Chicago Rapper G Herbo Connects Black Youth to Mental Health Services

His new initiative, “Swervin’ Through Stress,” will allow 150 kids access to mental wellness therapy.

August 4, 2020 By Alicia Green

Having been clinically diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) almost two years ago, 24-year-old rapper G Herbo knows how mental health issues can affect Black youth. This is why he started “Swervin’ Through Stress: Tools to Help Black Youth Navigate Mental Wellness,” an initiative that provides mental health resources to young Black people in underserved communities, Chicago Reader reports.

“‘Swervin’ Through Stress’ is a project I put together to put 150 kids through therapy,” Herbo said. “At their age, you never know how critical it can be to have someone to talk to—to have someone help you better yourself and your situation.”

Herbo announced the multifaceted initiative on social media this week. Beginning in September, Black youth ages 18 through 25 can apply to receive free therapy sessions for 12 weeks.

In addition, the hip-hop star’s team launched a hotline in conjunction with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Anyone can call 844-457-7873 or text NAMI to 741741 Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST for 24/7 emergency professional help.)

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WHILE 75% OF ALL LIFETIME MENTAL ILLNESSES WILL BEGIN BY THE AGE OF 24, ONLY 1 OUT OF 3 AFRICAN AMERICANS WHO NEED MENTAL HEALTH CARE RECEIVE IT. EARLY INTERVENTION CAN HELP REDUCE THE SEVERITY OF AN ILLNESS. ACCESS TO RESOURCES IS ESSENTIAL ANNOUNCING SWERVIN' THROUGH STRESS - IM WORKING WITH @NAMICOMMUNICATE, @AUDIOMACK, AND @INNOPSYCH TO HELP INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AMONGST BLACK YOUNG ADULTS AND DESTIGMATIZE BLACK CULTURAL NARRATIVES ABOUT THERAPY. SWIPE TO LEARN MORE #SWERVINTHROUGHSTRESS TO DONATE AND GET MORE INFO, VISIT WWW.SWERVINTHROUGHSTRESS.COM (LINK IN BIO)

A post shared by G HERBO (@nolimitherbo) on Jul 31, 2020 at 2:04pm PDT

According to the program's website, the goal is to increase young Black adults' access and use of mental health services and to normalize therapy in the African-American community. After the first 150 kids, Herbo wants to expand the initiative and offer resources to 500 more youth.

"Everything I do comes from my life experiences," he said. "I understood at an early age that even though my story is significant in its own way, other people could relate to it. But I was never motivated to be a voice [on PTSD] or a key focal point until I recognized I actually became a product of it."

Herbo explained how growing up in Chicago surrounded by drug addiction and violence, living in poverty and experiencing the death of loved ones affected his mental health. (At age 8, he

witnessed his first death and lost friends and to gun violence as he grew older.)

He noted that PTSD prevented him from finishing high school because he lived in fear of being killed. “I was in fear of my life all the time, so I had to carry guns,” he said.

Eventually, his lifestyle, which was characterized by drugs, violence and guns, got him arrested. His lawyer suggested he see a therapist, and he began regular sessions that allowed him to open up and unpack a lot of his trauma. He also reflected on how his experiences shaped him.

“I can’t tell you how your sessions would go, but I would recommend everybody go through the process,” he said. “A lot of times people don’t understand or realize it, but you hurt the people closest to you while suffering from this mental illness, because you think it’s normal and you try to react where you don’t let it affect you.”

Herbo wants young people to know that being emotional and vulnerable can help them better understand themselves, address any negativity and improve their lives.

For related coverage, read “Suicide Attempts Are on the Rise Among Black Teens,” “Chance the Rapper Pledges $1 Million to Chicago Mental Health Services” and “More Frequent Mental Health Visits May Reduce Suicide by At-Risk Youth.”

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