

SPEAKING *for* OURSELVES



Ideas at Work: Addressing Needs and Assets in Immigrant and Refugee Communities

The *Speaking for Ourselves* study surveyed over 450 immigrants and adult children of immigrants about their lives – their families, education, jobs, health, and engagement in their communities – to learn: What are the biggest needs of immigrant and refugee communities in the Twin Cities? What are issues of greatest concern? What assets are available to address them?

In this booklet, several organizations provide insight about working with immigrant communities to address key issues voiced in the survey in the following areas:

- Education needs
- Health care access
- Mental health needs
- Personal finance management needs
- Social engagement
- Work readiness and employment needs



APRIL 2016

**Wilder
Research**

Information. Insight. Impact.

Education needs

KEY FINDING



15% of respondents said they spoke English well, and even fewer can write in English well. Almost half of Latino respondents with school-age children have children enrolled in ELL programming.

HACER

Goals: To have a positive impact on the academic success of English language learners through an improved curriculum that is able to address the unique educational needs of each student.

Activities: HACER has been working in partnership with MinnCAN, MN Latino Education First, and the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to revamp ELL programming to be more customizable in order to better serve students at varying levels of English proficiency. There is such diversity within each ELL classroom. HACER's work in this area is to develop a curriculum that moves away from a one-size-fits-all model to a curriculum with options that can better meet the unique needs of each student. In addition to curriculum development, we are working to increase the number of teachers in the classroom. This project is still in the development phase due to challenges in finding funding.

Ingredients for success: It is often challenging to change trends. One of the greatest challenges in implementing this program and others like it is to convince the people with the resources to be a part of it.

There are eight basic elements related to success among Latino education programs and they all point toward engagement with the community and cultural appropriateness.



Health care access

KEY FINDING



15% of respondents indicated they had challenges accessing health care for their family, and 29% said lack of interpreters was a barrier to health care access.

Hennepin County Public Health

Goals: To assist people from cultural communities that struggle to access health care and navigate the health care system, and to connect them to primary care providers.

Activities: Hennepin County Public Health provides initial health screenings for immigrants and refugees who are new to the country or to Minnesota. During the screening visit, our number one priority is to connect clients to primary care. We provide referrals to clinics and work to find one that is close to where they live. We recently received a grant from the Minnesota Department of Health that provided us with the resources to hire a Somali Community Health Worker (CHW). This position has been critical to improving our ability to follow-up with Somali families to ensure that they are connecting with a primary care clinic, and continue to stay connected. The CHW's role is to identify resources, engage clients, and provide follow-up to families.

Ingredients for success: Having a CHW position, and having someone in that position from a cultural community that we do a lot of work with has increased the effectiveness of our work. Before we hired a Somali CHW, the follow-up that was needed to ensure a family was connected to a primary care clinic was lacking. Our CHW has helped bridge that gap and has helped our clients understand what it means to have a "family doctor." The CHW reaches out before the screening appointment to make sure the individual is coming, and, after the visit, the CHW makes sure that they access primary care at least once. We currently have a case load that enables our CHW to work with every person we screen and to know about the specific health needs of each case. The CHW has also helped us make mental health referrals that were challenging to make in the past due to language barriers and stigma around mental illness. Some of the partnerships we have had in the past that help us identify new immigrants and refugees who need to be screened have dissolved. The CHW has helped us to continue to identify individuals that need our services.

Mental health needs

KEY FINDING



26% of respondents rated their emotional health as fair or poor. Karen and Hmong participants were the most likely cultural groups to rate their emotional health as fair or poor (67% of Karen respondents, 19% of Hmong respondents).

Wilder Foundation Southeast Asian Services

Goals: To address the mental health needs of Southeast Asian community members using whole-person, whole-family, whole-community approaches that blend services and treatments from both Western and Eastern perspectives.

Activities: Traditionally funded mental health services, provided in a client's language when possible, and from an emic approach include: diagnostic assessment; individual, family, and group psychotherapy; psychological testing; and mental health case management.

In addition, we also offer the Center for Social Healing, an intentional, therapeutic community designed to respond to the many barriers and unmet cultural and mental health service needs of Southeast Asian communities. Grounded in effective, innovative, and recovery-oriented approaches, the Center focuses on alternative ways of healing, learning, community building, and blending in other effective practices.

Ingredients for success: Having staff who are culturally and linguistically competent and who reflect the people you serve really matters. Our providers are true cultural brokers in many arenas and must constantly navigate cultural (including the culture of mental health), linguistic, educational, social, and political systems to help clients meet their needs. As such, providers must be multicultural in every way possible, not just bicultural.

Because providers are often serving people with whom they have a shared history, helping our staff navigate delicate boundaries as well as their own experiences, particularly with trauma, becomes an important part of their daily work.

Attending to issues of acculturation, with staff and with clients, is crucial to success. This informs how people talk about, think about, and engage in recovery.

Using people's traditional ways of speaking and thinking about mental health has many overlaps with Western mental health ideas and concepts, surprisingly, and also equally as many differences.



Personal finance management needs

KEY FINDING



34% said the ability to get credit is a serious problem for their community, which was the most commonly reported problem related to finances.

Twin Cities PBS and ECHO

Goals: To increase financial literacy in immigrant and refugee communities and better understand systemic barriers immigrants face when dealing with mainstream financial institutions.

Activities: In 2013, Twin Cities PBS and ECHO (Emergency, Community, Health, and Outreach) partnered on a project to build bridges between various cultural communities and the banking/finance world. The “Making Money Work” initiative was intended to expose some of the unconscious (and conscious) barriers that can interfere with understanding and use of America’s banking system. The project was funded through a Neighborhood LIFT grant and the Wells Fargo Foundation. TPT and ECHO worked closely with Neighborhood LIFT grant recipients, community-based organizations, and Wells Fargo to create high-impact, multilingual, multi-media communication and educational tools for immigrants. Specifically, TPT/ECHO created two documentaries, a series of digital shorts focused on the journey to financial stability and the dream of homeownership. The concepts for the productions were borne out of a series of community listening sessions where TPT was able to pinpoint gaps in financial literacy and develop culturally relevant productions to address those gaps.

Ingredients for success: This project demonstrated the value of bringing real life challenges to light through community partnerships and media. Partnering media and community outreach leveraged opportunities to increase awareness, add insight, and encourage conversations that ignite change. The documentaries and discussion guides, which were offered to community-based organizations that are bridging financial education gaps in neighborhoods across Minnesota, helped create the awareness and learning as intended.

Social engagement

Minnesota Historical Society

Goals: To engage and sustain engagement with cultural communities where there has been a lack of engagement. To be a resource to all communities, including immigrant and refugee communities.

Activities: MNHS has had some success engaging the Hmong community in Minnesota with our most recent “We Are Hmong Minnesota” exhibit. The rate of volunteerism and internships around this exhibit was very high. Our data show that Asian Pacific visitor attendance increased significantly. Since this exhibit, we have been working to partner with organizations like the Somali Museum of Minnesota, who are already engaging the Somali community in museum activities, to learn how we might engage the Somali community and others. We are also learning how to sustain the relationships we have built. We currently have free Tuesday nights at the Minnesota History Center, and we are examining the impact of the admission fee on attendance among different groups. In addition, we are looking at social media strategies to increase our outreach and communication to immigrant and refugee communities. Lastly, we are exploring how we can practice foundational community engagement and increase diversity among our staff.

Ingredients for success: We have seen some success in co-creating exhibits and programming for diverse communities. The “We Are Hmong” exhibit utilized a community advisory board, guest curators, interns, and gallery staff, all recruited from the Hmong community. “Beyond Bollywood,” an upcoming exhibit, is also utilizing an advisory board consisting of members from the Indian American community in Minnesota. Building on this success, we are examining ways to create sustainable community engagement and relationships that have space for communities to narrate their own stories.

KEY FINDING



Only 1 in 5 respondents said they volunteer formally, but very few said it was due to lack of interest. Nearly 3 in 4 respondents volunteer informally.

The Science Museum of Minnesota

Goals: To engage and sustain authentic engagement with cultural communities where there has been a lack of participation and trust. To be a resource to all communities, including immigrant and refugee communities.

Activities: The Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM) is working to expand volunteer opportunities for people from communities historically underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Activities include: 1) engaging youth from underrepresented cultural communities through internships available in the Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center; 2) informal volunteering opportunities at annual Museum-wide STEM events designed to engage scientists, inventors, educators, and community members to celebrate community, creativity, and science; and 3) focused, multi-lingual advertising of opportunities to receive free and reduced-price tickets.

Ingredients for success: The Museum is committed to continued work with immigrant and refugee communities. This runs the gamut from deep and sustained engagement through youth opportunities to a positive experience for every single visitor, no matter their prior experience with SMM or background with museums. Ongoing dialogue, engagement, and a learning stance is key to our future work.



Work readiness and employment needs

KEY FINDING



The main challenges participants described in getting a job are **language barriers (47%)** and **lack of education (30%)**.

EMERGE

Goals: To increase the English skills, employability, and job opportunities for people who are English language learners, through training related to job readiness requirements (i.e., resumes, interviewing).

Activities: EMERGE is in the process of developing a 12-hour course spanning 4-6 weeks that focuses on teaching English language needed for employment. The course will not be focused toward a particular job, but rather will emphasize general employment vocabulary and language as well as language to better prepare someone as they job search, apply, and interview for positions outside of their native language community.

Ingredients for success: As this particular project is currently still in development, reaching out to other organizations that offer similar programming and looking through existing curriculums has been our main focus. Having an idea of what needs people have in this area has been helpful in guiding the development of the curriculum. In both EMERGE locations, we have offered a work readiness workshop called New Beginnings. In our Cedar-Riverside location, the workshop is offered in English and Somali so that the majority of our clients are able to access the skills; however, we are currently lacking the programming and staff to focus on English language skills that participants are missing to be able to effectively job search outside of their language community. When the pilot is rolled out in late summer 2016, we hope to recruit participants with high English proficiency as well as those with very low English proficiency to participate, to capture any gaps in services EMERGE might not be attuned to. For this to be a viable and useful experience, we will be working to ensure participants have buy-in as the class begins by providing an opportunity for them to give feedback and suggestions for programmatic changes. Employees at the Brian Coyle Community Center (including EMERGE and Pillsbury United Communities) have shown a lot of interest in this program, and having that support is of great value.



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For more information on the study and related reports and fact sheets:
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