

Arab Community Workgroup CSIP Write-Up

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1. What did you do?

Under the direction and support of the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE), the Arab Community Workgroup (ACW) planned and executed an outreach event for the Arab community in San Mateo County. The event was completed in collaboration with Westmoor High School and was also hosted on their premises on April 14th, 2016. The event was titled “Health, Mood, and Well-being: Services for you and your Family!” The gathering commenced with signing in, completing a pre-test, and enjoying a light Middle Eastern dinner while listening to Arabic music. Childcare services for youth ages 5-12 years and interpreter services were offered to support community members and help them overcome some of the barriers that may have kept them from attending. Sarah and Islam each spoke to the members in attendance.

Sarah presented the psychological piece, discussing some of the myths and barriers that Arabs may face regarding seeking services. She also provided psycho-education on the two most common mental disorders, anxiety and depression, and offered different techniques attendees can apply to improve their emotional health and well-being. Sarah paid special attention to the biggest barrier to seeking services, confidentiality, and addressed it at lengths. She highlighted the different processes in place to protect patients’ privacy and health information. Sarah also introduced the community to what anxiety and depression’s symptoms usually look like and shared the different somatic and emotional symptoms associated with each. She then proceeded to present different cognitive and behavioral techniques that have evidentiary support for their effectiveness. In terms of cognitive techniques, Sarah presented the “catch it, check it, and change it” technique commonly used to address negative automatic thoughts. She also described how to set up a worry period or log and the benefits of doing so. In terms of the behavioral recommendations, Sarah highlighted the importance of good sleep, healthy and

balanced diets, physical activity, and scheduling of pleasant activities. Sarah ended her presentation with collaborating with attendees to create a wellness toolbox and led a brief deep breathing exercise.

Islam's portion of the event covered the practical and logistical issues in accessing services from San Mateo County. Islam presented the step-by-step process necessary in order to receive services through both Behavioral Health & Recovery Services (BHRS) clinics as well as School-Based services. Islam covered the necessary requirements of receiving services through BHRS, starting with having the appropriate health insurance coverage and contacting the ACCESS line to begin establishing care. Islam also highlighted members' right to request School-Based services for their child(ren) and the ways to achieve that. Islam also introduced the attendees to the different groups available to clients of the county, such as the Parent Project. Further, Islam familiarized the members to available community resources, such as the Arab Resource and Organizing Center, Arab Cultural and Community Center, the Yaseen Center, and the Ramallah Club of San Francisco. She also directed them to spiritual support through the Arab mosques and churches available in the area, if they are so inclined. Islam ended her presentation with a brief review of how to receive services in San Francisco County.

After the presentation, members of the audience were encouraged to ask questions or make any comments about the information that was presented. The outcome was a lively discussion where members explained the different barriers and obstacles they face, such as high cost of living, difficulty finding housing, and Islamophobia. Islam, Maggie, Sarah, and other members of the audience helped gauge the discussion and offered validation of the difficulties that are faced within the Arab community as well as ways to receive help and support for their struggles. At the end of the discussion, attendees completed the post-test and course evaluation and turned them in to the presenters. Attendees were also given a pamphlet that held necessary mental health and community services and resources; members also had the

opportunity to access the “resources” table at the event, which held different booklets, pamphlets, cards, and pages with different mental health resources.

2. How did it go?

The event went very well, perhaps even better than expected. Around 20 members of the Arab community attended the meeting. Additionally, non-community members were also in attendance. Several attendees brought their children and utilized the childcare service provided. Additionally, multiple attendees used the interpreter services and listened to the translated presentations via the provided headsets. A large number of attendees utilized the Arabic versions of the pre- and post-tests as well as course evaluations.

The event was warmly welcomed by the attendees. Many inquired about upcoming meetings in the future and expressed their appreciation for holding such events. The community members were engaged in discussion amongst themselves and also with the presenters, bringing up difficulties and offering solutions. One attendee demonstrated a breathing exercise she finds useful and other people in the audience seemed willing to try it as well.

Islam and Sarah would like to extend their deepest thanks to Maggie Furey and Maria Lorente-Foresti for supporting them in this project. Thanks are also extended to Colin Hart and Gloria Gutierrez for providing constructive criticism on the presentations and helping at the event. Finally, special thanks to ODE for initiating the ACW and providing the opportunity to serve the Arab community.

3. What did you find?

Initially, we had believed that the members of the Arab community would know little about accessing mental health services, but perhaps knew information regarding where to receive outside community and religious support. We found that most of the attendees were not aware of how to access mental health services, or that they were even an option to receive.

We also found that most attendees were unaware of the different community and spiritual support; this was quite shocking, as we had believed the attendees would know at least where to access community and spiritual support.

Some members of the audience were knowledgeable about different ways to practice self-care. One member of the audience explained a specific type of breathing technique she uses with her children, which was a great addition to the presentation. Additionally, we found that most of the members of the audience had recently relocated to the bay area, most of who had been in the Bay Area for less than a year; we met several refugees as well.

The most salient piece that we found was how true and real the struggles are for those who identify as Arab/Arab American, especially when faced with Islamophobia. There seemed to be fear and mistrust behind accessing services, fearing they would be misunderstood or judged as their values and beliefs are different than the western culture. We did inform the attendees of the responsibility of clinicians to treat the mental health issue at hand rather than change your mind about beliefs or values. We also reassured the members that BHRS trains their staff exceptionally well around cultural humility. However, we are not entirely sure whether the reassurance offered any relief, especially as the discrimination that the attendees face is regular.

4. What are your recommendations for BHRS going forward?

The main recommendations for BHRS moving forward are twofold: maintain connections with the Arab Community and ensure that staff members throughout San Mateo County are properly trained in cultural humility around working with the Arab and/or Muslim client.

The ACW event was held on April 14th, 2016 – hosting another event, whether hosted solely by ACW or paired with another organization or program, would be essential in maintaining connections to the Arab community. One recommendation is to pair up with Westmoor High School again and help host their “breaking fast” event at the start of Ramadan

(holy month for Muslims, which begins June 6th this year), or Eid celebration (celebration that occurs at the end of Ramadan, July 6th). This would be essential in ensuring that the connections with the community members stay present and that the members of the community feel supported by ACW.

Additionally, a county wide training on “Understanding the Arab Community” or “Understanding the Muslim client” would be imperative in ensuring that all county members are culturally aware and holding cultural humility when working with this population. We are aware that training for BHRS staff was done in January 2015; however, it would be beneficial to have this kind of training annually or bi-annually as the Arab population in the Bay Area is rapidly increasing. Additionally, the training in 2015 was 3.5 hours, with the majority of attendees requesting a longer training; an all-day, 9am-4pm training would be recommended for the next step.

According the White Paper that was done in 2015, initial members of the ACW wanted to gather key members of the Arab community and have a discussion around needs of this community. This may have been accomplished by the presentation done by Sarah and Islam; however, it would still be a good idea to hear what the needs are from specific leaders in the Arab community.