



I AM A BETTER ME! INC.

Bi-Monthly Newsletter-January 2026



LOOKING AHEAD TO THE NEW YEAR

IN 2026, I AM A BETTERME! INC.

Receives MOORE Equity in Mental Health Grant

Expanding Mental Health Support for Youth of Color in Bronx, New York

Sponsored by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation

Message from the CEO

Patricia Kerr, M.Div

Last year, our inaugural Mental Health Conference, "Shining the Light on Mental Health," united 156 participants and sparked ongoing conversations throughout our community. The connections we made have led to valuable new resources and partnerships with local stakeholders and faith groups. Having worked closely with youth who have experienced trauma, I recognize how overwhelming these challenges can be, but I have also witnessed the profound difference that accessible support can make.

We are pleased to announce that our organization has been awarded the distinguished 2026 MOORE Equity in Mental Health Community Grant by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. This funding enables the expansion of comprehensive mental health services for Bronx youth of color ages 12–24. By integrating professional expertise with faith-based outreach initiatives, we aim to enhance the relevance and accessibility of care. The expanded program comprises workshops, youth ambassador training, and coordinated outreach through community and faith organizations, with the objective of connecting more than 300 youths to support resources over the next two years.

Achievements: Fostering Innovation

In 2025, collaboration with local stakeholders, SOMOS Social Care Network, the New York City Suicidality Council, and area churches enabled us to reach a wide range of community members. These partnerships have ensured that our programs remain accessible in trusted environments and are tailored to individual needs.

Looking Ahead: Embracing Opportunities

As we approach 2026, we are preparing to face physician shortages, rising insurance costs, and the persistent digital divide. Our ongoing goal is to develop effective solutions, advocate for vulnerable populations, and leverage technology to address gaps in care. With sustained collaboration and engagement, I am confident that together, we can build a stronger, more resilient community.

Strategic Positioning for Crisis Response

Through secured partnerships with organizations like SOMOS Social Care Network, I AM A BETTER ME! INC. can connect individuals and families to the support they need. Our streamlined referral systems, virtual and in-person workshops, regular newsletters, and educational content create a robust safety net for our community. Targeted outreach, especially through faith-based organizations, underscores our commitment to accessible, responsive care for all, especially during times of heightened need.

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SOMOS

Community Needs & Targeted Initiatives

Our ongoing outreach has identified key needs in the community: employment opportunities for the disadvantaged, financial assistance, housing, nutrition, elder care, and autism services. We also provide comprehensive support for individuals affected by cancer and their families.

Expanded Autism & Gambling Prevention

We are broadening our autism initiatives by hosting monthly workshops at local churches, bringing together families and experts for education and direct support. In addition, we are collecting data on autistic gamblers to design more effective interventions and improve recovery outcomes within this population.

Our partnership with Gambling-Family & Friends of Gamblers (FFOG) is launching new initiatives in 2026 focused on gambling prevention, early intervention, and family support to address the broader mental health impacts of gambling.



Hurt By Gambling. **Silent No Longer.**

RESOURCES

<https://www.getevive.com/>

If you are in crisis or need support right away:

- ✓ National Problem Gambling Helpline
- ✓ (24/7, confidential): 1-800-426-253
- ✓ Peer Support: Text "HOME" to 741741
- ✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- ✓ The Better Institute: 1-412-438-8510



**UNLOCK EMOTIONS
TRANSFORM CULTURE
ELEVATE PEOPLE**

KEY FEATURES



Emotional Analysis

Proprietary algorithm providing real-time emotional insights.



Data Hub Marketplace

Comprehensive suite of tools for customized solutions.



Security Measures

Latest encryption technologies and data security safeguards.



Seamless Integration

Effortless integration with existing applications and channels.



Ethical Use of AI

Commitment to responsible and empathetic AI usage.

HOW WE DO IT

Data Collection

Our data collection platform allows users to create emotionally intelligent customized forms to capture data.

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www.thaut.ai

Emotional Spectrum

Analyze and understand the emotions of customer interactions. Build an emotional profile over time.

Actions & Insights

Take action with emotion driven responses. Tell a story with your data and make informed decisions.

KEY FOCUS AREA

- Feedback & Conflict Resolution
- Education, Training & Development
- Workforce Coaching & Mentoring
- Recruitment & Selection
- Personal Growth & Improvement
- Mental Health Monitoring
- Crisis Management



Become a Monthly Supporter: Make a Lasting Impact

Your monthly support is vital. By becoming a monthly supporter, you help ensure that families and young people in our community have consistent access to critical mental health care, especially those facing barriers. Your contributions fund essential workshops, counseling services, and emergency assistance, making it possible for us to respond quickly and effectively to those in need.

Together, we can provide hope, foster healing, and empower every young person to shine their light. Your support builds a more inclusive, resilient community—one story of hope at a time.

How to Join as a Monthly Supporter

1. Visit our website at www.iamabetterme.org
2. Select the "Become a Monthly Supporter" option on our homepage.
3. Choose your preferred monthly contribution amount (\$25 or more).
4. Complete the secure online registration form.

Thank you for considering a monthly commitment—your partnership truly changes lives.

**As part of our wellness program, we are honored to share
Bi-monthly Reflections from Rev. Elmer Porter Hardy Jr.
These reflections foster personal connection and relevance**

A Powerful Way to Overcome Dark Times: Speak Life



Fear of the dark, known as nyctophobia, is a condition that, according to the Cleveland Clinic, affects people of all ages. It is strongly associated with anxiety disorders and can lead to a number of challenges, including insomnia at night, fatigue during the day, panic attacks, and even a fear of going outside after dark. Statistics show that 45% of children and more than 12% of adults will experience this phobia at some point in their lives. While literal darkness is a frightening reality for millions of people suffering from nyctophobia, metaphorical darkness such as the loss of loved ones, jobs, or material possessions—can be equally devastating.

A Personal Experience in Ministry

One of the most significant and memorable moments in my ministry occurred during my four-year pastorate at the former First Baptist Church in Port Jefferson, NY. A Spanish gentleman entered my office after having driven all morning from New Jersey to Long Island, searching for a place to end his life following the loss of a relationship. By chance, he saw our church sign, called my office, and decided to give life one more chance before giving up entirely.

Through God's grace, I was able to guide him out of darkness and into the light of life by sharing foundational biblical principles and essential spiritual precepts. I emphasized the value of speaking life, and he left my office in a better state than when he arrived.

The Power of Speaking Life

The next time you or someone you love feels overwhelmed by the darkness of loss or despair, remember that your words hold power. The ability to speak life and death resides in your tongue, and you have the God-given authority to declare positive change. You can say things that are not as though they were and watch them become reality.

This principle is rooted in the story of creation: when the earth was covered in darkness, God spoke life and said, "Let there be light." In the dark seasons of your life, do the same. Speak life, happiness, joy, stability, and serenity into your circumstances, and observe the transformation that follows.

Resources for Support

- Rev Hardy is available to render Pastoral Counseling to those in need
- Clifford Beers Community Care Center
- Call or Text 24/7: 988
- Email: elmerhardy@comcast.net
- Phone: (347) 622-8676

Stay Inspired,
Rev. Elmer Porter Hardy, Jr. Pastor
The Winthrop Baptist Church, Deep River, Ct.

Gabrieal Volpe BCHN: Nutrition Advocacy for Children with Autism



Gabrieal Volpe is committed to using nutrition to support children with autism and their families. She holds a Master's in Complementary and Alternative Medicine focused on nutrition, a Board Certification in Holistic Nutrition, a Bachelor's in Psychology, and is pursuing her Registered Dietitian credential at Cedar Crest College, integrating expertise in both nutrition science and behavioral therapy.

Her background as a registered behavioral therapist informs her integrative approach, developing evidence-based nutritional strategies to improve behavior, reduce sensory challenges, and enhance well-being for autistic children.

At WIC, she assists mothers of autistic children in establishing healthy eating habits, individualized nutrition plans are created, addressing mealtime difficulties to support both dietary and behavioral needs at home.

Gabrieal also has leadership experience in nutrition counseling and founded Garden Spirit Cuisine, a holistic practice blending nutrition, psychology, and motivational support. Her mission is to make nutrition practical and effective for families navigating autism by providing actionable solutions and presentations that empower parents, caregivers, and professionals.

Food Dyes & Your Child

What Every Parent Needs To Know

- Why Worry About Food Dyes? In the U.S. 28% of all packaged foods marketed for children contain artificial food dyes.
- In 2022, over 28 million pounds of color additives were certified for use in U.S. foods & beverages.
- Red 40, Yellow 5, & Yellow 6 are the most common dyes present in thousands of cereals, candies, snacks, drinks, & even "healthy" products.

Why Does This Matter?

Artificial dyes have been linked to a range of health & behavioral concerns in children 1-18 years old, especially in children with autism or ADHD, such as:

- ✓ Increased hyperactivity, irritability, aggression & difficulty focusing.
- ✓ Impaired memory, slower learning & reduced attention span.
- ✓ Worsening of meltdowns, repetitive stimming behaviors & regression in language or social skills.

The colors we're dyeing for

Red 40

Hyperactivity, and various types of cancer

Red 3

Thyroid cancer, and chromosomal damage

Yellow 5

Hyperactivity, chromosomal damage and thyroid tumors

Yellow 6

Hyperactivity, and kidney and adrenal gland tumors

Green 3

Bladder and testes tumors

Blue 1

Hyperactivity, chromosomal damage, kidney tumors and asthma

Blue 2

Hyperactivity, chromosomal damage, and brain and bladder tumors

Foods With Artificial Dyes Contain 141% More Sugar

Foods with synthetic coloring tend to be higher in sugar, compounding behavior & learning issues.

The high & increasing prevalence of these dyes means many children are exposed to levels of dye & sugar that exceed what was originally considered safe, putting their mental, emotional & academic well-being at risk.

Top 10 Facts Parents Should Know About Artificial Food Dyes

Empower your family: Small changes now can mean healthier, happier kids especially for those most sensitive to artificial dyes

1) Early Awareness:

Companies & regulators have known about food dye risks for over a century. The first federal investigations began in the 1880s due to toxicity concerns.

2) Where Dyes Hide:

Packaged foods and drinks with bright or uniform colors—like Froot Loops, Skittles, Doritos, Cheetos, fruit snacks, sodas, & sports drinks—are likely to contain synthetic dyes.

3) Exposure Is Widespread & High:

Red 40 is in over 36,000 products; more than 13,000 packaged foods & beverages in the U.S. contain synthetic dyes.

4) Kids Get More Than Intended:

Actual intake in kids often exceeds the “safe” limits originally set by the FDA, especially for frequent consumers of packaged foods & drinks.

5) Behavioral Effects Are Real:

Children exposed to high levels of Red 40 & Yellow 5 showed a 30% increase in irritability & 25% more aggressive outbursts versus dye-free diets. 52% of studies show dyes trigger or worsen behavioral problems. (California OEHHA, 2021)

6) Cognitive and Learning Risks:

Dyes are linked to impaired memory, slower learning, & reduced attention span—especially in children with high intake.

7) Autistic Kids Are Especially Vulnerable:

Dyes can worsen meltdowns, repetitive behaviors, self-injury, & regression in language/social skills. Effects are more severe & persistent in autistic children.

8) Dye + Sugar = Double Trouble:

Packaged foods with artificial dyes have 141% more sugar on average than foods with no dye—compounding risks for behavior & learning.

9) Regulation Isn't Always Enough:

FDA sets maximum allowed levels & requires certification, but real consumption in children can far exceed safe margins. There is no “Generally Recognized as Safe” (GRAS) status for synthetic dyes; each must be assessed & approved for use by the FDA.

10) Simple Steps Make a Big Difference:

Read ingredient labels & look for Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, etc. Choose organic, dye-free, or minimally processed options. Whole fruits, plain dairy, & water are safest for all ages. Teach kids & teens to make informed choices about colorful packaged foods & drinks



Sources: California OEHHA Systematic Review (2021); FDA Color Additive Certification Reports (2022).

Schab & Trinh Meta-Analysis (2004); Historical FDA/USDA documentation



Community Impact and Collaborative Initiatives in 2025

The below graph provides a visual representation of our community impact in 2025, reflecting our alignment with the SOMOS Social Care Network, partnerships with local churches, and the execution of robust awareness campaigns. Through these strategic collaborations, we have been able to implement a wide array of conferences and workshops that address critical topics such as mental health, suicide prevention, autism awareness, and other essential areas of need. Affecting more than 498 households and individuals directly.

Our commitment to education and outreach is further demonstrated by the publication of our bi-monthly newsletter, which reaches an audience of 4,500 both electronically and in print. The data depicted in the graph highlights the effectiveness of these collective efforts, showcasing our progress in expanding outreach, building meaningful connections, and addressing the diverse challenges faced by our community.

SOMOS Social Care Network Alignment



GAMBLING IS EVERYWHERE!

From Casinos to Supermarkets

Paulette J. O'Gilvie, PhD, MBA, CCGC

Casino & Gambling Researcher | Public Health Advocate | Prevention Specialist



I never imagined that gambling would become such a routine part of daily life. Years ago, placing a bet meant planning a trip to a casino or racetrack—an event that was separate from everyday activities.

Now, with a smartphone always within reach, betting can occur at any moment. More surprising is how gambling has begun to appear in some of the very places I visit for essentials, such as supermarkets and corner stores.

This shift has made me pause and reflect on just how deeply gambling is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Recently, I learned that a family-owned grocery chain, located 34 miles outside of Chicago, received approval to install licensed slot machines inside its supermarket. While legal under current regulations, this new mode of “offline” local gambling has raised concerns among residents and advocates, many of whom question the ethics of introducing wagering into spaces frequented by families, seniors, and individuals managing often tight household budgets.

Stories like this, to me, reflect how gambling has become increasingly normalized. Local boards and legislators often frame gambling expansion as routine economic development, emphasizing tax revenues and business sustainability while minimizing social costs. While policymakers continue to debate expanding video gaming terminals into bars, restaurants, and other everyday venues, the installation of gaming machines sends the message that gambling is a normalized form of recreation rather than a behavior with well-documented public health risks. The availability of gambling in local spaces has moved beyond Chicago to cities such as Philadelphia, which have struggled with the spread of electronic gambling machines (EGMs). Often labeled as “skill games” and found in corner stores, gas stations, and laundromats, EGMs replicate casino-style play while

operating in spaces that lack meaningful oversight, responsible gaming safeguards, or access to support services. From mobile apps to grocery store slot gaming, individuals can move from daily tasks to gambling with little store slot gaming, individuals can move from daily tasks to gambling with little pause or reflection. However, constant exposure to gambling can increase the risk of problem gambling, financial stress, and associated mental-health harms.

As I reflect on the expansion of gambling into more local spaces, I realize that the normalization of gambling in our daily lives presents a challenge for society at large. The burdens of problem gambling fall to communities, social services, faith institutions, and healthcare systems. It is important to recognize that gambling expansion disproportionately affects communities already facing socioeconomic disadvantages. As we enter 2026, let's work together to raise awareness through thoughtful dialogue and implement effective prevention measures and policies to protect individuals, families, and communities. Gambling may be everywhere, but so is our capacity to make a positive difference.

The advertisement features a smartphone displaying the Evive app's main screen. The screen shows a "Good afternoon, Sam" greeting, a "Our Community" section, and a "Consecutive Check-ins" counter of 48 days. To the right of the phone is a light blue callout box with four circular icons and corresponding text: "Set Your Goals" (Stay in control, cut back, or stop gambling; whatever path fits your needs), "Track Your Progress" (Stay on track and build positive habits with brief daily check-ins), "Learn & Grow" (Access expert content for a life free from gambling harm), and "Build Connections" (Join peers and experts in a private, judgment-free space). At the bottom of the callout box is a blue banner with the text "Download the Evive App for FREE access!" and icons for the App Store and Google Play. A QR code is also present. The bottom right of the ad includes the text "To learn more, visit www.getevive.com".

I AM A BETTER ME! INC.

Awarded MOORE Equity in Mental Health Grant by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF)

The Bronx-based nonprofit, I AM A BETTER ME! INC. has been awarded the multi-year MOORE Equity in Mental Health Community Grant by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF). This funding will support Our “Shining the Light: Youth of Color Mental Health Initiative,” enabling the organization to add to culturally responsive mental health services for youth of color (ages 12–24) in Bronx, New York. The initiative addresses significant challenges such as high poverty rates and common barriers including: stigma, trauma, & mistrust.

Grant Requirements and Program Activities

- ✓ Incorporate youth perspectives into program development and decision-making processes to ensure that initiatives reflect their needs and voices.
- ✓ Ensure cultural inclusivity and respect across all services, fostering an environment that honors the diverse backgrounds of youth and their families.
- ✓ Promote collaboration among youth, families, and community members, building strong support networks within the community.
- ✓ Maintain an ongoing commitment to learning and adapting based on community needs, allowing for responsive and effective programming.
- ✓ With the grant’s support, I AM A BETTER ME! INC. will conduct stress management and wellness workshops in both community and faith-based settings.
- ✓ Youth ambassadors will be trained to educate their peers and facilitate connections to support resources, working in partnership with local schools, the SOMOS Social Care Network, the NYC Suicidality Council, and local churches.
- ✓ The program aims to reach and positively impact more than 300 youth over a two-year period.

Collaborating for Educational Impact



Building Trust:

To foster trust and reduce barriers to participation, the organization delivers services within familiar community environments. Leveraging cultural competency, faith-based collaborations, and extensive community experience, I AM A BETTER ME! INC. effectively engages youth and their families.

Addressing the Urgent Need:

National data highlights the critical nature of this work: one in five youth are affected by a diagnosable mental health disorder annually, yet less than half receive treatment. This disparity is particularly acute among racial and ethnic minority youth in under-resourced communities such as the Bronx.

Gratitude and Call to Action

The organization expresses sincere gratitude to APAF, APA, and all community partners for their invaluable support in empowering youth of color. Community members, organizations, or individuals interested in collaborating or joining the Shining the Light: Youth of Color Mental Health Initiative are encouraged to contact I AM A BETTER ME! INC. directly for more information



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