

# Wyandanch

Community Advisory Board

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## April Events

Wyandanch Prepareathon Day, April 29th

Seed Library at Wyandanch Library, all month

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Meet Ednesha Saulsbury (left) and Kimberly Moore (right) - the cofounders of Black Woman Be Whole.

March is International Women's Month, so let's embrace...

## Healing Through Truth Telling

- Aliyyah Hamid, Syosset High School, Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition EH ambassador, Wyandanch Community Advisory Board member.

**B**lack Woman Be Whole (BWBW) assists Black women on their emotional and mental health journey. Based in Harlem, they attended last September's Ujamaa Festival. Our March interview focused on healing through truth-telling. "Everyone has something to heal from. No matter what is happening in your life. It doesn't always have to be around trauma." says Ednesha Saulsbury, LCSW, co-founder of Black Woman Be Whole (BWBW).

Reflection and ownership are key cornerstones of their powerful philosophy. **"A lot of times people tell our stories. And sometimes we don't get a chance to tell our own story."**

**Flip to page 4 to see a page from BWBW's beautifully illustrated workbook!**



Write to us at: [EditorsNewsletterCAB@gmail.com](mailto:EditorsNewsletterCAB@gmail.com)



At their self-care brunches, BWBW enables women to find their joy.

BWBW is an organization that gives Black women that space. **“Only 4% of therapists are Black,** so when people are looking for a Black therapist it is really hard to find,” Ednesha adds. This Women’s History Month, we celebrate Ednesha and her co-founder Kimberly Moore. **They teach us that in order to speak truth to power, we must reclaim vulnerability as our “superpower.”**

Ednesha explains that vulnerability is “being exposed to the possibility of harm, either physically or emotionally.” Often, “when you open yourself up and you let people know these parts of you, the fear is that you will be rejected.” To reclaim vulnerability, we need to “trust each other.” BWBW creates safe spaces to explore these emotions and inner truths.

**Vulnerability is our gateway to empathy.** “I have PTSD,” Ednesha shares. “For a long time, that was not something I talked about, because it felt like, how can you be a therapist and have mental illness - like why should I listen to you? How can you help me? But I realized that it was really a part of my superpower: I have an understanding of what mental illness feels like for another person.”

Creating a space to be vulnerable allows us to destigmatize mental health and mental illness. “They’re two very different things. We want to destigmatize mental health to [begin talking about] mental illness, but also normalize talking about how we feel and what we’re thinking.”

Ednesha shares that there are internal pressures that may prevent Black women from opening up. “A lot of times when you come from Black and Brown homes, you’re not able to really talk about your emotions. [Emotions] don’t seem like something that is important. When you become an adult, you’ve pushed down those emotions, so much. You don’t really know how to talk about them.”

**The trope of the “strong Black woman” is a persistent stressor that harms vulnerability.** “It’s actually a really unfair trope, because I’m no stronger than anyone else. There are parts of me that want to be soft. That want to be fragile. That want to be weak. Why can’t I be given that same possibility as other women? Why do I need to be so much stronger?”

BWBW was founded on allowing Black women to reclaim their emotions. When they started, there were “no other programs that focused on the mental and emotional health of Black women.... We noticed there were Black women who held back a little bit, around what they felt comfortable talking about in front of other women of other ethnicities.”

From 2018-2019, Healing Through Truth Telling was BWBW’s signature workshop. The workshops paused once the pandemic hit, so Ednesha and Kim created their hit workbook *Hey Sis, Are You OK?* “During the pandemic we realized we were asking people all the time ‘are you okay?’ And people were saying they were when they weren’t.” The book’s premise allows people to open up and “tell the truth about whether or not they are okay.”

“The funny thing is, we now have workshops around the book,” Ednesha says, instead of their original curriculum. “A lot of our workshops are about self care and really talking about the stigma of mental health. My mission as a therapist is to normalize these conversations and destigmatize illness.”

Healing through truth telling is still at the core of their work. **Ednesha added that 1 in 5 people in the US have a mental illness.** “But we’re not talking about it, and a lot of us are not getting treated. So we just want to make sure people are telling their truth. You can only heal once you stop keeping it a secret.”

Another core aspect of BWBW's work is **joy**. Kimberly Moore shared, "When I think about joy, it's more internal for me. Happiness is the external thing that you all get to see. But joy is more internal. If you don't have that, then what does life look like for you? How are you showing up in your relationships? So we want to make sure that joy is a focus." Joy is crucial to sustaining our health and inner resilience to all of life's daily stressors.

BWBW's Self-Care Brunches enable women to not only find their joy, but also hold "courageous conversations." These uphold vulnerability as an act of bravery, rather than weakness. "The brunches are also about not having to deal with the male gaze. Since I generally see Black women, it's about not dealing with the white gaze as well." The brunches allow women to examine who we are and how we show up when we don't have that gaze upon us."

For girls and young women, Ednesha advises that "they have to understand that they are enough. A lot of times we are often told that we are not enough for whatever reason - financial issues, lack of education. But wherever they are, they have to make sure their voices are heard. A lot of us go into spaces and we feel silent, silenced by the people around us or the actual space that we are in. **Wherever you go, you belong, you should take up space, and you should always ask questions.** And I know growing up, it felt like, oh, that's a stupid question; Like I shouldn't ask. And no, you should ask." Ednesha recalls, as an undergrad, at Hobart and Smith College, she would go into a classroom feeling that she looked or talked differently than the other students. But she learned, "I had to start to decide that, yeah, all of these things may be different, but that doesn't mean you don't deserve to take up space and have a voice in this space. **Find your voice and don't let people take that away from you.**"

*Image created by Geydi Ventura Diaz, Wyandanch Memorial High School and CAB Graphics Editor.*



## What's the connection between environmental and mental health?

Our natural environment has a huge impact on our mental health. Air pollution, housing conditions, extreme weather crises, noise, lack of green space, and other negative environmental exposures can influence our mental health by inducing stress, depression, anxiety, and even PTSD.

Ednesha shares that living in Harlem, "the constant uncertainty of 'am I going to be able to continue to afford where I live and stay in my neighborhood?' causes a lot of stress."

Total wellness means recognizing the connection between our mind, our body, and our earth, and therefore, our mental, physical, and environmental health.

Source:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6210156/>

# Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

**A**s we work on ourselves, we must take stock of who we are and how we express ourselves. We also have to look at how we show up in relationships and how others show up for us. Part of working on yourself involves paying attention to your relationships and how they impact you.

Below are examples of healthy vs. unhealthy behaviors in relationships. Notice those that apply to your various relationships.

Healthy	Unhealthy
✓ There's mutual respect in your relationships with others.	✗ Feel pressure to change who you are for other people.
✓ You are supportive of friends and family. You cheer them on.	✗ You are unaware and don't care about what is happening in the lives of those around you.
✓ In relationships, you are able to express yourself to one another without fear of consequence.	✗ There's an obvious power struggle where you attempt to control or manipulate each other.
✓ You have and encourage full friendships outside of your romantic relationships.	✗ You are jealous of and suspicious of your partner's friends and would rather they only focus on you.
✓ You respect each other's differences.	✗ You are critical of your differences and talk down to one another.
✓ You're not fearful of conflict.	✗ You're willing to go out of your way to avoid conflict.
✓ You accept boundaries set by others.	✗ You have a hard time accepting boundaries and setting your own.
✓ You accept responsibility for your behaviors, attitudes, and values.	✗ You blame others for your behaviors, attitudes, and values.
✓ You accept each other's opinions, friends, and interests.	✗ You are not trusting of each other's friends, and you try to sway the other's opinions and interests.
✓ You can operate independently and as a team.	✗ You are codependent and have trouble operating separately.
✓ You have empathy for others.	✗ You lack empathy for others.
✓ You are willing to compromise.	✗ You either stand firm on your opinions or easily give in and ignore your desires.
✓ You genuinely care about the interest and growth of others.	✗ You don't care about the interest and growth of others, and seeing others succeed makes you uncomfortable.
✓ Your relationships positively contribute to your self-esteem and emotional energy.	✗ Your relationships are toxic and drain you instead of lifting you up.