



## **BEST Kids Progress Report for Impact 100 DC**

As the 2024 Impact 100 Grant Partner, BEST Kids is pleased to report that we have made significant progress on our mental health initiative. Support from Impact 100 DC has allowed us to substantially increase our capacity to provide critical mental health services and support to our youth population, families and mentors. Since receiving grant funding, BEST Kids has hired its first Mental Health Specialist, Dominique Watson, who brings a wealth of experience in behavioral therapy, crisis response, and mental health counseling. We have created our mental health curriculum entitled, “Out of the Box.” The curriculum is tailored to address the mental health needs of our population through one-on-one and group wellness sessions as well as monthly mentor and caregiver trainings. The goals of our wellness sessions are to promote mental, emotional, and physical health, assist mentees with exploring their emotional awareness, stress management, self-esteem building, and coping strategies. During these sessions, mentees are able to identify and express their emotions utilizing activities such as journal prompts, drawing, music and movement as well as support circles. Having the opportunity to facilitate open discussions about mental health has helped to foster a sense of belonging and reduce the stigma often associated with mental health among our youth.

Monthly trainings for our caregivers and mentors are designed to equip those who support our youth with strategies to understand and address their children's/ mentee's mental health and emotional needs. These sessions have provided them with the tools to assist our youth with the mental challenges faced in college and entering the workforce, those who are experiencing domestic violence, grief, seasonal depression, as well as understanding the importance of self-reflection and maintaining positive habits. These training sessions have allowed our mentors and caregivers to gain insights into the challenges our youth may face and how to use effective communication techniques to support them.

In addition, we have begun building a partnership with Sasha Bruce, an organization providing support for vulnerable youth through residential facilities, counseling and educational programs. Our partnership will provide additional resources and support for youth residents, especially those facing significant challenges through workshops focused on specific needs such as confidence building, resilience building, coping skills, and life skills.

We are also excited to announce that we will be hosting the first BEST Kids “Out of the Box” Mental Health Expo in the Spring! The overall goal of the Expo is to raise awareness about mental health, share resources, and engage with the wider community. We will be partnering with other mental health professionals and community organizations, providing interactive activities and sessions to spread awareness and build stronger ties with the community.

Since implementing this program, our youth have shared that our mental health sessions have been eye-opening, safe spaces, and created a sense of belonging. We are grateful for the funding provided by the Impact 100 DC members to support our mental health initiative and look forward to our continued partnership.