



Mistah F.A.B. Delivers Message of Acceptance in Alameda County's First Mental Health Summit

Oakland hip-hop star joined event to promote critical services offered across county

By AC Health Communications Team

HAYWARD, Calif. - It's okay to not be okay.

That was the message delivered on April 24 at Chabot College by Stanley Petey Cox, better known to hip hop fans and beyond by his stage name, Mistah F.A.B.

Cox, who has been rapping professionally for more than 20 years, was on hand at Chabot College to talk about his life experiences as part of his keynote speaking duties for a first-of-its-kind mental health summit hosted by the Office of Ethnic Services under Alameda County Health's Behavioral Health Department (ACBHD).



ACBHD Director Dr. Karyn Tribble delivers opening remarks at the Building Bridges Conference.

Titled "Building Bridges: Mental Health & Recovery Across Communities Conference," the all-day event featured numerous panel discussions and breakout sessions on the topics of mental health, substance use and community re-entry challenges, convened by Alameda County Behavioral Health officials and their nonprofit partners. Along with generating difficult conversations on those issues, the conference was aimed at raising awareness about all the resources, services and assistance offered throughout Alameda County. Capping off the day's event was Cox's speech, an inspiring rallying cry on the importance of destigmatizing mental health challenges and supporting those in need. An Oakland

native, Cox recounted his difficult upbringing, which included a father lost to AIDS and a young mother who was growing up on her own at the same time that she was raising her son.



Mental health service providers and ACBHD staff participated in various breakout sessions throughout the daylong event.

“I know way too many people who carry around their hurt like it’s a medal—we wear it like a chain,” said Cox. “As a Black man, I know I do that, but really everyone walks around with some kind of hidden trauma. We normalize that—we feel like it’s a badge of honor to live with that pain. And I’m here to say that doesn’t have to be the way.”

Cox demonstrated that vulnerability and empathy in real time during his speech, when he offered his support for a young man who walked into the discussion room late and seemingly distressed. Sensing some discomfort, Cox offered to give the young man a hug. While the man initially resisted, the two eventually embraced, to a wide round of applause.



Oakland hip-hop artist and keynote speaker Mistah F.A.B. embraces a conference attendee during his talk.

“Sometimes you just need a hug,” said Cox. “When was the last time you smiled at someone and asked them if they needed a hug? I’m telling you; it can change their day.”

Cox’s display of impromptu camaraderie in many ways encapsulated the intent of the summit—generating dialogue and connection between individuals who might normally not connect.

“The biggest thing we hope that people gain from this event is community,” said Dr. Clyde Lewis, the administrator for ACBHD’s Office of Ethnic Services. “If I’m in the community and I’m looking for services, I’m not necessarily calling an organization. I’m looking to connect with a person—with an individual. Events like this allow us to meet the person behind the organization and to make that human connection.”

Rita Robinson, a program specialist at the Office of Ethnic Services, echoed Dr. Lewis’ emphasis on bringing communities together, particularly on taboo topics that might be challenging for individuals to speak openly about.

“Within our communities, we know that a lot of times people are afraid to talk about mental health and substance use disorders,” said Robinson. “We wanted to create an open space where people could feel comfortable coming in and discussing these topics—to talk about their lived experiences together.”

The Office of Ethnic Services advances health equity by creating racially, linguistically, and ethnically equitable access to local residents.

The Office will be hosting two more all-day summits in the near future—one on [May 3](#) at Hayward Veteran’s Memorial and [May 8](#) at Merritt College. Cox will be at both events—to once again relay his message of acceptance and fellowship.

“It’s okay to not be okay—that’s the biggest thing I want people to take away from these events,” said Cox. “We walk around with a mask on—we hide who we truly are, we are afraid to be vulnerable. We live our whole lives in that kind of captivity, but I want people to see what it looks like when someone frees themselves.”

###