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Courageous Access: Who We Are, What We've Done

Courageous Access is a nonprofit created by Black women, for Black women — advancing safety, health, economic mobility, and generational well-being through culturally rooted healing that produces measurable outcomes.

The **Courageous Access Black Women's Conference (CABWC) 2026** is the national expansion of years of direct-service work, cohort-based programming, and community-rooted healing models developed to improve outcomes for Black women across the United States.

Led by Black women healers from across the U.S. and beyond, the conference offers a sacred, trauma-informed space for healing, education, and empowerment — **without requiring Black women to explain themselves to be understood.**

Our mission is to send Black women home **restored, informed, connected, and resourced** — with embodied practices, practical tools, and clear pathways to strengthen emotional, physical, and economic health immediately and sustainably. Participants leave more grounded and regulated, with a calmer nervous system, increased clarity, and strategies they can implement in real time to support their well-being.

Courageous Access was founded by **Courageous Fire, CHW**, a Black woman and survivor of domestic violence who transformed lived experience into prevention-focused, survivor-centered solutions. From the beginning, the work has centered one core belief: **Black women deserve healing approaches that honor their culture, intelligence, and agency — and that lead to lasting change.**

Over the past five years, Courageous Access has designed and facilitated **cohort-based programming and direct services** for Black women across **Iowa, Missouri, Texas, New York, Ohio, Illinois, Alabama, and Puerto Rico**. These cohorts are where the deepest work happens — supporting Black women to build safety, autonomy, economic mobility, and healthier relationships over time.

Each year, this sustained work has been reinforced through **community-centered gatherings**, including events held during Domestic Violence Awareness Month and other culturally rooted convenings. Some were original Courageous Access productions — such as the *Empowerment Arts Showcase* — while others were existing community events we intentionally secured, closed, and curated for Black women only. These spaces centered cultural healing and were followed by facilitated dialogue to ensure reflection, learning, and outcomes were fully integrated.

Through this layered approach — cohorts, direct services, and community-based healing spaces — Courageous Access has achieved **measurable, sustained impact**, including:

- **An 80% success rate in helping Black women achieve and sustain intimate partner safety and gender-based violence prevention**, including the ability to recognize risk, set boundaries, exit unsafe dynamics, and maintain healthier emotional, physical, and economic stability over time
- Improved emotional regulation and reduced trauma-related symptoms, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression
- Increased economic mobility and healthier financial decision-making following empowerment and healing cohorts
- Youth and family programming that strengthens autonomy, boundary-setting, and the ability to recognize, identify, and avoid teen dating violence
- Generational impact through modeling healthier relationships, decision-making, and self-worth within families and communities

In **October 2026, in Chicago, Illinois**, the Courageous Access Black Women's Conference brings this proven work to a national stage. CABWC is the evolution of what has already worked — expanding access to culturally grounded healing, scaling measurable outcomes, and gathering Black women from across the country into a full-day experience of restoration, power, and possibility.

This is the next chapter of a model that has already changed lives — now made accessible to Black women nationwide.

Conferences Outcome Overview

Public Health

- Demonstrate measurable reductions in stress and increases in emotional resilience.
- Increase adoption of preventative, culturally responsive wellness practices.
- Report improved health self-efficacy and sustained wellbeing behaviors.

Violence Prevention

- Demonstrate earlier identification of coercive, unsafe, or exploitative dynamics.
- Increase confidence and effectiveness in boundary-setting, refusal, and help-seeking behaviors.
- Report increased awareness and utilization of personal and community-based safety resources.
- Experience reduced isolation through strengthened peer support networks.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)

- Validate culturally specific knowledge as credible and effective expertise.
- Demonstrate increased agency, voice, and self-trust within historically exclusionary systems.
- Report increased psychological safety, belonging, and inclusion in learning and professional spaces.

Community Wellness

- Contribute to strengthened collective care, mutual support, and community safety practices.
- Apply learned tools within families, workplaces, and community settings.
- Support broader community resilience through sustained engagement and leadership.

Emotional

- Demonstrate increased emotional regulation, grounding, and self-compassion.
- Report decreased shame, fear, and burnout-related emotional distress.
- Report increased emotional safety, dignity, and affirmation.

Mental / Cognitive

- Demonstrate increased clarity and critical awareness of power, access, and risk.
- Show improved decision-making and strategic self-advocacy.
- Report increased confidence in discernment and internal guidance.

Physical / Somatic

- Demonstrate increased awareness of bodily cues related to stress and safety.
- Engage in practices that support nervous-system regulation and embodied agency.
- Demonstrate stronger integration between body awareness, voice, and action.

Economic

- Demonstrate cost-effective, preventative approaches to health and violence intervention that reduce downstream public health and social service expenditures.
- Gain the ability to convert trauma to reparations.
- Uncover the power buried beneath Black woman "strength" that equips participants to build generational wealth.

Courageous Fire, CHW

answerbeautiful.com

Bio

Courageous Fire, CHW, is an award-winning author, international speaker, and Freedom Architect whose work strengthens health, safety, and economic stability for Black women by transforming how trauma is understood and addressed—both individually and systemically. She is the Founder and CEO of [Courageous Fire, LLC](#), where she designs and delivers culturally responsive training and systems frameworks, including [HaRD Wiring™](#), [Centers of Must™](#), and [Centers of Trust™](#), that help organizations reduce harm, improve decision-making, and create conditions where Black women can thrive.



Through Courageous Fire, LLC, she trains leaders and institutions across healthcare, victim services, higher education, and justice-aligned systems to apply trauma-informed self-care, resilience, and trust-centered practices that improve outcomes for individuals and teams. Her award-winning book *This Is for the Other Child*—now part of [The O.C. Series](#) and its companion journal—is already being used as a learning resource within these sectors to deepen understanding of family systems, secondary trauma, and culturally responsive care for Black women and their families.

Courageous Fire is also the Founding Executive Director of [Courageous Access](#), the nonprofit host of this conference. Through Courageous Access, she created and directly facilitated the [Empowerment Through the Arts™](#) program and journal for five years, maintaining an 80% success rate in helping Black women participants avoid future predatory relationships and circumstances. Across her nonprofit and consulting work, Courageous Fire is known for producing results that matter to sponsors and communities alike: healthier, more financially stable Black women who are better positioned to contribute, lead, and remain engaged in workplaces and systems that intentionally integrate trust-centered, trauma-informed approaches.

Keynotes

1. *Opening: Sista Strength Hurts, Ask the Right Questions, & Power Gets You P.A.I.D.*
2. *Closing Reflections: Group, Gains & Greatness*

Abstract

Nearly 97% of women experience trauma in their lifetime; for Black women it fuels the top three causes of death—heart disease, cancer, and stroke—contributing to an average lifespan of just 78.1 years. Nearly 8 in 10 Black women also experience trauma connected to childhood abuse, intimate partner violence, and chronic stress, yet abuse is often normalized or overlooked, allowing long-term harm to persist.

Through this opening keynote and closing reflection, Courageous Fire equips Black women with practical tools to transform trauma into reparations using her P.A.I.D. Framework, supporting stabilization, economic clarity, and personal power. Guided participation and outcome tracking in the closing reflection reinforce learning, document impact, and ensure participants leave safer, informed, and connected.

Expected Participant Outcomes

1. Public Health
 - Demonstrate improved stress management and resilience, reducing risk factors associated with chronic stress–related health disparities.
 - Adopt preventative self-regulation practices that support long-term physical and emotional wellbeing.
2. Violence Prevention
 - Improve early identification of interpersonal, institutional, and coercive forms of violence.
 - Increase confidence and effectiveness in boundary-setting, refusal, and help-seeking behaviors.
 - Demonstrate increased awareness of safety resources, access pathways, and protective networks
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
 - Strengthen self-efficacy, voice, and agency within systems that have historically marginalized Black women.
 - Affirmed culturally grounded knowledge and reduces barriers to engagement with traditional support systems.
 - Participants report increased psychological safety and sense of belonging in professional and community spaces.
4. Community Wellness
 - Participants contribute to stronger peer accountability and collective, prevention-oriented care practices.
 - Participants extend learned tools into families, workplaces, and community spaces, supporting broader community resilience and safety.
5. Emotional
 - Participants demonstrate increased emotional regulation and reduced experiences of shame, isolation, and burnout-related distress.
6. Cognitive / Mental
 - Participants show improved ability to recognize interpersonal and systemic risk factors.
 - Participants report increased clarity, critical awareness, and informed decision-making capacity.
7. Physical / Somatic
 - Participants increase awareness of bodily stress responses and early warning signals.
 - Participants acquire practical tools for nervous system regulation and physical stress reduction.

Testimonials

“Courageous is a content expert who is genuine and authentic. She delivers highly impactful opportunities for healing and engagement. With Courageous I know we are making a difference.” Monica Goedken, MPA, Violence Prevention Program Manager, Iowa Department of Health & Human Services

“I was a child therapist for many, many years and worked primarily with the child who was the primary victim of abuse and violence, but it affects the whole family. To be able to have this specific terminology, to be able to put words to the other child’s experience, I think it’s just so powerful. Unfortunately, I didn’t have it when I was practicing, but can spread the good word for those who are!” Tiffany Conroy, LISW, Sr. Integrated Health Consultant, Iowa Primary Care Association

“The way certain things were framed was super powerful. I feel really confident you delivered what we asked for.” Steve Schappaugh, Executive Director of Secondary Education, West Des Moines Schools

“Courageous Fire brings exceptional skill as a consultant and trainer. I am grateful and honored to have learned from her and to continue learning with her. That learning is more than professional development—it has been a touchstone and a source of support for my own internal work and healing. I am deeply grateful for her wisdom, expertise, knowledge, and profound empathy. She is an investment whose value cannot be measured, because the healing and change she fosters—in professional contexts and within individuals—is both collective and personal.” Ruth Reymundo Mandel, Co-Owner, Safe and Together Institute

References

Autumn Paine, Chief Executive Officer, Waypoint Svcs — apaine@waypointservices.org
Ilima Young-Dunn, Program Chair & Human Svcs Professor, DMACC— imyongdunn@dmacc.edu
Teresa Zilk, Founder, Stories to Tell My Daughter — zilkteresa@gmail.com
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Dr. Lauren H. Collins, PT, DPT, WCS, CLT

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Bio

Dr. Lauren H. Collins, PT, DPT, WCS, CLT is a healer whose work is rooted in clinical excellence, cultural reverence, and a deep commitment to the restoration of Black bodies and lives. With nearly 30 years as a physical therapist and more than two decades dedicated to women's health, she is a Board-Certified Specialist in Women's Health Physical Therapy, a certified lymphedema Therapist, and a trauma-informed practitioner with extensive experience treating pelvic floor dysfunction, chronic pain, and the embodied impacts of trauma. A proud Howard University alumna, she earned her Master's in Physical Therapy in 1998 and returned to complete her Doctorate in Physical Therapy in 2020, grounding her practice in both legacy and leadership.



Dr. Collins' approach to care is rooted in multi-layer, whole-self healing. She integrates advanced manual therapy techniques including Craniosacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation, Myofascial Release, and 5NP Auricular Acupuncture, alongside her training as a sexual assault survivor first responder. Her work centers survivors of sexual assault and intimate partnerviolence, honoring the reality that the body remembers – and that healing requires safety, cultural attunement, and deep respect for lived experience. In 2022, she founded **Lauren H. Collins Wellness**, a nonprofit created to provide pro-bono, survivor-centered healing services for Black survivors, reflecting her belief that healing must be accessible by design.

In addition to her clinical practice, Dr. Collins is a professor in Howard University's Physical Therapy program and serves on faculty with the American Physical Therapy Association's Academy of Pelvic Health, where she has supported the training of clinicians nationally for over a decade. She also teaches at Alabama State University, has guest lectured at the University of California, San Francisco, and leads workshops for survivors and survivor-serving organizations on trauma-informed care and pelvic health. Through her educational platform Pelvic Love on YouTube, she offers free, affirming pelvic health education – extending her healing beyond the clinic and into the community. When you meet Dr. Collins, her presence is unmistakable: grounded, compassionate, and deeply committed to collective healing.

Keynote

Trauma and the Body: How to Heal

Abstract

Within the US, the incidences of interpersonal violence amongst Black women is 4/10 persons, and the incidences of sexual assault amongst Black women is greater than 20%. A person who is exposed to trauma has a 2.7 times increased likelihood of experiencing a physical dysfunction. The physical effects of IPV and SA can include a wide range of dysfunctions, inclusive of; pain syndromes, gut issues, urinary and bowel issues and sexual dysfunctions. These issues can be amplified within the Black community due to the exposure to chronic stress due to consistent social, political and economic forms of discrimination.

Healing from the trauma of sexual violence, that is concomitant with the chronic stress of negative biases, requires a multifaceted, culturally relevant, trauma-informed approach. This workshop aims to educate participants on trauma and the body, screening for survivor needs, types of referrals and healing practices that can be incorporated; giving autonomy to experiencers.

Expected Participant Outcomes

1. Public Health
 - Participants demonstrate improved stress management and resilience, reducing risk factors associated with chronic stress–related health disparities.
 - Participants adopt preventative self-regulation practices that support long-term physical and mental health.
2. Violence Prevention
 - Participants demonstrate earlier identification of interpersonal, institutional, and coercive forms of violence.
 - Participants increase confidence and effectiveness in boundary-setting, refusal, and help-seeking behaviors.
 - Participants report increased awareness of safety resources, access pathways, and protective networks.
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
 - Participants strengthen self-efficacy, voice, and agency within systems that have historically marginalized Black women.
 - Programming affirms culturally grounded knowledge and reduces barriers to engagement with traditional support and safety systems.
 - Participants report increased psychological safety and sense of belonging in professional and community environments.
4. Community Wellness
 - Participants contribute to strengthened peer accountability and prevention-oriented collective care practices.
 - Participants extend learned tools into families, workplaces, and community spaces, supporting broader community resilience and safety.
5. Emotional
 - Participants demonstrate increased emotional regulation and reduced experiences of shame, isolation, and burnout-related distress.
6. Mental / Cognitive
 - Participants show improved capacity to recognize interpersonal and systemic risk factors and make informed safety-related decisions.
7. Physical / Somatic
 - Participants increase awareness of physiological stress responses and early warning indicators.
 - Participants apply practical nervous-system regulation and grounding strategies that support physical wellbeing.

Testimonials

"I appreciated the intimacy of the moment. Dr. Collins took time to listen to what I was experiencing and navigated me to a place of mental healing that was years overdue. Also, because I really wanted acupuncture but was short on time, Dr. Collins provided it for me during my physical therapy session." Healing Retreat Attendee

"Didn't know what to expect for physical therapy so I was pleasantly surprised when Lauren had all these tools and practices I could apply that day to relieve my pain. That was so helpful and I've been doing better in the last few weeks." Healing Retreat Attendee

"The physical therapy was life changing! Dr. Collins is amazing." Healing Retreat Attendee

"Black people overwork themselves and don't realize the stress our mind and body endures from the silent load. This load includes being the recipient of microaggressions, thoughts about safety and perceptions that linger in our subconscious and more. Without a safe accessible space to be in we may forever be overloaded. While the services provided at this retreat may be afforded by some the spaces they are typically found in are not safe spaces just for black people to unwind and have selfcare. This event was curated with so many details and was artfully executed to provide the most stress free day possible." Healing Retreat Attendee

References

Kandee Lewis, Executive Director, Positive Results Center - kandeele@prc123.org

LaTonya Horace DuBois, Executive Director, The Silent Task Force - hdubois_latanya@thesilenttaskforce.org

Claudine A. Cheatem, MFA

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Bio

Claudine A. Cheatem, MFA is a master storyteller, playwright, poet, emcee, and woman inspirer whose work sits at the powerful intersection of laughter, truth, and transformation. Known for making audiences laugh while they heal — and think while they laugh — Claudine has a rare gift for telling stories that disarm, empower, and then lovingly challenge women to choose themselves more boldly. Her presence is magnetic, her humor sharp, and her message unforgettable. When Claudine takes the microphone, she doesn't just perform — she *activates* people, leaving them clearer, braver, and more willing to act in their own best interest.

A lifelong writer and performer, Claudine is the author and playwright of [*Jamaica's Kaleidoscope*](#), a book and stage production that reflects her signature blend of grit, wit, and unflinching honesty about womanhood, survival, and self-determination. As a spoken-word artist and emcee, she is as comfortable commanding a room as Michael Jordan is on a basketball court — the microphone is her home. She invites women to laugh at what hurts, name what didn't work, admit missteps without shame, and then walk away with what often feels like marching orders: clearer boundaries, wiser choices, and renewed authority over their own lives. Claudine earned her Master of Fine Arts degree at the age of 64, a testament to her staying power, courage, and belief that it is *never too late* to claim your voice.



Claudine's passion for words began in childhood. Born the seventh of fifteen children, she was introduced early to the one place with no restrictions — the library — and told she could “go as much as you want, stay as long as you want.” That freedom changed her life. To this day, the library remains her favorite place in the world because it opens up entire worlds by putting them right at your fingertips — peoples, places, perspectives — all there for your asking. Her guiding motto reflects that truth: **“If there's something that you need to know, there's a book for it. And if there isn't a book, that's your opportunity to write it.”** That belief pulses through everything she does. Claudine Cheatem doesn't just tell stories — she gives women permission to claim theirs, laugh through them, learn from them, and then go change their lives.

Keynote

Weep, Wail, Write

Abstract

Disenfranchised grief — grief that is dismissed, minimized, or left unnamed — is pervasive among Black women and reinforced by cultural expectations to be strong, self-sacrificing, and continuously productive. With only 10.3% of Black women accessing formal mental health services, unprocessed grief frequently contributes to physical and mental health crises and long-term impacts that disrupt well-being and participation at home and at work.

Weep, Wail, Write emerged from the dual necessity of the creator's own healing and the completion of her Master of Fine Arts degree, grounding the session in both lived experience and professional training. Designed as a structured 90-minute writing-based experience, the session creates a culturally affirming pause for Black women to process grief safely, release its internalized effects, and reshape their relationship with loss. Participants leave with greater clarity, emotional steadiness, and a renewed sense of agency that supports healthier engagement and healthier lives.

Expected Participant Outcomes

1. Public Health
 - Participants demonstrate increased stress release and emotional processing, reducing risk factors associated with suppressed grief, chronic stress, and trauma-related health disparities.
 - Participants adopt preventative expressive practices that support long-term emotional regulation and mental wellbeing.
2. Violence Prevention
 - Participants demonstrate increased ability to identify harm, silence, and coercive dynamics that often precede interpersonal or institutional violence.
 - Participants strengthen voice and self-advocacy, supporting earlier disclosure and help-seeking behaviors.
 - Participants reduce isolation through collective witnessing, increasing protective social connection.
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
 - Programming affirms culturally grounded storytelling traditions that center Black women's lived experience and knowledge.
 - Participants report increased psychological safety, validation, and sense of belonging within shared narrative space.
 - The session reduces barriers to participation for individuals historically excluded from clinical or institutional healing spaces.
4. Community Wellness
 - Participants contribute to collective care through shared reflection, witnessing, and communal meaning-making.
 - Participants extend expressive practices into families, workplaces, and community spaces, supporting broader emotional resilience and connection.
5. Emotional
 - Participants demonstrate increased capacity for emotional expression, release, and self-compassion.
 - Participants report reductions in suppressed grief, emotional constriction, and internalized distress.
6. Mental / Cognitive
 - Participants acquire narrative tools that support processing of trauma, loss, and lived experience.
 - Participants demonstrate improved meaning-making, psychological insight, and cognitive clarity.

7. Physical / Somatic

- Participants increase awareness of embodied emotional responses, including breath, voice, and muscular tension.
- Participants engage in expressive practices that support nervous-system regulation and improved mind–body connection.

Testimonial

“Photographers and community journals have described Claudine’s presence as arresting and emotionally powerful—an expression that leaves people feeling and thinking long after the moment.” DSM Magazine

References

Teresa Zilk, Founder, Stories to Tell My Daughter — zilkteresa@gmail.com

Deborah Alexander, Educator Emeritus, Des Moines Public Schools — integrityfilled@msn.com

Rev. Orisha “Orixa” Bowers, BFA, MA, MEd, PhD

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Bio

Rev. Dr. Orisha A. Bowers, is a strategic and visionary leader with over 25 years of experience designing and implementing healing-centered, justice-rooted programs across reproductive health, harm reduction, and interfaith spaces. With a BFA, MA, MEd, PhD in Interdisciplinary. With a Graduate Certificate in Women and Gender Studies and a Certificate in Complementary and Alternative Medicine, she brings deep expertise in program strategy, knowledge management, and public engagement, rooted in justice, healing, and community wisdom.

As Deputy Director at Yellowhammer Fund and former Executive Director of the National Harm Reduction Coalition, Orisha has led national coalitions, managed multi-state initiatives, and facilitated leadership development for partner organizations. She has stewarded complex budgets, built cross-sector partnerships, and curated transformative programming that centers Black and Brown women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people living with HIV.

Her interdisciplinary Ph.D. research on Tennessee’s fetal assault law and the founding of Orixa Healing Arts reflect a lifelong commitment to systems change, spiritual resilience, and community-led innovation. As an ordained minister through the Universal Life Church, she seamlessly integrates spirituality with therapeutic disciplines such as mindfulness dancing, offering Dancing Mindfulness and other healing practices across the U.S.

Orisha’s work embodies integrity, creativity, and purpose. She is devoted to designing programs that not only meet the moment but shape liberatory futures, merging women’s studies, education, interdisciplinarity, and healing to foster collective wellness and transformation in communities of color.

Keynote

Vibrations of Liberation: Healing Through Sound, Sacred Arts, Reiki, and Reproductive Justice

Abstract

In this participatory workshop, we explore how sacred arts—particularly sound healing, visual collage, and ancestral ritual—can support trauma recovery, mental wellness, and transformative action at the intersections of faith, reproductive and sexual justice, and racial equity. Rooted in womanist theology, interfaith healing traditions, and culturally responsive care, this session guides participants through embodied practices that center the body as a sacred site of resistance.

Through breathwork, sonic immersion, and creative reflection, attendees will deepen their understanding of reproductive justice as a spiritual and human rights imperative. Designed for faith women, advocates, and healers, this experience offers tools to integrate sensory and artistic healing modalities into movement-building, ministry, and community care.

Together, we invoke sacred resistance, activate embodied truth, and imagine collective healing grounded in divine purpose.



Expected Participant Outcomes

1. Public Health
 - Participants demonstrate improved stress regulation and resilience, reducing risk factors associated with chronic stress–related health disparities.
 - Participants adopt preventative, embodied regulation practices that support long-term physical and mental health.
2. Violence Prevention
 - Participants demonstrate earlier recognition of misalignment, coercion, and unsafe dynamics.
 - Participants increase effectiveness in boundary-setting, refusal, and protective self-advocacy.
 - Participants report increased awareness of personal and community-based protective resources and access pathways.
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
 - Programming affirms culturally rooted spiritual and intuitive knowledge as valid sources of insight and expertise.
 - Participants strengthen agency, voice, and self-trust within systems that have historically marginalized Black women.
 - Participants report increased psychological safety, belonging, and validation in shared learning spaces.
4. Community Wellness
 - Participants contribute to strengthened collective grounding, mutual care, and culturally based safety practices.
 - Participants extend learned practices into families, workplaces, and community spaces, supporting broader community resilience and wellbeing.
5. Emotional
 - Participants demonstrate increased emotional grounding, affirmation, and self-trust.
 - Participants report reduced emotional distress, fear, and internalized pressure related to unsafe or exclusionary environments.
6. Mental / Cognitive
 - Participants demonstrate improved clarity, discernment, and decision-making capacity.
 - Participants increase critical awareness of power dynamics, boundaries, and risk in interpersonal and institutional contexts.
7. Physical / Somatic
 - Participants increase awareness of bodily cues related to stress, safety, and alignment.

Testimonials

“Dr. Bowers expertise in integrating harm reduction, wellness, and expressive arts into her consulting practice makes her a uniquely versatile and impactful professional. She is a highly sought-after consultant because of her ability to address complex challenges with creativity and compassion.” R. Lyle Cooper, PhD, Meharry Medical College's Addiction Clinic

“Dr. Bowers has been a tremendous asset to our organization. She brings a rare combination of expertise, dedication, and professionalism.” LaRonia Hurd-Sawyer, Executive Director, Partnership To End AIDS Status Incorporated

“Dr. Bowers brought these principles to life during our retreat, where staff members had the opportunity to build stronger relationships, engage in personal development, and practice authentic communication.” Athena Bannister-Short, Development Strategist, Kentucky Harm Reduction Coalition

“Dr. Bowers led the team that served as the core for elder abuse initiatives, ensuring survivors received specialized support and resources.” Olliette Murry-Drobot, former Executive Director, Family Safety Center at Memphis and Shelby County

Zakiya Jenkins, BS, MPA

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Bio

Zakiya Jenkins, BS, MPA, is a seasoned public health leader, community nutrition educator, and holistic wellness practitioner with nearly two decades of experience advancing health equity through culturally responsive, faith-centered approaches. She is the founder of **Nourished by Faith Wellness, LLC**, where evidence-based nutrition, movement, and spiritual grounding come together to support sustainable, affirming pathways to wellness for individuals and communities.

Zakiya's public health leadership began in 2006 and includes more than a decade as **Director of Primary Healthcare (2012–2017)**, followed by her role as **Founding Executive Director of Grace Fitness (2018–2025)**. She holds a **Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in Public Administration from Upper Iowa University (Summa Cum Laude)** and a **Bachelor's degree in Nutrition and Dietetics from North Carolina Central University (Summa Cum Laude)**, and is credentialed as a **CDC Certified Lifestyle Coach, Certified Community Health Worker, and NASM Certified Personal Trainer**—a rare combination that bridges policy, nutrition science, and lived application.



Faith is central to how Zakiya understands healing, leadership, and stewardship. Through **Nourished by Faith Wellness, LLC**, she creates vibrant, welcoming spaces where joy, accountability, and clarity coexist, inviting people to care for their bodies without shame or fear. Known for her bubbly energy, warmth, and commanding presence, Zakiya equips participants not only with knowledge, but with confidence, momentum, and the belief that lasting wellness is both possible and deserved.

Keynote

Nourishment as Resistance: Reclaiming Health, Healing, and Wholeness in Community

Abstract

This session explores nourishment as a form of resistance and restoration in communities disproportionately impacted by stress, food insecurity, and chronic disease. Participants will examine how food, faith, and culturally responsive wellness practices can support healing on physical, emotional, and communal levels. Through storytelling, evidence-based nutrition education, and reflective practices, this session centers nourishment as both a personal and collective act of care. Attendees will be able to reframe health beyond dieting and deficit models, incorporating sustainable nourishment strategies rooted in culture, accessibility, and compassion. This session is designed for individuals seeking to support holistic wellbeing while honoring lived experience and community wisdom.

Expected Participant Outcomes

1. Public Health
 - Participants demonstrate improved stress regulation and emotional resilience, reducing risk factors associated with chronic stress–related health disparities.
 - Participants adopt preventative regulation practices that support long-term physical and mental health.
2. Violence Prevention
 - Participants demonstrate earlier identification of coercive, unsafe, or exploitative dynamics.
 - Participants increase effectiveness in boundary-setting, refusal, and protective communication.
 - Participants report increased awareness of safety resources, access pathways, and protective support networks.
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
 - Participants strengthen agency, voice, and confidence within systems that have historically limited access for Black women.
 - Programming affirms lived experience and culturally grounded knowledge as valid sources of expertise.
 - Participants report increased psychological safety and sense of belonging in professional and community contexts.
4. Community Wellness
 - Participants contribute to strengthened peer connection and collective safety practices.
 - Participants extend learned tools into families, workplaces, and community spaces, supporting broader community resilience and care.
5. Emotional
 - Participants demonstrate increased emotional regulation, confidence, and self-trust.
 - Participants report reduced emotional distress related to marginalization, burnout, and survival stress.
 - Participants report increased sense of dignity, affirmation, and emotional safety.
6. Mental / Cognitive
 - Participants demonstrate increased clarity regarding power dynamics, access barriers, and systemic risk factors.
 - Participants show improved critical awareness and strategic decision-making related to advocacy and self-protection.
7. Physical / Somatic
 - Participants increase awareness of bodily cues related to stress, boundaries, and personal safety.
 - Participants engage in practices that support nervous-system regulation and embodied agency.
 - Participants demonstrate stronger alignment between bodily signals, voice, and action.

Testimonials

“This session shifted how I think about food, wellness, and healing. Practical, engaging, and grounded in real community needs.” Program Participant, Diabetes Prevention Program Sponsored by CDC

“Zakiya brings knowledge, compassion, and lived experience into every space she enters. Her approach to public health is empowering and deeply affirming.” Trina Radske-Suchan, CEO Iowa Community HUB

References

Morgan Pavon, Diabetes Program Manager, Iowa HHS — morgan.pavon@hhs.iowa.gov

Trina Radske-Suchan, President & CEO, Iowa Community Hub — tsuchan@chpcommunity.org