remember.

### **Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**J. Fuller:** I’d say yes and no. The yes is because you have to, you really don’t have an option to not trust the healthcare system. It’s kind of like you’re limited if you don’t know what you’re getting into. And so, the no is because there’s a lot of unsurety

“We will be able to achieve what we want to achieve because we have the “right fit” work ethic and resources.”

and unawareness when it comes to working and understanding the healthcare system and its jargon, the way they explain things. My uncle is a doctor, and I have several cousins who are nurses. They are able to help break down and explain some of the things in layman’s term when it comes to dealing with medicine and healthcare in general.

### **OHM: Would you be willing to seek mental health services?**

**J. Fuller:** I am currently seeking mental health services. What I found is that it’s harder to find, because I want someone who is a Black male. Then there’s the financial barrier to getting access to mental health. I’m learning a lot of them [counselors] don’t accept medical plans. I work in human resources, so I know we offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). But the reality is, like if I don’t know you and I don’t trust you, I’m not going to share everything or be as vulnerable and open as I would like to be. It’s not as stigmatized as it was before. Growing up you could pray it away, play gospel music, go to church on Sunday and Wednesday. I’m aware that mental health issues have been identified in my family, so I make sure I understand it and address any issues that may arise.

### **OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**J. Fuller:** My vision for myself, family and community—we will have ownership of every activity that we want to do and accomplish, regardless of the constraints. We will be able to achieve what we want to achieve because we have the “right fit” work ethic and resources. If we don’t have the resources, we’ll create the resources for others. Then for my community, encouraging more farming, encouraging more civic opportunities, connections, and relationships. We can work together to make this happen.



## Q&A

**ERIC L. WESSON, SR.**  
Publisher, The Kansas City Call

# All We Have to Do is Work Together

**Our Health Matters (OHM):** Do you trust the healthcare system?

**Eric Wesson:** I fully trust the healthcare system in general. I'm concerned about how their payment systems may not allow someone who lacks financial resources to receive the best care. Those who have the most money get the best care. Several years ago, I was in a car accident and was in the emergency room. While they were running tests they asked if I had medical insurance. They told me that I would have to stay in the hospital for a few days for observation. After I told them I was a veteran, I was suddenly able to be discharged about 20 minutes later.

**OHM:** What is your understanding of mental health?

**Eric Wesson:** Mental health is something we don't want to talk about because we don't want to address the reality that we may have issues. If someone has a mental health issue, it's not okay to have it and do nothing about it.

**OHM:** What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?

**Eric Wesson:** I think it's understanding how to project our positive attributes. Someone is always watching. We must mentor Black boys to take pride in themselves and teach them how to overcome challenges they will face in this society.

**OHM:** What have you learned about money and wealth development?

**Eric Wesson:** I've learned you need to tell your money what you want it to do. I own a home, so I want to make sure it passes to my kids. I have investments in place for my children's college education. Grandparents used to leave their home to their grandchildren, who would leave it to the next generation. Today, reverse mortgages and failure to pay property taxes are preventing property from being passed on to families.

**OHM:** What do you need in order to accomplish your financial goals?

**Eric Wesson:** I always tell people to get a financial planner. I consult with people who have the expertise and say, "this is my goal, this is what I want to do, this is how much money I make." A lot of people think it costs too much to hire a financial planner. It really, really doesn't. The earlier you understand your money and the power it has, the more successful you will be.

**OHM:** What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?

**Eric Wesson:** I want to be a good example for those that are coming behind me. I want to be a good leader, and I want to bring people together to not just accept the status quo. All we have to do is work together.



**JAMES (JIM) NUNNELLY**  
Retired Healthcare Executive



## Family, the Key to Better Health. Period.

**M**r. Nunnally has a lot to say about health and the family connection.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Jim Nunnally:** I trust the healthcare system mainly because—not trusting it, you’ll be in worse shape without it. I’ve had an African American-African doctor for the last 25 years, and everything he’s instructed, especially as I’ve aged, has been right on point. I trust him unequivocally. Families must be intentional with each other to point out and address men’s health issues and encourage them to see a doctor right away. Another fact is men enter the healthcare system late which sometimes makes it difficult to reverse a condition.

**OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Jim Nunnally:** Well, I think mental health is kind of a state where one feels pretty much depressed, unbalanced and disconnected to some degree. In a country like America where everything is achievement, it’s easy to feel inadequate and left behind. Family members should be the first line of defense to help a loved one connect to professional mental health services.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**Jim Nunnally:** First, what is a Black man’s view? Let’s start there and begin pointing out things that are positive about Black men. Society isn’t going

to push Black men forward. Mothers of Black boys have often told me they understand the persecution society places on their child. Families should still be supportive when someone fails, but just as important, celebrate their positives.

**OHM: What do you want people to understand about health and the family connection?**

**Jim Nunnally:** We have to redirect our thinking when it comes to family because it goes beyond one’s individual residence—father, mother and children. For example, it was my sister and mainly my brother,

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“Family is the key to good physical health, good mental health and good financial health—always has been and always will be for me!”

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who left school at 15 to put me through preschool. Preschool at that time was something like \$5 a week, but he paid that for me. Now, who do you think I give credit to for my education? The family bond starts early! To this day I am actively involved in the education of every one of my siblings’ children. I was the first one to graduate from college. Today, out of my 22 nieces and nephews, 20 of them have gone beyond high school and achieved accreditations or college graduation. In closing, just remember, “family is the key to good physical health, good mental health and good financial health—always has been and always will be for me!”



# Q&A

## EBRIMA ABRAHAM SISAY

Chairman & President

Alkamba Film and Documentary Production

# How Is Your Spirit?

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**E. Sisay:** I've never really had a good relationship with the healthcare system, especially coming from Africa. When I came to the US, I had a really high expectation. We're in a very civilized world, and healthcare is not even free. Back in Gambia, we had free healthcare. I think there's just a lack of representation for minority people or underserved people. The healthcare system just needs to find those organizations that want to work with this population, and then speed up the process to make sure they receive resources to help.

**OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**E. Sisay:** I had an opportunity to see a psychologist about eight years ago. The whole healing process probably took me two years. Now the way I see it, that kind of helped me to have the resources and tools to deal with day-to-day problems. Currently, I'm seeing a therapist who's a Black woman, and when she asks me how I am, she'll always say, how's your spirit? The moment I went to this Black psychologist, it felt like home. I was able to trust more and be more open.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**E. Sisay:** I live in Mission, Kansas now, and whenever I go out for a walk, I'm always terrified because people have literally called the cops on me. One time, I was walking and a cop pulled up, and asked

me, what am I doing? I had on a Nike shirt, shorts, running shoes — I'm working out. He said someone called because they noticed something suspicious and gave your description. He ended up walking with me and we had a conversation. Now whenever he's driving by, he always stops by and knocks on my door (which sometimes I think may scare my neighbors, He and I have become fast friends). So, what does this tell us? I am a Black man and people are afraid of me while just walking?

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“The moment I went to this Black psychologist, it felt like home. I was able to trust more and be more open.”

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**OHM: Describe an experience that shaped your view of the community.**

**E. Sisay:** Kansas City reminds me of Gambia a lot. I mean, there is a village called Kudang, which basically means community. My grandpa has this big house in Gambia, it's a compound, and we have so many uncles that I'm not related to, but they're just people that were passing by. So, you know, that's something that I grew up seeing, and I just love that aspect of community in Kansas City as well.

*Ebrima Sisay is a native of Gambia, Africa. He is the founder of the Freedom Project ([www.forum.com](http://www.forum.com)).*



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# Q&A

**MARQUISE SHELTON**  
High School Student

## I Want a Better Future

**M**arquise is young, energetic and passionate about creating a better future.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Marquise:** I know mental health can affect your mind. One example of a mental health condition is depression. It's like you're going through something, and you let it overwhelm you too much. It may also make you want to do bad things, or it could make someone consider committing suicide. I would rather ask for help for it because if you ask for help you may be able to overcome the problem and not let it bring you down.

**OHM: How do you protect your mental health or find inner peace?**

**Marquise:** I protect my mental health by finding something that I like to do that can take my mind off of a problem. I will take maybe 30 minutes to do some self-reflecting and thinking about what I need to do to feel better.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men and boys?**

**Marquise:** I think society doesn't see the best in us. It's like we are not important just because we're Black. Our color doesn't have anything to do with what we can accomplish in our life.

**OHM: Are you open to being mentored by older Black men?**

**Marquise:** Yes. Because if I have a lot of different mentors who are very well educated, I can get different advice from each person. This way I can always learn something new from each one.

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“Our color doesn't have anything to do with what we can accomplish in our life.”

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**OHM: What have you been taught about money and wealth development?**

**Marquise:** If you ever become rich, don't allow it to take over your mind. Don't place all your trust in money.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**Marquise:** I'd like to go to college and play professional football one day, if everything goes well. I would also like to be an entrepreneur and own a lawn service business. For my family, I want to see them become better and help other people. I want to see my community come together and support one another instead of knocking each other down. I can start it off and get a group of people that can help me build up the community and change the way we act towards each other. I want a better future for myself, my family and the community.

**LEWIS WALKER**  
 Retired Telecommunications  
 President, Black Family Technology  
 Awareness Association, BFTAA.org



## Clearing the Path for Others to Succeed

**L**ewis Walker personifies what it means to “make a difference.” If it was up to him and his organization, every kid in the urban community would be creating robots and all sorts of Artificial Intelligence.

### **Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Lewis Walker:** I definitely trust in the healthcare system. I haven’t had any experiences where I felt like any particular health system neglected me or was insensitive to my needs.

### **OHM: What do you know about chronic health conditions that affect Black men?**

**Lewis Walker:** Some conditions I know about are pancreatic and colorectal cancer. My family has a health history of colon cancer. My father died from it. My brother and I get checked regularly. Black men need to know that early detection can head off some chronic conditions—possibly prevent some from getting worse.

### **OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Lewis Walker:** Mental health to me is how you think about yourself and how you process things. Are you seeing things in a logical way? I’ve heard a lot about depression, which is something that can throw off your mental balance. Our mental health is something we shouldn’t neglect or be afraid to seek help for. There are programs and therapists that can help.

### **OHM: Were there any barriers in your career?**

**Lewis Walker:** My career started at Southwestern Bell Telephone at the lowest craftsman level position. Black men and women who had worked at Southwestern Bell Telephone (now AT&T) in earlier years were usually hired as janitors and maids. It was a big deal when they saw young Black guys getting hired for positions that they had been prevented from pursuing. After the Civil Rights laws passed, AT&T started actively recruiting more Black people right out of high school around 1969. I was constantly being told I needed a college degree to apply for higher level jobs. There were people who got promoted without a degree, but they had to be recommended for the job. The Black managers formed an employee resource group to advocate for us to advance in our careers.

### **OHM: What have you learned about money and wealth development?**

**Lewis Walker:** I’ve learned that we need to invest some of our money. I was always told to save my money, but nobody early in my life was showing me how to invest. When I started at Southwestern Bell Telephone, there was a guy talking about how he was putting his money into a mutual fund. It dawned on me later that he was investing for his future. I’m clearing the path and educating my kids and grandkids early about 401k accounts, mutual funds and other financial products.



# Q&A

**JOHN DUNN**  
Delivery Driver

## Respect Goes Two Ways

**J**ohn Dunn is eager to get on with his life. He's kind-hearted and focused on what matters—himself, his family and his community.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): What can the healthcare system do better to address your needs?**

**J. Dunn:** My recommendation is that healthcare systems focus in a big way on mental health interventions. I think instead of having liquor stores on every corner there needs to be something like a “drop-in” therapy clinic for a person like

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“I’ve always had the utmost respect for older Black people, but I just feel like some of them, need to show a little more respect for us.”

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me and others that just need somebody to talk to and just get things off our chest. I know this sounds unconventional, but I think we need some alternatives that bypass the red tape.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**J. Dunn:** I think they view us as garbage, a menace to society. I think they’re intimidated and view us as a threat. I’m hearing about more people experiencing racism and prejudice than I ever have. I saw on the news a city official on the Los Angeles City Council called somebody a black monkey. So, yeah, it’s real out here.

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**J. Dunn:** The biggest challenge to Black men is trying to prove to society who we are, our worth and that we are created by God the same as they are. That most of us are not what they see on rap videos. Also, the challenge is trying to become successful when people don’t want us to win, especially after you put in hard work. Instead of building each other up and making investments in each other, some want to harm us. Black men killing Black men. Mainstream society could do more with better gun laws and policies that protect innocent people.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**J. Dunn:** I see our neighborhoods becoming more diverse. White people are moving back to urban neighborhoods and are learning they can be comfortable living in communities that are ethnically diverse. They discover we are not any different than they are. That’s a good thing. I want things to get better for me financially so I can be in control of my life in the years ahead. I would also like to say there needs to be more love and understanding between everybody. I’ve always had the utmost respect for older Black people, but I just feel like some of them need to show a little bit more respect for us.



## TERRENCE RAMSEY

General Manager, Peachtree Restaurant



# I Envision Us Being More

**Our Health Matters (OHM): How do you think society views Black men?**

**Terrence Ramsey:** I feel many but not all Black men are seen as a problem and grouped into the same category of being a menace. It's not surprising, since these images are constantly played out on the local and national news and on TV shows.

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**Terrence Ramsey:** As individuals we are constantly trying to dispel stereotypes to prove we're not like

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“Don't count us out!”

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those who are destroying themselves and harming others. We need many more stories about “us” doing something good. It's up to us to make a difference by promoting all the good things about our community. **Our Health Matters Black Men Speak** is a great place to start.

**OHM: Describe an experience that shaped your view of our community.**

**Terrence Ramsey:** What has shaped the way I see my community is how much diversity there is. Growing up I was able to travel a little to see other communities and to see how our community compares to theirs. Coming from a home with both parents who loved to travel, I got a sense of what

the United States was really like. I have been able to experience different cultures from the upper class, the middle class, and the poorest.

**OHM: Do you have a desire to support younger men?**

**Terrence Ramsey:** I do, because that's what I experienced growing up. There were uncles, cousins, friends and others who connected with me and passed down knowledge. So, I feel like it's also my duty to do the same for other Black males.

**OHM: Tell us about your career.**

**Terrence Ramsey:** I have worked for the Peach Tree Cafeteria for nearly 19 years. I went to school at Alabama State University, then family stuff happened, so I had to come back home. When I came back from college I started as a server and did a little bit of everything. I bartended for a while, and now I am the general manager.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family, and your community?**

**Terrence Ramsey:** My vision is to live a healthy and prosperous life. My wife and I want to become financially stable and secure enough to where there's no worry. It doesn't really have to have a monetary value on it as long as we're healthy, happy, and together. For my community, I want us to be more than what we are at the moment, more than basketball players and athletes and entertainers. I see us leading in the fields of STEM and IT. I envision us being more. I don't want people to count us out!



# AUTHOR

## LEWIS W. DIUGUID, AUTHOR

Certified Diversity Facilitator  
News Media Consultant

## Life Is Worth Living — Healthy

A dear friend explained to me about 30 years ago after she suffered a serious back injury that our health not only is our best friend, but it is the one that we take for granted the most. Often it is not until we each face a personal health crisis that we come to this realization.

Starting at age 17 in 1972, I have maintained an exercise regimen. It includes jogging about 2 miles when few baby boomers did such things. Add to that my mother's constant caution, "You'll get enough of that fool running!" I also have continued to do some weightlifting, rope jumping, pullups and pushups. Sit-ups have turned into stomach crunches because of back problems in 2006.

I never anticipated prostate cancer being the genetic bullet that would strike me in 2011 at age 55. One of my mother's brothers had colon cancer. My mother had Alzheimer's Disease when she died in 1994 at age 62. Some of my dad's brothers had prostate cancer, and so did his father. Dad suffered an enlarged prostate and was diagnosed with prostate cancer late in life. But in his 90s, his doctors were okay with him doing nothing to combat it. He actually had pneumonia when he died in January 2015 — 10 days shy of his 98th birthday.

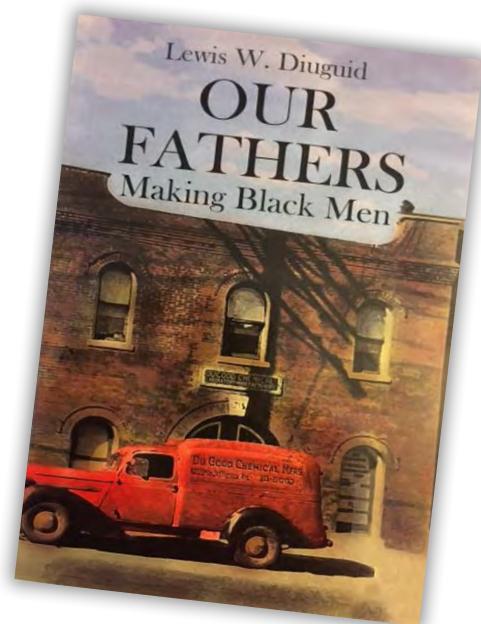
After I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I learned that African American men have the highest incidence of prostate cancer in the world.

Getting tested regularly is the only way to ensure early detection, which is the

best way to fight it. Surgery in April 2011 to remove the prostate gave me a fighting chance at life. When the cancer returned in the spring of 2013, radiation took care of the recurring threat.

My exercise regimen, healthy eating habits, moderate alcohol consumption and gardening to provide me with a diet of nutritious food all figure into my quality of life. The goal is to live as long as possible with the ability to enjoy life with those I love, who make life worth living.

*Lewis Diuguid's book Our Fathers: Making Black Men, focuses on one block of St. Louis in the mid-20th century, where African American businessmen living the American Dream created a sense of community for boys in that neighborhood. The Black men pushed the boys to higher expectations to fulfill long-held hopes and dreams of their forbearers, who were slaves. Our Fathers should be required reading for people who want to reverse the despair, improve public education, blow up the school-to-prison pipeline and end hopelessness in America's cities.*



**MINISTER GREG PARR**  
 Neighbor2Neighbor Ministry  
[n2n4kc.org](http://n2n4kc.org)



## We're Breaking a Vicious Cycle

**Our Health Matters (OHM): Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**Minister Gregg:** I did when I was a kid growing up in Baltimore. We had a family doctor that took care of us. He knew us from birth, so when I went into his office, he'd look at me and say, hey, you're not feeling good. As I got older, that type of experience changed. I've had totally different experiences with the healthcare system since I have been working in the field of addiction over the years.

**OHM: What has been your experience with the healthcare system?**

**Minister Gregg:** As a drug counselor, my focus is on helping people who have addictions. This means I am in and out of hospitals all the time with someone. I have found that a lot of the people that I take to hospitals are cared for differently and even spoken to differently. For example, I took a guy to the hospital and he allowed me to remain in the room. A psychologist came in to interview him. He had anxiety and depression and was afraid to stay sober. I listened to the way the psychologist was treating him, and I later filed a grievance. Now note that the patient was white and so was the doctor, but he was also a homeless veteran. I was asked to leave the hospital because I questioned her. I later learned that nurses, doctors, lawyers, and judges are not trained in addiction. So, no my trust is not where it should be.

**OHM: What is your understanding of mental health?**

**Minister Gregg:** I'm a recovering substance use disorder person, so I'd say it can be an unfavorable, or an unhealthy, condition of your mind. I think everybody has some type of denial when it comes to mental illness. I agree talking to a mental health therapist, a psychologist, or just talking to a trusted friend lets someone know you need attention. Sometimes I recognize we can be depressed and not realize it. People who know us might sense something's different and voice concern. I would not hesitate to see a mental health professional because I want to be mentally healthy.

**OHM: Describe an experience that shaped your view of your community.**

**Minister Gregg:** I work in the most drug infected area I have ever worked in. One of the things that came to my mind is that most people are caught in a cycle and going nowhere fast. It's not just individuals, it's families that are caught in a cycle. My ministry, Neighbor2Neighbor, is helping people break the cycle. We help them get off the streets so they can reunite with their families. Most churches and agencies don't want to work in this type of environment. We hear "thank you" quite often from the numerous individuals and families we help.





## Q&A

**KELVIN L. SIMMONS, MBA**  
Founder and Partner of Nexus Group, LLC.  
Government Relations, Lobbyist

# To Whom Much is Given, Much is Required

**K**elvin Simmons is on the move as a mentor and visionary. Read more online at [kcourhealthmatters.com](http://kcourhealthmatters.com).

***Our Health Matters (OHM): What is your understanding of mental health?***

**Kelvin Simmons:** I think Black men are evolving when it comes to mental health. In general, I don't think Black men are accustomed to seeking mental health support. However, we are paying more attention because the stigma is slowly diminishing. We are getting the message that to get help is not a weakness. And that what we share is confidential. More people are realizing that therapy is actually healthy. Keeping things inside, particularly from a cultural standpoint, may contribute to overall health issues and cause more problems later. As much as we need assistance with our physical health, there are more times when we need assistance with our mental health.

For a long time it was frowned upon to seek help outside of the family or your pastor if you were in church. We went to grandma and the pastor, who had good intentions, but they didn't have the ability to diagnose and solve mental health problems. I would seek help when I am not understanding what's going on in my own head, in my own space.

***OHM: Do you feel a responsibility to mentor younger Black males?***

**Kelvin Simmons:** Absolutely, yes. It's something I've done my entire life. To whom much is given, much is required. Absolutely. I am a product of the village, so everybody mentored me. Everybody. I can remember walking down the street and this old guy that sat on the porch would yell at me five times a week—wait, let me tell you something. And he'd tell me one thing that probably stuck with me, and it was worth it. So my point to you is everybody mentored me. I got something from everybody.

Recently I invited a young African American man who is a contractor to come to a fundraiser that we were having for the Mayor. He said, "I'd like to come, but I have a class of seven young high school kids I'm teaching." I told him to bring them as my guests as well. They were young Hispanic kids. He told them that the Mayor would be there and they would see movers and shakers so they could see how things work in the corporate world. They came and they asked us lots of questions. I offered them an opportunity to see how things work at the top. I can't tell you the countless times that I do that—thus my motto "to whom much is given, much is required."

**KEITH HARRISON**  
 Chief Investigator  
 Jackson County Prosecutor's Office



## Trust the Process

**Our Health Matters (OHM):**

**Do you trust the healthcare system?**

**K. Harrison:** I have to say honestly, I do. I trust the healthcare system only because ever since I turned 18, I worked for the government. When my kids were born, they were covered under medical insurance. So, when it comes to saying, do I trust the healthcare system in that respect, yes, because I've always had health insurance. I have had positive experiences. Here's a good example: I've only changed healthcare providers maybe four times in a lifetime. My wife noticed I was having problems breathing just walking around. After a brief doctor's visit, I received a call to go to the emergency room. It turns out both lungs were filled with blood clots. It was the long-term relationship with my doctor that saved my life.

**OHM: Are there any preventative things you're doing to protect your health?**

**K. Harrison:** I'm trying to exercise and watch what I'm eating preventatively. I've gotten away from a lot of red meat and fried foods. My wife and I have made a conscious effort to eat more chicken and fish. We bake and air fry most of our foods.

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**K. Harrison:** The biggest thing I see outside of problems caused by racial profiling is not being

given the opportunity to advance in one's career. I've seen it because it happened to me several times when I was passed over to give my white counterpart first preference. So, the biggest challenge for Black men is to be taken seriously and to be given opportunities to advance.

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**"I would love my community to trust one another and start trusting the system."**

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**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family and your community?**

**K. Harrison:** For my kids and family is to be healthy, physically and financially. To be able to do the things that they need to do and to learn from the things that I was unable to do. And for my community, I need my community to come together. The community is facing everyday battles and challenges with no real answers. I would love my community to trust one another and start trusting the system. It's not just Black on Black, it's also youth on youth violence. We need community partners to listen and create effective change in policies and programming. Hopefully that will begin to eat away at some of the negative aspects of the Black experience.

**CHRISTOPHER PEACOCK****Director of Arts and Education  
Kansas City Young Audiences (KCYA)**

## Self-Empowered to Be the Best Version of Myself

**R**ead more of Christopher Peacock's interview online at [kcourhealthmatters.com](http://kcourhealthmatters.com).

**Our Health Matters (OHM): How do you think society views Black men?**

**Christopher Peacock:** It depends on what society, because I don't believe that there's just one. I believe there are multiple perspectives, so I'll share what comes to mind. I believe society has created this fear of people and especially those of us who wear black skin. I have lived on the Plaza for more than ten years. Once there was a group of Black middle and high school kids out having fun riding scooters and just hanging out. I was on a date with a young lady. We were dressed nicely and just out walking, and I thought it was interesting that she and I got the same unfriendly stares as the Black kids got.

There was another time when I was walking by myself, approaching a group of Black high school students and fear came over me.. I decided to speak, like, hey, how's it going, gentlemen? It was just a small icebreaker. They turned around and said, "Hey, what's up?" "Hey, I like those shoes." You see, if we allow fear to overtake our humanity, then we will find ourselves at odds even with people that look like us. These Black kids

weren't out to harm anyone. Yet even I was a bit concerned. What has society done to us!

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**Christopher Peacock:** Personal development is one of the challenges of some Black men. We are assets to not only our family and community, but the places in which we work. I believe we don't always have positive connections and reinforcements. We're faced with an enormous responsibility and expectation of being something that we have not been taught to be. Or we don't know how to develop ourselves in the way that we need to be developed. I guess this is where mentors come into play big time. There are different perspectives even within myself: I am the self that I see, I am the idea of how I see myself and view myself in this life. But I am also how other people see me.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself?**

**Christopher Peacock:** My vision for me is to be the best version of myself. I envision my life as being an influential person, creating memories, living by my values and not by societal standards.

*Christopher J. Peacock is a dance artist, choreographer and professor of arts integration.*



# Art is Life in Its Many Forms



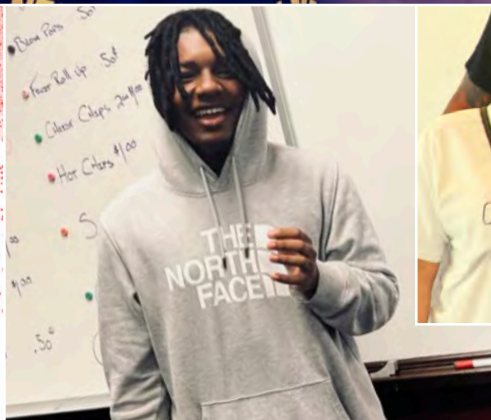
Young people looking for entry level careers that allow them to expand into various artforms such as music, poetry, writing and the arts will be right at home in Lyrik's Institute programs. Lyrik's classes are interactive and culturally centered

to provide a haven for the scholars to learn. They incorporate teaching tools such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Memes, Fashion, Music, Dance, Relevant News, Community Issues, Games and Seminars that are all based in the social culture and are proven to work.



Unlike other programs, Lyrik's Institution curriculum attacks the root

causes of criminal thinking and thinking errors and the thoughts that manifest them. Their goals center in on reducing crime and violence by dismantling destructive thinking errors and redirecting each participant towards productive behaviors.



Using a psychological reasoning based program allows students to master in fields of their choice

such as broadcasting, construction and automobile repair. Students receive paid internships that starts at \$25/hour and have the potential to earn career opportunities with local partners.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Lyriks accepts culturally and ethnicity diverse 9th graders—though age 25 from all backgrounds, gender, cultures and ethnicities.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

Internships for rising 9th-12th graders have no requirements other than age. Lyrik's operates their programs year round.

Lyrik's participants intern at businesses that are related to their artistic careers of choice. It is there they develop real world experience, exposure and certifications based on their respective internships.

Jesus Christ teaches that a man must be changed from the inside out. Lyrik's program embraces this teaching and understands that changing the mind thus changes the person.



**Lyrik's**  
INSTITUTION

**For more information  
call 816-419-0099  
[www.Lyriksinstitute.com](http://www.Lyriksinstitute.com)  
Email [info@lyriksinstitute.com](mailto:info@lyriksinstitute.com)**

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## Q&A

**ERIK KEITH STAFFORD**  
Educator, Historian and Founder  
Kansas City Tour Company

# We Have Work To Do

**E**rik Stafford has a healthy respect for history and holistic living. He reminds us that the past had many great accomplishments.

**Our Health Matters (OHM): What can the healthcare system do better to address your questions or needs?**

**E. Stafford:** They should offer a wide range of treatment options that incorporate holistic medicine. I'm interested in understanding how my body works and other methods that include meditation, fasting, prayer and healthy diets. I'd like to see more Black doctors and nurses. Thirty to forty years ago there were more options to be treated by Black doctors in Kansas City. I wonder when the number of available Black doctors will increase.

**OHM: How do you think society views Black men?**

**E. Stafford:** I think society feels threatened by the emerging intelligence of Black men. When a Black man speaks with authority, it's a threat. A lot of times they understand our power better than we do.

**OHM: What do you see as the biggest challenge to Black men?**

**E. Stafford:** Getting past the stereotype that we are one-dimensional. By that, I mean that we have more options than just entertainers and athletes. Our talents are vast, diverse and unlimited, and we have

many professions that we can build on. We need to recapture the pride our community once enjoyed when we had an abundance of Black doctors, educators, business owners, etc. We developed and sold our own products, and money circulated more than once in our community.

**OHM: Do you have a desire to mentor and support younger Black males?**

**E. Stafford:** Absolutely. I mentor every day in my job as an educator. I applaud coaches and churches that have mentoring programs. We need more people to get involved in helping kids improve their literacy levels and not just leave it up to the schools.

**OHM: What have you learned about money and creating wealth?**

**E. Stafford:** I have a degree in Business and Series 3 and Series 6 licenses, and I am a financial planner. We all need to practice self-control and not waste money. Financial literacy should be one of our top priorities.

**OHM: What is your vision for yourself, your family, and your community?**

**E. Stafford:** For my family and community, I want them first to exalt the Most High above anything else. In my view, this is the foundation. I want my family to be self-sufficient and happy.



**The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends the following screening guidelines for men ages 40 to 64. You should visit your health care provider regularly, even if you feel healthy. Below are screening guidelines for men ages 40 to 64. The purpose of these visits is to:**

- Screen for medical issues
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle
- Help you get to know your provider in case of an illness
- Assess your risk for future medical problems
- Update vaccinations

### BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING

Have your blood pressure checked at least once every year. Watch for blood pressure screenings in your area. Ask your provider if you can stop in to have your blood pressure checked. Ask your doctor if you need your blood pressure checked more often if:

- You have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or are overweight or have certain other health conditions
- You have a first-degree relative with high blood pressure
- You are Black
- Your blood pressure top number is from 120 to 129 mm Hg, or the bottom number is from 70 to 79 mm Hg
- If the top number is 130 mm Hg or greater or the bottom number is 80 mm Hg or greater, this is considered stage 1 hypertension. Schedule an appointment with your provider to learn how you can lower your blood pressure.

### CHOLESTEROL SCREENING

Cholesterol screening should begin at age 35 for men with no known risk factors for coronary heart disease. Repeat cholesterol screening should take place:

- Every 5 years for men with normal cholesterol levels
- More often if changes occur in lifestyle (including weight gain and diet)
- More often if you have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions

### DIABETES SCREENING

All adults who do not have risk factors for diabetes should be screened starting at age 35 and repeated every 3 years.

If you have other risk factors for diabetes, such as a first degree relative with diabetes, overweight or obesity, high blood pressure, prediabetes, or a history of heart disease, you may be tested more often.

If you are overweight and have other risk factors such as high blood pressure and are planning to become pregnant, screening is recommended.

### PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING

If you're 55 through 69 years old, before having the test, talk to your provider about the pros and cons of having a PSA test. Ask about:

- Whether screening decreases your chance of dying from prostate cancer.
- Whether there is any harm from prostate cancer screening, such as side effects from testing or overtreatment of cancer when discovered.
- Whether you have a higher risk of prostate cancer than others.

If you are age 55 or younger, screening is not generally recommended. You should talk with your provider about if you have a higher risk for prostate cancer. Risk factors include:

- Having a family history of prostate cancer (especially a brother or father, consider getting it at age 45 to 55)
- Being African American

If you choose to be tested, the PSA blood test is repeated over time (yearly or less often), though the best frequency is not known. Prostate examinations are no longer routinely done on men with no symptoms.



*Thank You for  
Your Support!*



Healthy Blue