

Sharing What We're Learning

In the November 2006 issue of CURA News, we explored the building of the Cultural Empowerment framework. The concept first emerged during the proposal development stage of the Taking Culture Seriously study as CURA partners recognized the need for mental health services to synthesize the existing power-oriented and culture-oriented models in order to meet the mental health needs of diverse communities. The concept of cultural empowerment evolved from these initial discussions.

1. Developing the Cultural Empowerment framework

During the summer and fall of 2006, CURA partners developed a draft framework of cultural empowerment and then discussed how to shape the model based on the initial research findings. The resulting vision (see chart below) was presented at the first CURA conference in December 2006.

The conference provided the opportunity to present the draft framework to members of cultural-linguistic communities, community mental health and health organizations, immigrant organizations, researchers, students, policymakers and funders. The framework is intended to serve as the foundation upon which demonstration projects can be developed. These demonstration projects, which will be implemented and evaluated over the next two years of the study, will enable CURA partners to test and expand upon the framework as needed.

Conference participants met in small groups to discuss ideas for possible interventions based on the research findings. They were asked to keep in mind the values, actions and outcomes inherent in the framework. Over thirty intervention ideas emerged from the discussions (see http://www.crehcura.com/files/CURA_conference_proceedings.pdf) for the full list. The main themes included:

- Community capacity building
- Peer support (prevention, early intervention and crisis)
- Education and outreach (prevention and early intervention)
- Cross-sector/inter-agency collaboration
- Policy-level change in mental health legislation and in immigration legislation (federal-provincial framework)
- Increased awareness and understanding among communities about mental health, and among practitioners about cultural meanings and approaches
- Developing a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to service
- Reciprocal training (communities and practitioners)

Envisioning Cultural Empowerment



The Cultural Empowerment framework, developed by CURA partners from the study's research findings, brings together two existing streams of thinking about mental health and cultural diversity (power model and culture model) into one new approach.

The framework has three main components: values, actions and outcomes.

The values address issues of power and culture; the actions come from within a community, from within the mental health system, as well as from a partnership between community and system; resulting in outcomes for cultural-linguistic communities, practitioners and service providers, as well as policymakers and planners.

The conference was the first step in getting feedback on the framework and generating ideas. Since then, CURA partners have been meeting with service providers in Waterloo Region and Toronto, as well as with funders. In addition, a series of community forum sessions have been held with the cultural-linguistic communities collaborating in the CURA study.

2. Meetings with service providers and funders

In the first few months of 2007, CURA partners met with service providers in Waterloo Region and Toronto involved in the CURA study. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the framework of Cultural Empowerment, review the guiding principles and process for developing demonstration projects, and brainstorm possible demonstration project ideas.

These meetings led to collaborations among agencies and cultural-linguistic communities who then developed concrete proposals to present to funders.

Since the funding in the CURA study covers only the evaluation of demonstration projects, not their development or implementation, additional funding sources needed to be identified. CURA partners met with potential funders to discuss possible demonstration project ideas which were then finalized for submission.

3. Community meetings

CURA partners have also been meeting with members of the cultural-linguistic communities collaborating in the study. These meetings are intended to give communities the opportunity to hear about the research findings (in particular from the focus groups in which many of them participated) and discuss ideas for meeting their mental health needs based on these findings.

For a summary of the forum meetings held to date, see the May 2007 issue of CURA News.

At each forum, community members spent time in small discussion groups, reflecting on the themes that had arisen in the research focus groups, the particular needs of their community, and the steps the community could take towards meeting those needs.

Some communities focused on the needs of specific sectors such as youth, seniors, men, parents raising young children while caring for ageing parents who do not speak English, and people without legal status in Canada. Other communities were more concerned about generic issues such as employment/underemployment, lack of credential recognition, lack of awareness of mental health services, and language barriers.

However, there were a number of ideas raised that were common across communities. These common themes included:

- education and awareness about the issue of mental health and available supports and services
- multidisciplinary holistic approach to services and supports (involving family and informal support network)
- information for new immigrants about Canadian way of life, police and legal system, social and employment services, accreditation process
- anonymous help line (in different languages) for basic mental health support and information about services
- community capacity building/leadership building
- professional mental health training for community members (identifying signs, providing initial support and referrals)

In keeping with the underlying intent of the Cultural Empowerment framework, CURA partners are reviewing the proposals for demonstration projects to ensure that they involve collaboration among some combination of:

- cultural-linguistic communities
- mental health service providers
- immigrant services organizations
- hospitals
- policymakers
- funders

A summary of demonstration project proposal under discussion is shown below. Additional ideas are being considered.

Potential demonstration projects (to date)

Waterloo Region

Cultural Empowerment Level	Description
Cultural-linguistic communities/mental health practitioners	Education about mental health/leadership training/community capacity building
Practitioner/cultural-linguistic communities	Organizational change/self-help/peer support
Systems/practitioner	Policy development and system evaluation

Toronto

Cultural Empowerment Level	Description
Practitioner/cultural-linguistic communities	Organizational change/self-help/peer support
Practitioner/cultural-linguistic communities	Supportive housing and diversity
Practitioner/policy/cultural-linguistic communities	Institutional change about diversity
Cultural-linguistic community/practitioner	Education about mental health/community capacity building

Provincial

Cultural Empowerment Level	Description
Practitioner/cultural-linguistic communities	Cultural empowerment practitioner training

Next Steps

- Demonstration project proposals are finalized, evaluation component is added, and proposals are submitted to funders (June - December 2007)
- Funded demonstration projects are implemented and evaluated (September 2007 - December 2009)
- Final CURA conference to present the overall study findings and the evaluation results of the demonstration projects (December 2009)