

Hispanic/Latinx Outreach

The underutilization of mental health services by Hispanic/Latinx has been a growing concern in research and clinical practice. This has become increasingly important as the population of Hispanic/Latinx in the United States rises and the evidence that many are not receiving mental health services accumulates. Barriers include social economic considerations, cultural variables and psychotherapeutic challenges.

SCCMHA has received multi-cultural funding from the State of Michigan for many years. Historically, these dollars had been used to fund a case management position within SCCMHA that was dedicated to serving the Hispanic/Latinx population. This approach over the years had little effect on the needs of the Hispanic/Latinx population as few presented for services and the position was underutilized. This was despite the fact that through our Saginaw MAX System of Care work we were hearing of the serious unmet mental health needs of the Hispanic/Latinx population in the Saginaw community. Leadership from community organizations providing support to the Hispanic/Latinx community in Saginaw County sat on our System of Care Governance body and strongly advocated for the need for mental health services for their community. They made us aware of the lack of therapists that were bilingual and the need to do outreach through these community organizations.

When it came time to apply for multi-cultural dollars from the State of Michigan for fiscal year 2017, SCCMHA took action. We submitted a proposal with a changed focus. We requested funding to support the cost of a bilingual therapist at our front door (Centralized Access and Intake Unit). We proposed that the position would be available to complete intakes and provide services to the Hispanic/Latinx population that presented at our front door. In addition, through the grant dollars, the position would be able to do outreach to the two large community organizations in Saginaw County that support the Hispanic/Latinx population. Through the grant, the person hired would be able to provide services at these locations and would develop marketing materials specific to the population. We were thrilled that our proposal was approved and the grant funding was provided.

Our immediate challenge was in recruiting a bilingual therapist. This position was posted for several months with no applicants. However, in August of 2017 we were able to promote Lucia Vargas to this position. Lucia had been the case manager providing services to the Hispanic/Latinx population prior to this change in focus. She applied for the position immediately after finishing her master's degree in social work. Lucia knows the community well and is an asset in this position.

Trusting relationships take time to build especially as it relates to mental health services within these Hispanic/Latinx organizations. But...these relationships have been growing. SCCMHA has a Cultural Competency Coordinator through the MAX System of Care grant, Dalia Smith. Dalia was elected President of the Latinx Leaders for the Enhancement of Advocacy and Development (LLEAD) – Saginaw Chapter in December 2015 and is currently in this role today. In 2016 Dalia was also elected to the state LLEAD Board of Directors. Dalia is a graduate of the 2016 Great Lakes Bay Hispanic Leadership Institute and was awarded the 2016 Guadalupe Gomez Community Services and Leadership award. Dalia was able to leverage her role and relationships to introduce Lucia and to advocate for the need for mental health services. Lucia immediately began doing outreach participating in community events in the Hispanic/Latinx community with support from Dalia. Referrals began to come in. It is believed that with continued outreach and funding, the number of referrals will continue to grow and we will begin to be successful with meeting the unmet mental health needs of the Hispanic/Latinx population in Saginaw County.