Diversity Paper

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As social workers it is very important to understand the meaning behind diversity and inclusion. To be diverse means to have and array of different races, ethnicities, genders, religions, etc. that surround the environment that you are in. To be inclusive means that within the diverse population everyone is accepting and respectful to all races and ethnicities and other diverse factors. At the Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of social services, the staff is not only diverse but also inclusive. The work environment is accepting of everyone’s diverse beliefs and races and the department takes pride in that. The agency has a large population of clients from Hispanic dissent as well as Black and White clients.

Although the agency has a large population of Hispanic clients there is a scarcity of Spanish speaking providers for this large population. The agency itself only has two interpreters which hinders the workers ability to talk to clients outside of scheduled appointments. Although this isn’t controllable discrimination or oppression, this does affect how Spanish speaking clients receive services. Spanish speaking providers such as therapist are hard to come by and therefore leaving our Spanish speaking clients without easy access to mental health services which many need. The Spanish speaking providers that are available have long waitlists because of the large population in Chesterfield County.

 Another way that Spanish speaking clients are at a disadvantage is in court. If an interpreter is not available at the time of the hearing the family will have to sit there until one is available meaning that the families may have to sit in court for hours longer than clients that do not need an interpreter. It is also in a social workers best practice to not use family as an interpreter so when in a situation at the courthouse preparing for the hearing if an interpreter is not available, speaking to the clients or caregiver may not be possible.

Many of the Spanish speaking clients are also undocumented leaving them with minimal resources due to not being able to apply for benefits. The parents that are undocumented with children that are documented allows the children to get access to some benefits such as health insurance, but the family is not permitted to get TANF, SNAP or other benefits that would support the entire family. Many Spanish speaking families are discriminated against because the approval for benefits is on a case-by-case basis and families that are undocumented have a harder time getting access to these benefits. During a meeting the author witnessed workers advocate for clients that are not documented to try and get them benefits but due to the state and federal laws it is not likely to happen. Also, due to COVID the benefits process looks different now and because the state of emergency has been lifted benefits are harder to get and many families are getting their benefits taken because they get paid too much.

Mental health is also barrier for the Hispanic population as a whole because of the cultural differences that the community faces. With a lack of cultural competence, it is more likely for Hispanic patients to be misdiagnosed (*Hispanic/Latinx*. NAMI). Within the Hispanic community it is often common to see families not knowing how to support one another through mental health crises because of the cultural differences. Individuals may be fearful to receive help because of the stigma that is held in the Hispanic community such as “bringing shame and unwanted attention to their families or “l*a ropa sucia se lava en casa*” (similar to “don’t air your dirty laundry in public”)” (*Hispanic/Latinx*. NAMI). Because of the lack of access to benefits and money, families may struggle with being able to financially afford therapy.

One way to meet the needs of Spanish speaking clients is to hire more Spanish speaking workers that are fluent in Spanish. Two Spanish speaking workers is not enough for the amount of Spanish speaking clients that the department has. By hiring more Spanish speaking workers this will benefit micro, mezzo, and macro levels within the agency because it will open up more job opportunities, allow more in-depth conversations, it will allow clients to feel more heard and understand as well as meeting the clients where they are, which is important to recognize as a social worker. From a micro level, social workers need to allow clients to teach them about their culture so providers can better understand their wants and needs. By meeting clients where they are and empowering them to self-determinate clients will feel heard emotionally allowing for more meaningful conversations. From a mezzo level, advocating for more Spanish speaking providers such as therapist will help the Hispanic community have more access to mental health and with proper explanation the families could possibly want treatment. From a macro level, advocating for changes in policy that advocates for more Spanish speaking providers as well as better informing Hispanic caregivers of mental health and helping them navigate the world of mental health. Another way to help advocate for Hispanic clients is advocating for easier access to mental health when undocumented.

The agency does it’s best to advocate for clients that are Spanish speaking but often run into roadblocks and barriers of their own because of the lack of resources available. One of the potential ways that the community can advocate for the Hispanic population in Chesterfield County is by raising awareness of the lack of resources that this community has access to. More professionals becoming fluent in Spanish could also help the scarcity of resources for this community. Religious organizations, schools, and other groups could potentially raise funds for these families that are undocumented and need benefits but don’t have access to them. These organizations could also help raise money to help people of the Hispanic community to get mental health access. With the scarcity of Spanish speaking providers researching online mental health providers and other Spanish speaking providers would benefit the Spanish speaking community. Online access may not be an individual’s first choice but it is still an option. With the cultural barriers it may be difficult to properly explain what mental health is and why it is so important to those in the Hispanic community but with the right providers, the Hispanic community will be able to clear the stigma behind mental health and openly talk about how they are affected.

Al in all, the Hispanic community and Spanish speaking clients that do not know English are at a disadvantage compared to those who speak and understand English. These families are experiencing similar traumatic events as the other families, yet they are not being provided with the same opportunities for help. With the lack of access to benefits, mental health, and Spanish speaking providers the Hispanic community is experiencing discrimination and oppression. By coming together as providers, community citizens, and partners of the Hispanic community it is important that we advocate for those who are experiencing these struggles. Advocacy starts at the micro level and will work its way to the macro level. It starts with just one person, one agency, and one mind. Together, the community can advocate for the Hispanic community and bring them the resources that are much needed.

**References:**

*Hispanic/Latinx*. NAMI. (n.d.). https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Hispanic-Latinx