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5/30/16

Cultural Stipend Internship Program

For my cultural project I facilitated a three day PhotoVoice workshop for older adults, age 60 and older who have a mental health diagnosis and are receiving mental health services from San Mateo County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS). The prompt was, "What has your experience been like as an older adult seeking/receiving mental health services?".

"PhotoVoice is a method of combining photography with grassroots social action...Participants are asked to represent their communities or express their points of view by photographing scenes that highlight themes...These photographs are collaboratively interpreted, and narratives can be developed that explain how the photos highlight that specific theme. These narratives are used to better understand the community and help plan health or social programs that address community needs."

The workshop had five participants signed-up, two attended and completed the workshop. Some individuals were discouraged due to the time the workshop started 10:30a and others had transportation difficulties, which are challenges that should be taken into consideration when planning future workshops involving this population. Also, there was a \$75 stipend, \$25 per day for those who attended all 2 hour sessions over the 3 day (one per week) workshop. The stipend was not confirmed until the week before the workshop, another factor that would have increased participation had it been confirmed earlier. Food and drink were provided to all participants.

The first day of the workshop was focused on introducing PhotoVoice, symbolism through photography, exploring the theme and brainstorming potential photos to capture the participant's intended message. Participants received a camera to take with them, simple photography instructions and had a week to capture photos. The second day of the workshop (a week later) was focused on reviewing the pictures, choosing a couple per individual to work with, identifying messages within the photo that relate to the prompt and developing brief narratives to accompany the photos. Narrative writing carried over into the third day of the workshop which was not anticipated, due to some technological difficulties and introduction to new concepts, this should be considered when planning future workshops for this population. The final product which consisted of five photos and narratives total, two by one participant and three by the other were displayed at San Mateo County's May Mental Health Month event at the San Mateo County Medical Center.

Themes that arose through the images and narratives were: gratitude for the resources and services that are available to low-income, mentally ill and homeless older adults such as St. Vincent de Paul and BHRS's Central County Adult Clinic. The image of "the sun breaking through" the clouds or a forest was used twice which represented finding the right medications, right provider and achieving "mental wellness". Lastly, the importance of community and acceptance as symbolized by pictures taken at the California Clubhouse.

Suggestions for future workshops targeted at older adults, as stated above, are to consider transportation difficulties, start times which are not too early or late and more time allotted to introducing unfamiliar technology and concepts. My cultural stipend project was presented at a BHRS staff meeting at the Central County adult clinic on Thursday 5/19 for clinicians and psychiatrists who provide direct service to the older adult population. Both the PowerPoint used in the PhotoVoice workshop itself and the PowerPoint used for the presentation at the Central County adult clinic staff meeting are attached.