



Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) – Innovation (INN) Project Brief

Project: Mobile Behavioral Health Services for Farmworkers

Proposed by: Ayudando Latinos A Soñar (ALAS)

Total Amount Requested: \$1,815,000 (\$1.455M services, \$215K BHRS admin, \$145K eval)

Duration of Project: 4 years (3 years of services, 6 mths start-up, 6 mths post eval)

Background

San Mateo County's MHSA Three-Year Plan prioritized strategies to increase culturally-focused community engagement and create culturally responsive and trauma-informed systems. The proposed project was identified as a priority to address the need.

The Challenge

In 2018, there were about 1,300-1,600 farmworkers and an additional 1,700-2,000 children and family members of farmworkers on the San Mateo County coast.¹ The vast majority of them come from working class, Latinx backgrounds. Due to socio-economic and nationality disenfranchisement, farmworkers represent one of the most vulnerable, and hardest-to-reach demographics in San Mateo County. In addition to regularly being victims of various forms of trauma, they are also subjected to high rates of isolation, inadequate housing, and lack of access to resources, which lead to behavioral health challenges like loneliness, depression, anxiety, and alcohol/substance misuse. A qualitative testimonial survey with 13 farmworkers in coastal San Mateo County revealed that all participants reported incidences of mental health symptoms including stress and anxiety.² Barriers to accessing services include the lack of transportation from farms to behavioral health providers and the lack of time off, and energy (after working long days in physically taxing conditions) to receive these services. Reaching this particularly remote, rural farmworker demographic is not feasible with the current brick-and-mortar behavioral health provider services available in San Mateo County.

The Proposed Project

The proposed project will provide direct behavioral health services and wraparound resources in Spanish to farmworkers and their families and children through a mobile health service that integrates cultural arts practices as a pathway for engaging farmworkers and their families with formal clinical behavioral health services spanning prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery. Studies have found that arts and culture can improve mental health by impacting trauma; community-level stress, depression, and substance use disorders; and cultural identity.³ Using culturally-centered arts practices lowers the psychological (stigma, distrust) barriers to adoption of services.⁴ Cultural, financial, and regional accessibility will support the farmworker community to engage in behavioral health support services, fostering healthier families and communities.

¹ [San Mateo County Health Care for the Homeless and Farmworker Health Program 2019 Needs Assessment.](#)

² Source: Ayudando Latinos a Soñar

³ Hand, Jamie and Golden, Tasha. October 4, 2018. [Arts, Culture, and Community Mental Health. Community Development Innovation Review.](#) Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

⁴ Fancourt D, Finn S. [What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review \[Internet\].](#) Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019. 2. RESULTS.





Services:

- Using cultural arts to process grief and trauma and build protective factors through “cultural sensory” activities such as creating altars, songs, stories, and murals centered around significant cultural holidays and celebrations
- Behavioral health outreach and education in farmworker communities
- Assessment and early intervention for farmworkers, their families, and their children who might be at risk of developing behavioral health challenges
- In-person and tele-behavioral health treatment for people who have behavioral health challenges
- Recovery support for people who are recovering from behavioral health challenges
- Linkage to community resources

Target Population

Annually, the pilot program will serve 150+ low-income, Latinx farmworkers and their families in rural, coastal San Mateo County.

The Innovation

- **MHSA Innovative Project Category:** Makes a change to an existing behavioral health practice
- **MHSA Primary Purpose:** Increases access to behavioral health services to underserved groups

The proposed project uniquely combines the healing power of the cultural arts and community connection with an array of formal clinical behavioral health practices. A mobile behavioral health resource that uses the cultural arts as a pathway to service adoption among farmworkers is without precedent. Mobile health care models have been implemented to reach individuals who are underserved; however, most mobile health centers do not provide behavioral health services, do not focus on culturally responsive services, and do not serve rural areas.^{5,6} Additionally, mobile behavioral health programs have tended to focus on crisis response, not the full range of prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery that the proposed project will offer.⁷ Several mobile health clinics serve migrant farmworkers, but few of these clinics are specifically designated to serve the farmworker population, and few offer behavioral health services.⁸

Learning Goals

Through an independent evaluation, this project seeks to learn:

1. To what extent does a culturally responsive, mobile behavioral health resource **expand access** to and utilization of behavioral health services in the Latinx farmworker community?
2. How does an integrated approach using cultural arts and formal clinical services support behavioral health **service adoption and outcomes** among the Latinx farmworker community?
3. What are the needs and **best practices** to support farmworker behavioral health?

⁵ Fernandez, Carlos. [Innovative Mobile Clinics Serving Children and Families of Riverside County With Limited Access to Behavioral Health Services](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp-ri.2016.111005). American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal 2016 11:10, 10-12. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp-ri.2016.111005>; Heath, Sara. August 30, 2019. [How Mobile Health Clinics Drive Care to Vulnerable Patients. Patient Engagement HIT](#). Xtelligent Healthcare Media.

⁶ Malone NC, Williams MM, Smith Fawzi MC, Bennet J, Hill C, Katz JN, Oriol NE. Mobile health clinics in the United States. Int J Equity Health. 2020 Mar 20;19(1):40. doi: 10.1186/s12939-020-1135-7.

⁷ California Health Care Foundation. February 11, 2022. [Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis Response Services in Medi-Cal](#).

⁸ Heath, Sara (2019).

