

Sharing What We're Doing

CURA partners have been quite active in the last six months, preparing and hosting the first CURA conference, as well as a series of community forums. This issue of CURA News will provide highlights from all of these events.

1. Towards Cultural Empowerment

The first conference in the Taking Culture Seriously study was held on December 7, 2006 at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. The purpose of the conference was to bring together stakeholders from diverse organizations and communities to hear the preliminary findings from the study and to transform these findings into action.



The first CURA conference brought together participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Over 140 participants from across Ontario attended the conference entitled "Towards Cultural Empowerment". For many, it was the first time that cultural-linguistic communities, community mental health and health organizations, researchers, immigrant organizations, students, policymakers and funders had gathered to speak about the sensitive issue of mental health.

The Taking Culture Seriously partners had been working together for two years to move the study from the proposal stage through research into action. Conference participants heard the initial findings from the range of research methods that included an international literature review, key informant interviews, a web survey of Ontario mental health service providers and focus groups with members of the five cultural-linguistic communities collaborating in the CURA study.

The draft Cultural Empowerment framework, developed from the research findings, was also presented. The framework, which brings together two existing streams of thinking about mental health and cultural diversity (power model and culture model), provides the foundation upon which demonstration projects will be

developed (see CURA Findings May 2007 for more detail about the Cultural Empowerment framework).

The highlight of the day for many conference participants was the theatre production "The Other End of the Line". The 15-minute presentation was commissioned by the CURA study from MT Space, a multicultural theatre company based in Kitchener, Ontario. The cast of five actors and two musicians, under the direction of Majdi Matar, and with the support of graduate students from the University of Guelph, worked closely with conference organizers, CURA community researchers and Steering Committee members. They created a piece that provided a powerful and sensitive presentation of the issue of mental health from the perspectives of cultural-linguistic communities and mental health service providers. Watching the presentation, conference participants were moved to laughter, tears and sighs of recognition. They gave the cast a thunderous standing ovation at the end.

Some of the comments about the theatre performance included

"The theatre presentation nailed the purpose of this research project."

"Demonstrated very well how a worker feels and how a client feels."

"Very powerful. Needs to be shared with the greater public as an awareness campaign."



Actors performing at the CURA conference used simple props to convey a powerful message to the audience.

The theatre presentation brought the issues to life and opened the door for animated discussions in the afternoon breakout sessions about ideas for demonstration projects. A full list of these ideas can be found in the conference proceedings at http://www.crehscura.com/files/CURA_conference_proceedings.pdf

2. Community forum sessions

A series of community forum sessions have been held this spring. The purpose is to provide opportunities for members of the cultural-linguistic communities collaborating in CURA to hear about the results of the research and to discuss, in their own languages, ideas for meeting their communities' mental health needs based on these findings.

In Waterloo, the Steering Committee representatives and community researchers from the five cultural-linguistic communities chose to have one forum, bringing all the communities together at the same time. The forum was held in March at Wilfrid Laurier University's Faculty of Social Work. Over 200 people attended, savouring food from the various communities, browsing community displays, and watching a t'ai chi demonstration. MT Space presented "The Other End of the Line" following presentations about the CURA study and research findings. After the presentations, forum participants left the main hall and met in separate rooms for discussions facilitated in their languages. When everyone returned to the main hall to hear a summary of each community's discussion, it was clear that there were many common themes and ideas being generated across the communities.



Discussion facilitators at the Waterloo community forum gave a summary of their community's ideas to meet mental health needs. From left, CURA community researchers Halima Abdilkadir and Jatinder Saggu, and Steering Committee member Debbie Wang

In Toronto, each community is holding its own forum. About 25 people from a range of countries attended the Latin American community forum in March. The Punjabi Sikh forum in April brought together about 80 community members, while the Mandarin forum in May drew 40 people including many families with young children. Each forum was facilitated in the language of the participants, with the assistance of CURA community researchers and Steering Committee members from the communities. Discussions generated many solid ideas to meet the mental health needs of each community.

CURA community researcher, Helen Song, notes the ideas from the discussion groups at the Toronto Mandarin forum.



3. Next steps

CURA partner organizations are working with the cultural-linguistic communities to develop proposals for demonstration projects based on the Cultural Empowerment framework and some of the ideas generated at the CURA conference and the community forum sessions.

These demonstration project proposals will be submitted to funders and, once funding is received, the demonstration projects will be implemented and evaluated over the next two years.

The results of the demonstration project evaluations will be shared at the final CURA conference in Toronto in 2009.

For updates on the CURA study, please visit the website at www.crehscura.com If you have ideas for demonstration projects, email us at general@crehs.on.ca

Conference and Workshop Presentations 2007

Metropolis National Conference: Exploring Canada's Diversity, Today and Tomorrow, Toronto, Ont. March 2007
Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation Workshops on Youth and Mental Health, Peel Region, Ont. April 2007
Canadian Evaluation Society Conference, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 2007
Hamilton Mental Health and Addiction Network, Hamilton, Ont., June 2007
Society for Community Research and Action, Los Angeles, June 2007

Journal Publications 2007

Jacobson, N., Ochocka, J., Wise, J., Janzen, R. (2007). Inspiring knowledge mobilization through a communications policy: The case of a Community University Research Alliance. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education and Action*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Urban Health Institute.

Janzen, R., Ochocka, J., and the "Taking Culture Seriously" partners. (2007). The road toward cultural empowerment: An invitation to inclusion. Chapter in *Navigating Multiculturalism, Negotiating Change*. Cambridge Scholars Press.

Maiter, S., Simich, L., Jacobson, N., Wise, J. (2007). Reciprocity: An ethic for Participatory Action Research with culturally diverse communities. *Action Research*.

Ochocka, J., Janzen, R. (submitted). Blending commitment, passion and structure: Engaging cultural-linguistic communities in collaborative research. Chapter in *Researching with Communities* (Ed.: Andy Williamson and Ruth DeSousa). WAIRUA: New Zealand.

Westhues, A., Ochocka, J., Jacobson, N., Simich, L., Maiter, S., Janzen, R., Fleras, A. (submitted). Developing theory from complexity: Reflections on a collaborative mixed method Participatory Action Research study. *Qualitative Health Research*.

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