

# A Bit of Me

This series of profiles on SUNY Broome community members is a part of the Student Village diversity calendar initiative. We will be highlighting members in our community who identify with or can speak on the diversity theme or topic for each month. The theme for February is Black History month and the topic is mental health in the black community. To be featured in this series please reach out to Pamela Alvarez or Alexandria Donkor.

## Mary Prempeh

SUNY Broome Friend



**Background:** Mary Prempeh is a social worker in New York City where she works extensively with youth in the black community.

### WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU SEE, IF ANY, THAT PREVENT THE BLACK COMMUNITY FROM RECEIVING ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE IN THE AREA OF MENTAL HEALTH?

Many African Americans believe in home remedy medicine instead of receiving health care. Most African Americans also attend church as a form of comfort instead, and they may feel ashamed to express their thoughts or concerns. This makes many afraid to seek help.

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH YOU BELIEVE WE CAN HELP TO SUPPORT THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN MAKING ADVANCEMENTS TOWARDS MENTAL?

Providing each other support and having a group meeting to address mental health concerns and provide support to the black community.

### WHAT DOES MENTAL HEALTH MEAN TO YOU AND HOW DO YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURS?

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. How I am able to take care of my mental health is by expressing my thoughts in my journal along with going on my knees to pray.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH MEMBERS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN THE AREA OF MENTAL HEALTH? ARE THERE ANY FACTORS THAT MAKE IT DIFFERENT FROM WORKING WITH SOMEONE WITH A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND?

My experience working with members of the black community has been a rewarding one. As a social worker I have been able to relate with the black community. As a social worker I feel empowered, advocate, motivate, connect, and encourage others by saying no matter what situation they may be in or find themselves in, there is a way to overcome and it all begins with the individual.

### WHAT ARE SOME TIPS YOU WOULD GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR OWN MENTAL HEALTH?

I will suggest someone struggling with mental health to seek help and to talk about their situation with a person who they can confide in. I will recommend them to see a doctor. I will also recommend for someone to seek a psychiatrist for evaluation. They should also seek to speak with a therapist, social worker and ect.

### WHAT IS YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE AS IT RELATES TO MENTAL HEALTH?

Awareness of the impact of child abuse and neglect in the short term, long term and adulthood. Understanding the impact of parental problems such as mental health illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual addiction, depression, grief/loss, relationship issues, school/ collage issues and child development at different stages and ect. Group counseling to family and individuals with mental health concerns. Maintaining mandated contacts: caretaker, child, worker, biological parents, and siblings, clinical, medical and school.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF YOUR JOB?

One of the most difficult parts of my job is assisting someone with an addiction issue to stop relapsing. Another part of my job in which I find difficult is coaching a person whose mind has already been made up in wanting to commit suicide. Another difficult part of my job is feeling powerless in what I do everyday.

## WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE MOST REWARDING PART OF YOUR JOB?

Making a difference in the lives of those who are encountering a severe mental health situation and seeing them smile. I also find helping people cope with mental, physical illness, unemployment, divorce, poverty, addiction, abuse and discrimination rewarding part of my job. Lastly, seeing the individuals you provided help to come back to notify you that you are part of their change and because of me. The individuals who were dealing with mental health are now a doctor or have molded me into who I am today.