

CIC (ISAP) and DIAS Program Review

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Diversity in Action Scarborough (DIAS) are two of our projects that are geared towards newcomers and ethno-specific programming. DIAS is comprised of East Metro Youth Services and three other Children's Mental Health Centres in the East Quadrant that collaborate, develop and fund particular projects to promote the mental health and well-being of particular communities. This past year, EMYS housed two DIAS staff: one for the Afghan community and one for the Mandarin community. The focus of these projects was to develop capacity within these four EQ Children and Youth mental health agencies to provide mental health and support services access to these communities. Although these two communities have some distinct differences, both staff focus their efforts towards identifying the mental health needs and barriers faced in accessing mental health services by both the Afghan and Mandarin communities. To this end, the staff have created various workshops for the community and for service providers that serve these communities.

This year, we received funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) stream to provide newcomer youth and their families with the support, skills and training they need during the settlement and acculturation process. Groups were formed and workshops were created to cover a vast range of topics such as:

- Defining mental health;
- Accessing and navigating community resources;
- Identifying services and supports that exist to help newcomer; youth dealing with mental health issues;
- Mental health and the law;
- Parenting skills; and
- Communication skills

Program Themes

There were several similar themes that emerged in both programs. Unidentified and/or undiagnosed mental health challenges are of the most dominant themes in these programs. Consequently and not surprisingly is the need to share with the youth and parents from these communities how to access and navigate mental health services. At the same time, there is considerable stigma within these communities regarding mental health issues, which acts as an additional barrier to these youth and families getting the help they need. Other factors such as gender and age were identified by some of the youth and parents in these programs as acting as an additional barrier to treatment.

Program objectives

The program objectives for the DIAS Afghan and Mandarin outreach projects are to bridge the gap between these two communities and mental health service providers in the East quadrant by:

- Identifying mental health needs in the Afghan and Mandarin communities;
- Providing educational workshops to the communities around issues of mental health and services available;
- Providing educational workshops to service providers, addressing cultural values, practices and belief systems of both communities, and ways in which service providers can create accessibility to their services; and
- Outreaching to both communities to develop a foundation of knowledge around mental health.

The program objectives for the CIC (ISAP) program are to provide support to newcomer youth and their families during the acculturation process, particularly with regards to mental health issues.

Program Successes

There have been many successes in both the DIAS and CIC (ISAP) programs this past year. Both programs have successfully outreached and recruited the support of ethno-specific media that have been disseminating information to newcomer communities. Secondly, both programs have experienced a high level of success in recruiting participants to the groups and workshops. Both programs have also experienced a high degree of success in generating a foundation of knowledge in newcomer communities in the East quadrant around the services that both programs provide. Lastly, both programs have experienced success in creating accessibility of mental health services to participants, as both program workers have been able to facilitate connection between mental health service providers to participants.

Program Challenges

Both programs have experienced several challenges this past year. As both programs are new to East Metro Youth Services, all workers experienced some challenges in the initial phases of outreaching and recruiting participants. The ISAP program in particular brought challenges with regards to recruitment as this was a new funding stream for CIC and it appeared there may have been some competition amongst service providers to offer programming to newcomer youth. However, through a successful creation of an advisory committee and strong outreach efforts, these challenges were overcome.

Other challenges that arose in both programs were transportation, the provision of childcare for parents, and language barriers, particularly in relation to mental health issues. As noted, many communities do not have a discourse through which to speak about mental health/illness so it takes considerable work on the part of staff to educate the clients/participants in this regard.

Client Statistics

There have been multiple outreach efforts within both the DIAS Mandarin and Afghan outreach projects. In total there has been approximately 8 workshops provided to service providers in the East Quadrant and approximately 6 workshops to community members. In addition to workshops, the Mandarin outreach project developed a mental health blog that contains facts and information on mental health issues on a popular Mandarin web site. This blog has been widely viewed and has been a major source for outreaching.

There have been three groups running within the CIC (ISAP) program that have commenced this past year. The first group had participants from various backgrounds, such as South Asia, and Afghanistan. There are also groups that service the Tamil and Mandarin communities. Participants in all three groups range from youth between the ages of 12-15 and parents of various ages. The group that serves the Tamil community is a female group, whereas the groups that serve the Mandarin and Multi-cultural communities have participants that are both male and female. This past year CIC (ISAP) has serviced over 142 participants.

Supporting Information

As both CIC (ISAP) and DIAS outreach projects are still running, the calculation of total feedback surveys from the CIC groups and Afghan and Mandarin workshops is only

representative of the pre-surveys. The only feedback to date has been anecdotal in nature. The following comment captures some of the success of the programs:

*"We are in need of support and services, and we don't know where to go, you are helping us learn."
(Afghan mother)*

Future Directions

As the year comes to a close, we are not yet clear on whether or not these projects will continue to be funded. While efforts have been directed accordingly, future directions will likely depend on the continuation of these projects. However, regardless of funding, we will be analyzing the post-program data to show program outcomes. and, if successful, we plan to build upon the work done to date and reach more and more newcomer youth and their families to reduce the stigma associated with mental health in these communities, open up dialogue, and ultimately, work alongside the youth and parents in these communities to ensure improved mental health and well-being.