

## Sharing What We're Doing

As we begin our fifth and last year of the Taking Culture Seriously in Community Mental Health CURA, we have three main areas of focus:

### Implementing CURA demonstration projects

Three CURA demonstration projects are currently underway: *A Mental Health Case Management, Outreach, and Support Services Program for the Punjabi Community* led by the Punjabi Community Health Services; *Strengthening Mental Health in Cultural-Linguistic Communities* led by Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre; and *Newcomer Youth Theatre* led by the YMCA and highlighted in this issue of CURA News. Eight additional potential projects are either waiting to hear about funding or have not been funded. To learn more about demonstration projects, please see: [takingcultureseriouslyCURA.ca](http://takingcultureseriouslyCURA.ca)

### Evaluating CURA Demonstration Projects

The CURA evaluation is designed to test and refine the project's emerging theoretical framework as it is applied in demonstration community interventions aiming to enhance cultural sensitivity in mental health services.

Data collection for Phase One of the evaluation entailed 40 interviews with CURA partners who planned and wrote project funding proposals. A first level of analysis has been completed with 12 reports that focus on themes about each project. The second level of analysis

will generate overarching themes across all projects, to be documented in a report later this year. Phase Two of the evaluation will focus only on implemented demonstration projects. The methods to be used across all projects are interviews and a tracking form. Project-specific evaluations will be determined individually, based on the nature of the project. For more information on the design, methodology and timelines, please see the September 2008 issue of CURA Findings.

### Knowledge Mobilization

A key component of our CURA is Knowledge Mobilization, the sharing of what we are learning through different methods (workshops, publications, presentations, etc.). The reason for this focus is so that our findings may be useful and applicable to various audiences.

This year, CURA partners will co-host a roundtable discussion with policy makers and funders to discuss potential strategies for resourcing and equipping diversity in mental health innovation.

CURA partners will continue to collaborate on academic articles and in addition, we will write more articles for wider audiences. We will also plan a symposium on research-inspired mental health innovation with practitioners and communities for late 2009. Please check our website for further details in the coming months.

## A Closer Look at a CURA Research Demonstration Project: Newcomer Youth Theatre

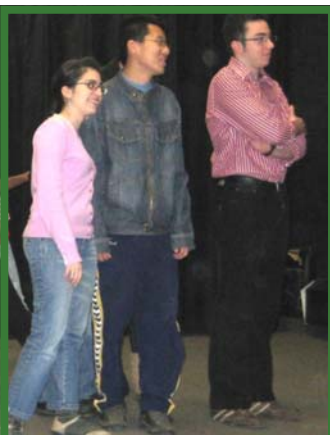
In collaboration with the YMCA and MT Space, an exciting CURA demonstration project is underway at a local high school. It all started when the YMCA Cross Cultural and Immigrant Services recognized the need for more youth-oriented settlement programs. They partnered with teachers from Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) and MT Space to create the Newcomer Youth Theatre Project. The project is centred on building self-confidence, self-awareness and empowerment through theatre and creative expression for newcomer youth from diverse backgrounds. The intended project goal is not only to encourage these students to voice their experiences and challenges through theatre, but also to build an atmosphere of understanding, support and openness to diversity within the high school community. One of the project strategies is to build reciprocal relationships between newcomer students and counsellors to learn from each other



Students involved in the Newcomer Youth Theatre Project pose for the camera.

about how to best offer and access support when needed.

Now in its fourth month, the Newcomer Youth Theatre Project is thriving under the artistic direction of Majdi Bou-Matar of MT Space. Since conducting auditions in October, twelve ESL students from WCI have committed to the project, meeting 3 hours per week for rehearsals. The foci of the dramatic exercises are topics that have been identified by the students as struggles they feel are important to convey, which include language barriers, struggling to fit in and develop friendships, food and clothing differences, cultural conflicts with parents, and dealing with a shift in the family's economic status. According to Tara Haworth, the YMCA Host Newcomer Youth Coordinator, the students involved in the project have displayed resilience and enthusiasm, and have developed a bond that has been a positive and empowering experience. When describing the activities, Haworth relayed the following example:



Newcomer Youth Theatre Project participants.

*"One of the most moving exercises so far has been an activity where students paired with another student who did not speak their first language, and then told each other a personal story in their own language. The "listener" worked on trying to understand the emotion behind the story, without understanding the actual words. Some of the students guessed quite accurately what their partners' story was about. We continued it as a large group, and had the students tell stories to the entire group in their first language. Some stories were sad, while others were funny, and had us all laughing even when we didn't know the words. The students felt empowered by this experience."*

The outcome of these rehearsals will be a performance at WCI in the spring, with the possibility of performing at other high schools in the Waterloo Region or within the community. The program will run for one more year on its current funding schedule, and may stay at WCI for the second year or possibly move to a different high school in the Waterloo Region.

#### *Recent Presentations*

- Berihun, G. & Abbott, A. (2008). Strengthening Mental Health in Cultural-Linguistic Communities Project Overview. Presented at WWLHIN Champions of Change Symposium. Waterloo, ON. Sept 29, 2008.
- Moorlag, E. & Song, H. (2008). Navigating the Taboo: Perspectives on Mental Health from Chinese Communities in Canada. Presented at the Canadian Asian Studies Association, 2008 Conference: "Asia on the Move". Waterloo, ON. Nov 15, 2008.
- Ochocka, J. & Janzen, R. (2008). Responding to Diversity in Community Mental Health: Towards Cultural Empowerment. Presented to Wellington Waterloo Local Health Integration Network, Staff and Board Development. Guelph, ON. Sept 19, 2008.
- Ochocka, J. & Janzen, R. (2008). Overview of Taking Culture Seriously in Community Mental Health. Presented at Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre Annual General Meeting. Kitchener, ON. Oct 22, 2008.
- Ochocka, J. & Marsh, S. (2008). Well-meaning to Wellbeing: Doing Community Based Research with Immigrant Populations. Presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Diversity and Wellbeing Conference: The Diverse Faces of Mental Health. Calgary, AB. Nov 21, 2008.
- Ochocka, J., Mutta, B., Song, H. & Marsh, S. (2008). Building Reciprocal and Action-Oriented Research Collaborations: Challenges, Successes, & Possibilities. Presented at Building Equitable Partnerships. Toronto, ON. Nov 7, 2008.

#### *Recent Journal Articles*

- Janzen, R., Ochocka, J., Jacobson, N., Maiter, S., Simich, L., Westhues, A., Fleras, A. and the Taking Culture Seriously Partners (submitted). Synthesizing Culture and Power in Community Mental Health: An Emerging Framework. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*.
- Maiter, S., Simich, L., Jacobson, N. & Wise, J. (2008). Reciprocity: An ethic for participatory action research with culturally diverse communities. *Action Research*. 6 (3), 305-325.
- Simich, L., Maiter, S., Moorlag, E. & Ochocka, J. (2009). Ethnocultural Community Perspectives on Mental Health. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. 32(3), 208-214.
- Simich, L., Maiter, S. & Ochocka, J. (submitted). From Social Liminality to Cultural Negotiation: Transformative Processes in Immigrant Mental Wellbeing. Submitted to *Anthropology and Medicine*. London, UK.
- Westhues, A., Janzen, R., Roth, D. & Grant, J. (submitted). Community mental health organizations in Ontario: Perceptions of responsiveness to the needs of diverse cultural-linguistic communities. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*.