

Immigration

Focus Group Discussion Notes

March 9, 2009

The United Way of Monmouth County (UWMC) Immigration Focus Group Discussion was held on March 9, 2009 from 9:30 AM to 11:30 PM at the New Jersey Natural Gas Building, Conference Rooms C, 1415 Wyckoff Road, Wall, New Jersey.

Facilitator

Christine Jagerburger, UWMC Director of Community Impact

Participants

Jennie Blakney, Regional Perinatal Consortium
Lydia Carbone, 180 Turning Lives Around
Sandy Dempsey, Monmouth County Health Department
Maria Dimitriou, Planned Parenthood of Central Jersey
Laurie Duhovny, Monmouth County Human Services Advisory Council
Rose Mary Gerdes, Calico Cat Cupboard / Community Outreach Group, Inc.
Janice Liebenow, Calico Cat Cupboard / Community Outreach Group, Inc.
Jenn Pena, Acelero Learning Monmouth County Head Start
Ann Torre, Parker Family Health Center
Monica Varela, Acelero Learning Monmouth County Head Start

UWMC Staff

Kathy Bibby, Administrative Assistant

Overview/Background

UWMC is hosting seven facilitated focus group discussions in support of our Community Impact Transformation process. The Immigration focus group is the third in the series. This focus group specifically examines:

- Data from the Population section of the Social and Demographic Report
- Responses to the Community Leaders Survey question concerning Barriers to Service and Additional Information

Please refer to the attached PowerPoint presentation for an overview of Community Impact and for the Immigration focus group's agenda & outline.

Discussion Topics

1. What are the most critical issues facing immigrants in our community?
2. What are the implications for health and human services, including barriers to accessing services
3. What are the "best practices" to address those issues

Critical Issues

- Ability to access healthcare programs, primarily affected by legal immigration status
 - Health insurance-i.e-Medicaid access
 - Prescription assistance
 - Dental care
 - Parker Family Health Center program
 - Offers dental services to uninsured children regardless of legal immigration status
 - Families must meet Parker's eligibility requirements, which are Monmouth County residency, no insurance at all (ie, not Medicaid, Family Care, etc.), and income below 300% of the federal poverty level
 - Immunizations for children
 - Can impact/complicate parents ability to enroll children in school
 - Parker Family Health Center program provides immunizations
 - Families must meet guidelines as per above
 - Prenatal care
 - Newly immigrated pregnant women from underdeveloped countries are at higher risk due to lack of prenatal care during their pregnancy
 - In New Jersey all pregnant women have the right to Presumptive Eligibility regardless of their legal immigration status
 - Medicaid program for pregnant women without health insurance
 - Only covers basic costs, does not cover specialized services
 - Preventative care
 - Waiting until issue becomes critical, then using emergency services
 - Women specifically may focus on the needs of their children and families first and do not access care for themselves until it is an emergency situation
 - The CDC has begun to compile data that shows the high cost to the health care system for domestic violence related injuries and health conditions (particularly health conditions brought/exacerbated by stress).
- Lack of transportation
 - Impacts ability to access medical appointments, employment, etc.
 - Ability to acquire a drivers license impacted by legal immigration status
- Early childhood education/ early intervention services
 - Head Start program-eligibility not determined by immigration status
 - Monmouth County Health Department- Ages and Stages program-about 60% of client referrals are Latino
 - Some clients are documented, others are not
- Lack of affordable housing
- Literacy issues
 - English as a Second Language (ESL)
 - Basic literacy in native language
- Ability to open banking and savings accounts
 - Some banks are able to work with immigrants regardless of immigration status
 - Impacts ability to accumulate and grow assets
- Lack of feedback from agencies on denial of services/qualification issues

- Disparities between programs available to children of immigrants when a child is a legal citizen and their parents and/or older siblings are not
- Refugee status more difficult to acquire now than in past
- Many of these issues are felt more keenly by immigrants who are not here legally than those who are due to program eligibility restrictions

Barriers to Service

- Legal status/documentation
 - Most frequently noted barrier to accessing/receiving services
 - Impacts eligibility to access many programs and services
 - Discussion around temporary legal status for immigrants; advocacy for new immigration laws
 - To protect the rights of non legal immigrants from employers that pay low salaries and consequently impacts ability to earn a self-sufficient wage, afford decent housing, etc.
- Cultural barriers
 - Can impact where and how clients access services
 - Different family and societal roles of women and family, roles of men
 - Cultures that condone a man's "right" to beat his wife
 - Greatly diminishes a woman's sense that there are alternatives
 - Religious beliefs
 - Class issues from native country
- Discrimination, community perception and resentment
 - Example-police ticketing parents who carpool children to school for providing Taxi services
- Transportation
- Education and awareness of available programs and resources, including eligibility
 - For immigrants
 - For the community
 - For service providers
 - Overcoming misinformation on availability and eligibility
 - We do not have a one-stop for immigrants when they come to Monmouth County
- Fear to access services, specifically around legal immigration status
- Community partnerships/collaboration to address issues
- Language barriers
 - Most noted languages needing translation to access services
 - Creole-Haitian community
 - Portuguese-Brazilian community
 - Spanish-Mexican community
 - Other immigrant populations exist in Monmouth County but not accessing services at same rate as above mentioned
 - Translation services can be costly
 - Impacts intensified for victims of domestic violence
 - if the victim is not conversant in English s/he is even more "trapped" as the abuser may be the victim's only source of information

Best Practices/Overcoming Barriers

- Need to raise the bar on translation/interpretation services for social service staff

- Having bi-/multi-lingual staff to provide direct translation as a requirement to being able provide service
- Not relying on family members/children to provide translation to client
- Adapt our current structures to meet the needs of immigrants not just today but in the future as immigrants from different counties come to our county
- Increase availability of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs
- Encourage and implement a Case Management approach to providing services
- Ensure cultural sensitivity when working with clients, must be respectful; kind
 - Immigration experience is different for every person and ethnic group
- Share information on available services programs
 - Printed resource guides on services
 - Using technology
 - United Way of Monmouth County Listserv
 - UWMC hosts 11 e-mail listserv groups for the nonprofit community to share information and opportunities with each other, topics include trainings, donations, employment, grants and research
 - 2-1-1 program
 - 2-1-1 is a free, statewide system designed to connect people in need of assistance with service providers who can help, funded by United Ways in New Jersey, including UWMC
 - www.nj211.org
 - MonmouthResourceNet hosted by Monmouth Cares
 - Free web tool providing a wide range of information about support, resources, and services for families in Monmouth County.
 - <http://www.monmouthresourcenet.org/>
 - Family Success Center-Long Branch Concordance
 - The purpose of each Family Success Center is to strengthen families and neighborhoods; develop networks of family services that result in preventing child abuse and neglect and fostering healthy families; reduce isolation and build connections within families, between families and to the community.
 - <http://www.lbc4help.org/>