

Summary

Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Cultural Humility, Health Equity & Social Justice Committee

May 26, 2022
10:05 am – 11:00 am
Behavioral Health & Recovery Services Facility
Teleconference via Zoom

Present:

Sharon Jones, Sabrina Abong, Ruby Awesome, Misty Rose Bautista, Alyssa Castro, Jose Chavez-Diaz, Dee Espinoza, Heydi Herrera, Melyssa Hintz, Ayesha Hunter, Amalia Madrigal-Hernandez, Conor Maloney, Cindy Mattox, Marilyn Mochel, Lanetta Smyth, Ker Thao, Griselda Vasquez, Melissa Windham, Katalina Zambrano

Presentation and Discussion:

All Members

I. Check-in/Conocimiento

II. Approval of Minutes

The approval of minutes for April 28, 2022 was motioned/seconded (Alyssa Castro /Misty Rose Bautista) and carried.

III. Discussion on Cultural Safety

Sharon Jones thought this conversation was very important for this committee for the simple reason that there have been several major critical incidents. We are in the Merced community and the critical incident wasn't in our community but yet and still, Sharon thinks we need to have this discussion because we were all still impacted whether it was in our community or not. Sharon asked the group about their thoughts on how to foster cultural safety.

Katalina Zambrano, LGBTQ Collaborative, suggested more trainings and presentations. Coming from the LGBTQ community, Katalina thinks it's important to continue to embed ourselves in everything and making sure that conversation is always open and people are always being called out when they're being kind of ignorant, and making sure people are held accountable for that. Also, approaching that with passion and understanding of where that's coming from. Sharon reiterated that Katalina is suggesting ongoing information and calling people out; making sure that if a discussion needs to happen it happens.

Alyssa Castro, Youth Leadership Institute, agreed with Katalina and said that we know that with young children, more likely they are to be less prejudiced when they're exposed to more and different cultures – getting exposed to more cultures and cultures here in the valley. Alyssa added that we're very fortunate to have different cultures here. Alyssa suggested more exposure, training, and holding people accountable to when they're not being culturally sensitive. Alysa wanted to shout out on the note of trainings that YLI is looking for spaces to host their training on how to support queer youth. If anyone in the group, their staff, or residents that they engage with, think they could benefit on learning about gender, sexuality, or some of the rights that queer youth have, they offer a training that's about an hour and a half. YLI could go to their site where they can arrange what they need to make sure that they're helping to provide those kinds of trainings to folks, especially for the queer community.

Griselda Vasquez, Livingston Community Health, expressed that she is excited that Alyssa is offering to do that. Griselda expressed her interest in coordinating with Alyssa, possibly offline. She knows that for their behavioral health team and their clinicians, this is a subject that they are very eager to know more about to provide better support to both the community and their patients. As Pride month is starting, Griselda thinks they are going to do something internally with their employees. Griselda will reach out to Alyssa directly but she thinks they need to have that conversation early on with youth and children to make them feel supported, loved, understood, and seen. Everyone wants to be noticed and seen for who they are and not have to be someone they're not, or feel that they have to different because they're not accepted. Griselda shared a personal story about her daughter, who is 10. She said that target has a nice little new section to highlight Pride, and her daughter liked one of the shirts. The shirt said "transgender rights are human rights" and her daughter wanted to know what that meant. In the simplest terms, Griselda tried to help her understand and explained it to her so that she's open and aware. Her daughter then asked if she could wear it to school and Griselda said she didn't see why not and her daughter didn't see why not either. Griselda thought that was a beautiful learning moment for her and her daughter to talk about something that is there, its present, but it's not discussed. She feels that it's important to have those conversations, obviously appropriate conversations for her age, for them to understand that not all people are respected and accepted. Griselda is excited now that they are talking about this. She thanked Alyssa for highlighting it.

Katalina also thinks that to make it mandatory is a big thing. When they do presentations from the Collaborative, Katalina notices that those trainings are optional, whether it be for cultural diversity, humility, or anything of that. Katalina always says if you see in an organization, your place of work, or business that they are being culturally insensitive, and then see those same people still opting out to go to these places - it's time to make these things mandatory. It really helps to have them in person but a lot of people have become comfortable with the Zoom meetings. With Zoom meetings they can just put the volume down but they are not really there because it's not interactive. They are not actually having that conversation or being called to answer anything, so they can just say they were there but don't take away anything. Katalina noted that is one big thing that people say, that when they go to those presentations whether it be about LGBTQ, understanding race, or economic struggle, they need to interact. Katalina thinks that's the only way that they will get it because the more time to not interact, they don't really listen. The Collaborative also provides a lot of trainings for any organizations in the Stanislaus and Merced area.

Sharon thinks they have to be talking about it in an authentic way and it has to be ongoing. When people are on Zoom doing other things and not tuned in, when it comes to cultural humility or culture responsive training, Sharon knows COVID is going on, but it needs to be face to face with the immersion and interactions so that people can get to know people in a positive matter. When it's on Zoom they can still keep operating with the stereotypes if they're not sitting at the table talking with them and getting to know them in that manner. Sharon said there have been several critical incidents - children and parents are afraid, especially individuals from diverse communities.

Alyssa Castro thinks that this country has a long history of cultural violence and a long history of oppressing young people. Our young people are the most oppressed in our society – they don't have any choices or any rights essentially. Alyssa thinks that violence and oppression hand in hand is a really big motivator for the culture that we uplift, especially in times when everything is so exposed. Culturally, Alyssa thinks those are two factors that really play into why these incidents keep happening. For ways to be safer, Alyssa doesn't know because it feels like legislation is pointless at this time. She shared that it is not always productive but, in her culture, they would get some hood justice if you hurt someone that is of where they come from or they care for. That can really translate to people just taking care of one another instead of relying on all these bodies of government to protect us and our children; we have to create a culture of community and relying on each other to help support and keep our young people safe.

Sharon highlighted that many of these incidents have taken place out in the community. Usually people have to travel to get services so she asked, how can we help our families or individuals feel safer?

Misty Rose Bautista, with the Transition to Independence Program, agrees with Katalina about educating, spreading awareness, and training, not just to staff, but anyone who is going to interact with their families to make sure that we're saying the appropriate stuff, knowing how to interact with people from different cultures, and teaching people that it's okay if you don't know to go ahead and ask. To be comfortable in the skin you are because if you're not comfortable with who you are as a person, then you're unable to successfully help anyone else. She noted that it's okay if you don't understand a culture, but it's also okay to ask to gain that insight.

IV. Impact of Contemporary Issues and Current Events on Seeking Services

Sharon Jones asked what might be the impact on individuals seeking services and getting the help that they truly need. Whenever situations like this happen, it has an impact of course in the place that it happens, but it impacts people all across the globe and in the United States. Just like in the case of a suicide, there needs to be postvention. Sharon asked the group what do they need to have in their programs so that a process can go forward. If a critical incident happens, we're doing the work, and it's just business as usual, but we're thinking about it in the back of our mind; we may represent that cultural group where the critical incident happened.

Katalina thinks a big part of it is when situations happen and it's pretty traumatic for people. Katalina thinks it's really important for them to remain visible. A lot of times they think, especially for the post night club situation, Katalina's brothers and sisters in the community were too scared to go out. Katalina considers to be a strong-minded person in the community, but in the sense of living visibly, being out, and living their truth. Katalina thinks that for others who already have a fear of having to deal with something like that, the ones that are strong to remain out see that others are getting back to their safe spaces. Also, having those conversations with people and allowing them to share what's going on with them and being compassionate for them.

Sharon Jones thinks this is a rich discussion because when a critical incidence happens, and you're already going through your mental health care needs, often times you may want to isolate because fear sets in. Sharon wanted to have this conversation about things we can do to help individuals who are seeking services so they don't just stop seeking services because of critical incidents.

Misty Rose thinks a big thing would be preventive care like having assessments and tools in place to be able to know our client as a person first to then help develop a safety plan. If and when a critical incident happens, we know who their support system is, as well as other resources that they have available at their fingertips to be able to help them get through that critical time in their lives. Just being able to assess the situation and the individual first through assessments and tools so that way we're able to better support them should they have a critical incident. Sharon Jones reiterated that it would be like upfront preparation; preparing in advance an also understanding who we're providing care and services to. Misty Rose agreed that having a support system in place and a safety plan

to have that safety net to help support them if something should happen - we would know who to contact and a better way to help them if we already knew them as an individual. Sharon highlighted about really zoning in on building relationship with families, individuals, and the community. Sharon knows a lot of them are doing that already and thinks that is key.

Marylin Mochel, NAMI Merced County, also suggested trainings around micro aggressions and how to address them. Often, as others have said, it can be a one-time training and there has to be practice woven into the training. Otherwise, people don't internalize the skills. This is ongoing because often we don't address micro aggressions and then there is an incident that gets everyone's attention, but yet we're not addressing these underlying beliefs that come out in daily conversations and we don't often have the skills to address them. Marylin said that often, we talk as if we do, but without practice Marylin doesn't know if any of our trainings really embed practice so that people feel comfortable and confident to stop and address when things are said. Sharon thinks it also depends on how safe you feel within the system that you're working or the system that you're connect to as well, and how acceptable, affirming and allowable it is to have those deep conversations. Sharon agrees that micro aggressions are so very important to address because if they're not, it only builds up resentment, hurt, hostile work environment – it goes into all those negative frequencies of everything. Sometimes it's the lack of the person really having awareness of what they've said or how it's come across so that the practice and the skills build up. The other thing is compassion and believe system; it is hard to have a person go through a training and just change their blue print, but Sharon does believe that through the practice and having them experience what it's like can lead to better awareness. Sharon noted that there's an essential thing today about keeping it in the forefront, and life-long learning. Marylin thinks that having individuals come together and being able to look at these underlying beliefs, as well as to experience and practice is very important as well. She added that it can't just be a one shot, it has to be embedded into the knowledge and culture of our organizations.

V. Mental Health: Discussion on How to Increase Family Support?

Sharon knows families are very fearful of their children going to school because of the critical incident. She asked how can we support our families a little more since we have many organizations that support families. Sharon asked for the committee's thoughts. When Sharon speaks of families, they are fearful that their children are having to go to school, but then the parents are having to increase stressors due to the fact that they think something is going to happen.

Katalina Zambrano shared that one thing that really helped them when they were fearful in Modesto about the straight pride, was for their local organizations to have a safe space for families where people could go and just talk about what was going on. Even afterwards, they had town hall meetings where family and friends could come together to really express how this has impacted them and how they're feeling. They also had peer support people there in case they needed extra support, to pull them aside and really have those in-depth conversations with them so that they could be heard and listened to. Going back to the presentations and trainings, Katalina suggested having people with lived experience about what's going on. Sitting in a presentation just listening to words does the job, but actually hearing how someone has been impacted by discrimination, harassment, assault, or whatever is going on.

Misty Rose Bautista suggested maybe working with families to help them, working with their children to create internal safety plans such as teaching them how to teach their children safe words and safety plans so when they are in crisis they are able to help identify each other, and know what their individual plans are for either the family as a whole unit, or for each individual child. Sharon agrees about having intimate discussions with families and getting the best information, including critical crisis information to help their children and to prepare them. Not to say that the situation might not happen, but again, being more preventative and having that conversation.

Lanetta Smyth, with BHRS, shared that she really liked what was mentioned about getting to know who our clients are as people, who our families are, and not just look at them as clients. Lanetta thinks it's really important that we're able to do that so that it's not just report building, it's relationship building. She noted that it's really hard, and it's hard to start those conversations sometimes, and you don't always know if you're opening up a can of worms that you shouldn't. Lanetta thinks that being as honest as possible and being able to be comfortable with people's fear is really important because she thinks we're afraid of fear. Lanetta thinks a lot of our negative reactions and emotions come from that feeling of feeling afraid. The cultural violence in the U.S. is pervasive and Lanetta thinks it's really difficult to find answers around us but it is possible by creating better relationships with our clients and their families, and encouraging people to have safety plans. Lanetta doesn't want to perpetuate people's care but thinks we also have to be realistic. Lanetta agrees especially with looking at people as who they are, where they come from, what they're circumstances are, and their family. Who they are as people is probably one of her biggest priorities when training staff.

VI. Mental Health Awareness and Outreach for Cultural Groups

Sharon stated that they are already engaging the community to some level. She asked the group about what they feel they need to add after critical incidents such as this happen, and how we need to engage cultural groups in our community or the community in general when an incident happens.

Ayesha Hunter, with BHRS, thinks it's also important to be able to find out what their needs are. She thinks it's easy for us to say they need this or that, but to create some kind of platform where there's outreach because they may not come to you, especially if there's fear. Ayesha suggested to somehow create a platform in which we go to them and find out what they need because number 1, we

can speculate what we think they want, but actually hearing from them could be to provide vital information that is needed. Number 2, the fact that we are taking the time to come to them and support them in that way shows that we as a community care about them when you feel heard, still validated, and like someone is actually taking their time to come and ask what you need. Ayesha thinks it's important for our community, our agencies, and the community as a whole. Sharon added about getting permission to go to the community because sometimes you may need to work through the trusted messenger – sometimes the community has a perception that we may not have.

Griselda Vasquez noted that in the previous meeting she shared that the school district in Livingston did send out a message to Livingston Union Unified parents. Griselda thinks this approach, at the very least acknowledging the tragedy, as it affected many lives not just the community where it happened. She believes someone from the district then reached out to them and she called back because she wasn't sure who it was. She was trying to connect with the superintendent's secretary just to let them know that in Livingston Community they want to be a partner. Griselda was thinking about assemblies back in the day, even though with COVID it is probably not a possibility physically in the school to reach the students, but she was wondering if there was any other organization that could maybe reach out to their local school districts and see if they would like information, a resource, or if they would like to partner and bring information. At Sierra Vista they have gone out to the local high school. Griselda would like to see if it's possible to go out to the elementary schools. She wonders if there is anything that says they can't reach them at a younger age to help provide resources, information, and visibility. Griselda would like to see something like this in the younger age category – it is obviously now touching the youngest aged category in such a tragic way. Their voices count, they are really receptive and open to learning and to experiencing whatever it is that's out there that we can offer. Griselda said to keep doing our jobs in the communities we represent, and try to partner with those trusted messengers, such as those schools, and see what can be done. She knows that the school year is about to end, but maybe it's something we kick off the next school year with. Griselda is going to see what they could do in Livingston. They have a very supportive superintendent with Mr. Zamora, so if they could find a way in which he feels comfortable. Griselda knows it's a sensitive topic but not talking about it also does no favors to these students.

Katalina Zambrano shared that they were just invited to be a part of a health fair at Waterford Elementary and at first Katalina wasn't sure if they were ready for that, but the reception was really awesome. Even though it was at the end of the day, there were people who were really interested in just hearing about what it was. Even for it being LGBTQ, at such a small rural area, Katalina expressed that it was really cool that they didn't get any back lash. Katalina has seen it happen over and over again, especially with other elementary schools. Katalina thinks health fairs are awesome where they invite all those organizations to come out during the lunch time, during a mid-day school thing, or a Saturday event – Katalina has seen them and they work really well. Also, going back in and just having conversations with teachers. Sometimes superintendents or principals don't really want to have that on their plate just yet. Katalina hears from other organizations that maybe the children are too young to hear about this, but the teachers are the ones dealing with what's going on the classroom every single day and they're hearing what the children's needs are. Katalina thinks even inviting the teachers to a teacher's fair so that they could go on their own time and see the resources there. Then they could take those resources to the principal to inform them of what is needed.

Ker Thao shared via chat that they were invited by Farmdale Elementary to table at their back to school night.

VII. Culturally Specific Approaches in Our Community

Sharon asked the group about culturally specific approaches in our community to help people or to help families. She said that we know that people and families are individual, but there are some things that culturally might be more acceptable than other things.

Jose Chavez-Diaz, Golden Valley Health Centers, shared that when engaging with the Latino community he works with and from his own experience of being a male, he does a lot of reminding on the importance of physicals at a certain age. He started doing it more during COVID-19 2019 because they were not allowed to go out to the community or even go to the doctor at one point since they were not sure what was going to happen. Jose always reminds males who are 30 and over about their yearly physicals. Sharon said that makes a lot of sense in terms of a culturally specific approach through their cultural belief system for physical health. Sharon suggested that maybe they can go through the conversation of how they receive their physical health – she thinks that is a good approach because sometimes we approach it from the angle that we're offering and it may not even be how they go about getting their health care needs met. Jose noted that from personal experience, he is a Latino male and he doesn't remember his dad ever going to the doctor or talking about physicals when he was growing up. Jose shared that he started doing that for a little while and then caught himself and said that he is giving the community all this valuable information on how to prevent and early intervention, and he's not taking it; Jose then started focusing on himself too. Jose shares his personal experience with them and explains that it's very important to get their physicals to prevent certain chronic diseases in the future.

Sharon thinks that's a good approach. She said that she can't say enough about lived experience because if a person can talk about going through something, automatically the validity starts to build up as opposed to talking about something that you've never gone through. Sometimes people don't see it as credible but if you tell them you were in a place similar to what they are, they have a tendency of really tuning in and listening – she suggested utilizing lived experience as a resource.

Misty Rose asked Jose if they hold clinics specifically for free physicals at different sites or if they partake in anything like that for the community for children who want to play sports. Misty Rose also requested Katalina's contact information for training purposes.

Jose explained that Golden Valley Health Centers paused and slowed down a lot of services throughout the pandemic. A lot of their staff left willingly and unwillingly, and one that left was the director of nursing. When they got the new director, they were mainly focusing on COVID-19 vaccines and testing. He noted that physicals slowed down. Now they have 2 new directors that are partnering to work together as a team on having some of these sports physicals. This Tuesday they were planning and talking about providing sports physicals at some events but he is not sure what events yet. As soon as Jose has more information he will let everyone know.

Sharon asked the committee to do research for the next meeting to come up with some things that cultures have said have really helped them. She thinks people need to know that they're doing outreach and they need to know what helps people in diverse communities. We're often building programs and setting it up from our own worldview and our belief system.

VIII. Substance Use Division Reports

Sharon explained the SUD prevention agenda item is usually to talk about SUD. Often, we talk more about mental health so we know that people who are living with substance use have challenges. There are also some culturally responsive things, reports, and information that needs to go forward.

IX. Client /Consumer Reports

Sharon mentioned that they are also looking to build up more client and consumer reports as well. Those are things that we have to work on and do a little bit better so that we can hear the stories of lived experience, which is so very powerful.

X. Updates

Griselda Vasquez said at the outcomes event last week she mentioned that they are recruiting for LCSW. She announced with excitement that in the coming weeks they will have someone in onboarding who will represent the Punjabi community – Griselda is excited to be able to say that. It's something that they had always dreamed of having in the community, or having someone to represent the community. In Livingston especially, they have a large community that is monolingual or somewhat lingual. To be able to serve them in a culturally sensitive way in their native language is going to be a life changer for some of their patients. Griselda hopes that as Jazlyn onboard, she builds up her population and her panel, she'll be a great asset to both the community and their health centers. LCH is also expanding and continues to grow. They will be adding an additional health center to the Modesto community. Services will also be provided there for behavioral health so they will still be recruiting; they have 1 more position to fill for Licensed Social Worker if anybody is interested. Livingston Community Health is very excited to say that they will offer services now in Punjabi for behavioral health.

Misty Rose asked that if anyone knew any resources of cooling centers for homeless youth or homeless population, or in general, to please share in the chat because they are trying to provide resources for families. Sharon responded that nothing has come through their emails about cooling centers. Sometimes the county sends out the locations and if so, Sharon will forward that to her.

Katalina mentioned that even though they are based out in Stanislaus, they still serve a lot of Merced. They also have a lot of groups out in Los Banos and other places, but they just decided that they will be opening and advocacy center for the collaborative in Merced itself, hopefully within the next few months. This will really help to have a base place there. It is a little bit of travel but it is so needed. They already have a pride center there that is a safe space for them and holds groups, but they really want to open up themselves a place where they can start presenting these trainings, meeting with all these organizations, providing all these resources, and possibly having a therapist. Katalina shared about her new office in Modesto, but noted that they are always in Merced. Katalina mentioned that they just expanded out to provide a full drop-in center –it was their admin office and a drop-in together as one, and all 10-11 staff members were working together. Now they got the space in the next building where it is now the drop-in center and they have been working with a lot of the youth in Modesto. They provided housing for homeless youth who are now employees of their organization. Katalina expressed that they are excited to see them progress and about 90% of it has to do with their peer support.

XI. Possibilities and Success Stories

For the next meeting, Sharon asked the committee to bring a success story and one culturally specific thing that has been known to really help people.

XII. Next Steps

The next Cultural Humility, Health Equity, and Social Justice Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 23, 2022

XIII. Adjourned

The meeting adjourned at 10:55am