



FINAL REPORT 2022-2023

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

La Cultura Cura: The Traditional Arts for Healing is a series of 4 free workshops focused on how cultural practices can support our healing through storytelling, cultural foods, milagro charms, songwriting, and other day-to-day cultural practices for the Latino/a/x community. The workshops are bilingual in Spanish and English and primarily held online. We first developed the program in 2020 as a part of our Building Healthy Communities Boyle Heights work, funded by The California Endowment, specifically to create connection for underserved communities during a time of extreme stress and anxiety. With funding from the LA County Department of Mental Health, ACTA had the opportunity to conduct the workshop series in four Service Areas: 2, 3, 6, and 7, totaling 16 workshops between November 2022-June 2023.

Each workshop was 1.5-2 hours long, was led by 2-3 artists/culture bearers, and addressed a different mental health theme: stress and anxiety, wellbeing, grief and loss, and music as healing. At the beginning of each workshop, a mental health promoter introduced each mental health theme with a short accessible presentation, which included helpful

resources. The artists then proceeded to lead the majority of the workshop by engaging participants in conversation through storytelling and the creation of an artwork or song connecting cultural practice to healing. We held the final 4th workshops for Service Areas 6 and 7 in a hybrid format, and the rest were held completely on ZOOM.

Betty Marin, Associate Program Director, and César Castro, Program Coordinator, were the primary ACTA staff coordinating each workshop and conducting outreach in partnership with the local community organizations and DMH, who shared their lists and networks. María Moreno, an independent mental health promoter, led the mental health-themed presentations during each workshop. We worked with a variety of English-Spanish interpreters to ensure each session was fully bilingual, primarily Jen Hofer, Alexia Veytia, and Rossy Russo.

Our partnership with different community organizations that served the local communities was a central way we focused on our outreach in each Service Area. Outreach and promotion were carried out as a joint effort between ACTA, the host organization of the series, and DMH through social media, emails, phone calls, direct invitations at partner meetings, with both staff and affiliated members, taking flyers and posters to libraries, community health centers, and businesses in the area surrounding the physical address of the partnering organization. All our promotional materials were fully bilingual in Spanish and English.



Large posters (English language versions) we printed with full details promoting the workshops for each series. We also created social media versions featuring the information on different slides. Design by Carla Zarate for ACTA, 2022-23.

Summary of Partnerships, Service Areas, Dates, and Participation

The communities where we focused outreach for each workshop series were the San Fernando Valley (Service Area 2), San Gabriel Valley (Service Area 3), South East Los Angeles (Service Area 7), and South Los Angeles (Service Area 6), with a total of 234 participants with an average of 58 people per series, divided as follows:

Service Area 2, San Fernando Valley. Nov 16, Nov 30, Dec 7, Dec 14

Community Partner: Tía Chucha's Bookstore and Cultural Center,

<https://www.tiachucha.org/>

Working to transform communities in the Northeast San Fernando Valley and beyond through ancestral knowledge, the arts, literacy, and creative engagement.

Total participation: 51

Service Area 3, San Gabriel Valley. Feb 8, Feb 15, Feb 22, March 8

Community Partner: South El Monte Arts Posse, <https://semartsposse.wordpress.com/>

A collective of artists, writers, urban planners, educators, scholars, farmers, ecologists, swap meet vendors, and youth dedicated to engaging with the South El Monte and El Monte community through the arts by rethinking our use of space and transforming how we inhabit it.

Total participation: 55

Service Area 7, South East LA. April 5, April 12, April 19, April 26

Community Partner: Communities for Better Environment, <https://www.cbecal.org/>

Build people's power in California's communities of color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy, and sustainable communities and environments.

Total participation: 66

Service Area South 6, South LA. June 7, June 14, June 21, June 28

Community Partner: Wellnest Center, <https://www.wellnestla.org/>

Through a holistic approach to emotional well-being, Wellnest offers hope, healing, and opportunity to the children, young adults, families, and communities we serve. Our commitment remains steadfast as we enter our second century of service.

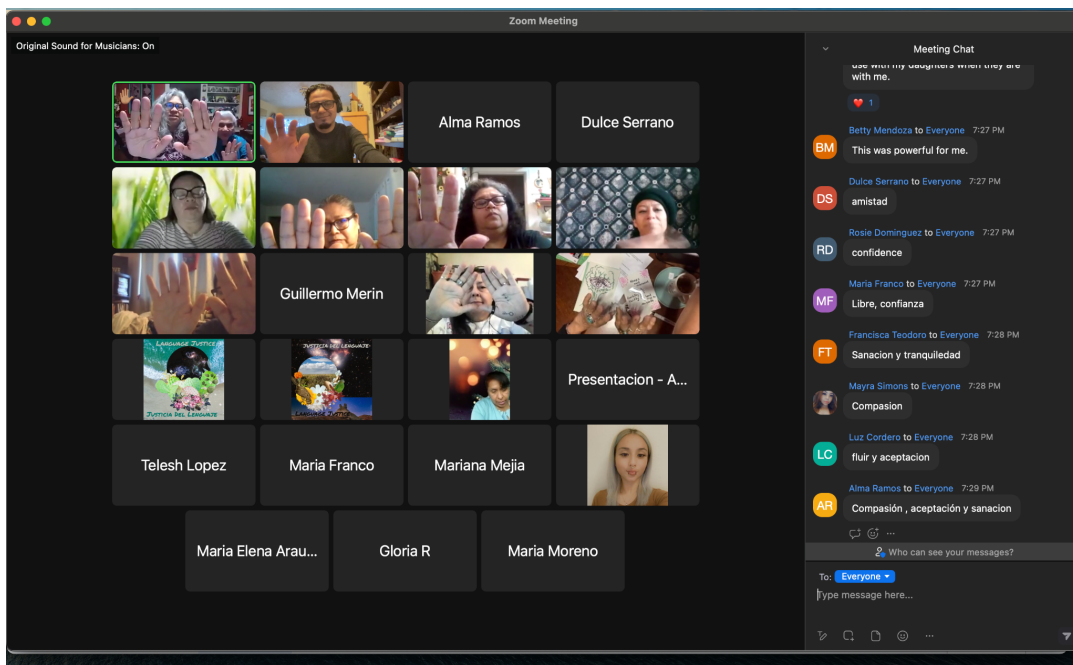
Total participation: 62

Workshop Structure and Summary Descriptions

For each workshop, we had a planning meeting with the instructors to adjust the curriculum and/or prepare support material for their topic as needed. Each session followed the basic structure below.

- Welcome and interpretation announcement
- Thank you to funders and partner
- Reminder about participatory program
- Mental health promoter's presentation with Q&A
- Artist facilitated session
- Pre-Survey or Post-Survey
- Partner's announcement/invitation/resources
- Closing

Workshops and Artist Facilitators



Screenshot from *Milagro of Wellness* workshop on ZOOM with participant comments on June 14th, 2023.

Workshop 1. Share and listen to stories: Cultural Healing Dishes

Participants worked with co-facilitators Juana Mena and Omar G Ramirez to recall and share, listen, and connect personal histories through an online discussion on food and culture as healing. The participants recalled and shared a recipe, ingredients, and personal stories passed down from one generation to another. In sharing their stories, they were invited to reflect and critically analyze how these recipes, ingredients, and personal stories have brought and continue to bring them joy.

Omar G. Ramirez is a visual artist who developed a methodology called Restorative Cultural Arts Practice rooted in Chicax traditions. He has taught and worked in underserved communities such as incarcerated populations for 20 years.

Juana Mena is a quilter from Guadalajara, Mexico, who has been mentored by Omar Ramirez in restorative justice and is a leader in organizing spaces in Boyle Heights where she lives.

Workshop 2. Milagro of Wellness: A Personal Offering

Ofelia Esparza and Rosanna Esparza Ahrens led a workshop on healing and wellness through the creation of a milagro, a healing charm. Participants conducted a body scan to learn from their body "What is needed now," and created a Milagro charm with foil and paper, followed by writing a short poem/prayer. The Milagro can be added to a personal *ofrenda* (offering) as a daily devotion to the self for healing. We started with a meditation on our names to ground us in the present moment and our own histories, and closed with an affirmation.

Ofelia Esparza is a Chicana printmaker and 4th generation *altarista* (altar maker), whose work is informed by a deep spiritual belief in the traditional process. She was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship, the country's highest honor for a culture-bearer in 2019.

Rosanna Esparza Ahrens is Ofelia's daughter and also a master altar maker and graphic designer and together they run a boutique and creative wellness art studio called TONALLI STUDIO, located in the heart of East Los Angeles.

Workshop 3. The Rebozo for Wellbeing: Affirming our Healing for Grief and Loss

Luz Marlene Cordero, Francisca Teodoro, and Mayra Simons led participants in a series of reflections/meditations about how cultural practices can support us through grief and loss. We reflected on the *rebozo* [shawl/scarf] as an important cultural garment in Latin America and other countries and how it is a symbol of cultural embrace. We also learned to create homemade incense as a practice to support our grieving process and create cleansing in our home.

Mayra Simons is a mother, grandmother, and longtime resident of East LA/Boyle Heights, and was born into the Tarahumara traditions of northern Mexico. She has facilitated workshops on altar making, paper flowers, herbalism, and crafts.

Luz Marlene Cordero is from El Salvador and a long-time resident of Boyle Heights. She developed her own craft practice creating decorative fixtures for her home and for friends, and as a volunteer with the parent center at Roosevelt High. She was mentored by Rosanna Esparza Ahrens and Ofelia Esparza for 3 years and since then has taken more leadership in expanding her practice, growing from the altar-based practices she learned from her mentors.

Francisca Teodoro is from Puebla Mexico, and has been working and learning from Luz Marlene since 2021, along with drawing from her own experiences. Her cultural practices are rooted in traditional foods, as well as sewing and altar-making. She has always been active in her community, including also being involved in the parent centers at local schools in Boyle Heights where her children attend.

Workshop 4. Music Heals Us: Collective Songwriting to Move Forward

Vaneza Calderón and Chuy Sandoval led participants in the use of a traditional or popular/familiar song structure to collectively create a song with input from all participants. The collectively created song told a story that combined lessons and ideas through the words of the participants, which helped with building connection and a sense of wellbeing amongst the participants. At the culmination of this workshop series, participants reflected on how culture heals and what they have gained in their participation in the La Cultura Cura series.

Vaneza Mary Calderón is a mariachi musician from Los Angeles trained in facilitating collective songwriting, drawing on various musical song forms and genres including corridos, cumbias, and others.

Manuel “Chuy” Sandoval is a community-based musician focusing on son jarocho. He teaches in various contexts and is part of the local son jarocho band Cambalache.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- About 90% of participants identified as women.
- Most participants were in the age range of 26-59 years (about 78%), 17% were 60+, and the remaining were between 16-25 years old.
- About 60% of participants live in Service Areas 4 and 7, which respond directly to the area of the county where ACTA has the greatest presence with its programs. However, we also secured great participation in Service Area 7 due to the strong community base of our partner, Communities for a Better Environment.
- The remaining approximately 40% of participants were distributed somewhat evenly between Service Areas 2, 3, and 6.

SURVEY RESULTS & PROJECT OUTCOMES

The initial and final bilingual surveys consisted of 12 questions from which we obtained demographic information, awareness on the subject of mental health and public services, understanding of a cultural connection to mental health, and current emotional state. 9 out of 12 questions focused on the experience of the participants and those are documented in the comparative view document linked below. We received 90 Pre Survey responses (53 in Spanish and 37 in English) and 77 Post Survey responses (58 in Spanish and 19 in English), reflecting responses by 30-40% of the total participants.



The survey questions implemented a 5-point Likert scale, where 5-agree, 4-slightly agree, 3-unsure, 2-slightly disagree, and 1-completely disagree.

Survey Questions

Participants were asked to complete the Pre Survey prior to the workshops and the Post Survey at the end of all 4 workshops, which provided significant data regarding the impact of our workshops.

Pre Survey Questions Link to Pre Survey in English on TypeForm	Post Survey Questions Link to Post Survey in English on TypeForm
1. I feel welcome in the workshop space.	1. I felt welcomed in the workshops.
2. I understand what mental health is.	2. After these workshops, I have a stronger understanding of mental health.
3. I know where I can find more information on mental health resources.	3. After these workshops, I feel more comfortable accessing mental health resources in the community.
4. I feel connected to my cultural heritage.	4. After these workshops, I feel more connected to my cultural heritage.
5. I feel connected to a cultural heritage other than my own.	5. After these workshops, I feel more connected to a cultural heritage other than my own.
6. I recognize how cultural practices can support me in dealing with stress and trauma.	6. After these workshops, I learned about specific cultural practices that can support me in dealing with stress and trauma.

7. I know the symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress and grief.	7. In these workshops, I learned about the symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress and grief.
8. The state of my current emotional well-being is positive.	8. As a result of my participation in this program, my emotional well-being has been positively affected.
9. Other comments.	9. Other comments.

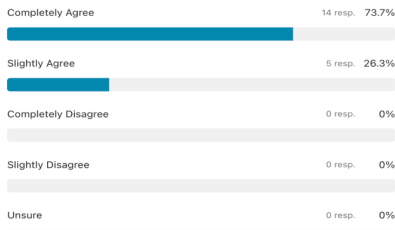
For a comparative view of the Pre and Post Surveys in English and Spanish, please see the following link attachment to our **Pre and Post Survey Response Summary**:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/fv1r23k4ktolxld/La%20Cultura%20Cura%20PRE%20%26%20OST%20response%20summary%202022-23.pdf?dl=0>

The summary provides a panoramic view of all the questions for each of the surveys in both languages.

As a result of my participation in this program, my emotional well-being has been positively affected.

19 out of 19 people answered this question



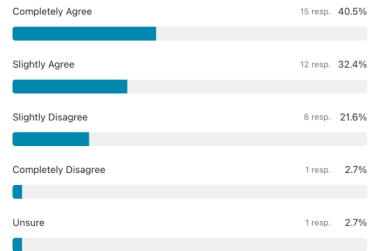
Como resultado de mi participación en este programa, mi bienestar emocional se ha visto afectado positivamente.

58 out of 58 people answered this question



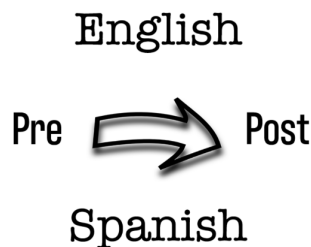
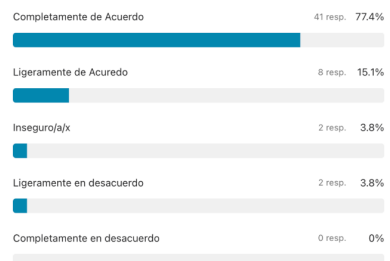
The state of my current emotional well-being is positive.

37 out of 37 people answered this question



El estado de mi bienestar emocional actual es positivo.

53 out of 53 people answered this question



Survey Response Highlights

Question #2.

Pre: I understand what mental health is.

Post: After these workshops, I have a stronger understanding of mental health.

In general, participants reported having a high understanding of the subject of mental health, yet at the end of the cycle, they reported their understanding increased, 78.9% of English language respondents and about 84.5% of Spanish language respondents.

Question #3.

Pre: I know where I can find more information on mental health resources.

Post: After these workshops, I feel more comfortable accessing mental health resources in the community.

73.7% of English language respondents reported more comfort in accessing mental health resources, showing an 81.9% increase from the Pre Survey response of 40.5%; whereas 87.9% of Spanish language respondents reported more comfort in accessing mental health resources, an increase of about 26% from the Pre Survey response of 40.5%.

Question #4. Pre: I feel connected to my cultural heritage.

Post: After these workshops, I feel more connected to my cultural heritage.

About 77.4% of Spanish language respondents reported a connection to their cultural heritage during the pre-surveys, which increased to 93.1% in the post-survey, showing a 20% increase. For English language respondents, there was a dramatic increase from 54.1% reporting a connection at the start to 94.7% reporting a connection following the close of the workshops, resulting in a 75% increase.

Question #5. Pre: I feel connected to a cultural heritage other than my own.

Post: After these workshops, I feel more connected to a cultural heritage other than my own.

Respondents also reported a greater connection to a cultural heritage other than their own. For English language participants, 78.9% felt a connection to a cultural heritage not of their own at the end of the workshops: a 125% increase from 35.1% at the start of the

workshops. Spanish language respondents reported 67.9% at the start of the program and 84.5% for the Post Survey, an increase of about 25%.

Question #6: Pre: I recognize how cultural practices can support me in dealing with stress and trauma.

Post: After these workshops, I learned about specific cultural practices that can support me in dealing with stress and trauma.

English language respondents in particular reported a greater understanding of how culture can support their mental health, from 56.8% to 89.5% in Pre and Post Surveys—a 57% increase. For Spanish language respondents it was about 83% to 89.7%—an 8% increase.

Question #7. Pre: I know the symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress and grief.

Post: In these workshops, I learned about the symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress and grief.

73.7% of English language participants reported learning about these symptoms during the workshops and 89.7% of Spanish language participants confirmed the same.

Question #8. The state of my current emotional well-being is positive. 8. As a result of my participation in this program, my emotional well-being has been positively affected.

Participants reported their mental and emotional health status improved as a result of the workshops. For English language participants, this increase was from 40.5% to 73.7% (an 82% increase), and for Spanish language participants from 77.4% to 86.2% (an 11% increase).

Participant Comments

The surveys concluded with an open-ended question regarding additional comments participants would like to share. The comments highlighted the positive effects of this workshop series:

"I was moved about the shawl as a gift of remembering loved ones and reminding me of beautiful times."

"Me encantó saber que la cultura sana mi alma y espíritu y mente ..."

[Translation: *I loved knowing that my culture heals my soul, spirit, and mind...*]

"I love composing the song and it was very healing to hear everyone's input"

"Me gustaron los cuatro workshops. Me identifiqué con los comentarios y opiniones. Gracias estuvo muy informativo."

[Translation: *I liked the 4 workshops. I identified with the comments and opinions Thank you. It was very informative.*"]

"I really enjoyed the workshop, I feel closer to my community"

"Si que estos talleres deberían de ser más frecuentes."

[Translation: *Yes, these workshops should be more frequent.*]

"Excelentes talleres con muchas información y herramientas para aprender y aplicar a mi vida diaria"

[Translation: *Excellent workshops with lots of information and tools to learn and apply in my daily life*"]

"El programa es muy bueno. Para conocer y hablar con otras personas a través de estos talleres y aprender sobre cómo la cultura es buena para sanar. Por ese momento se me quitan las preocupaciones y siento que tengo valor. Muchas gracias."

[Translation: *"The program is really good. To meet and learn with other people through these workshops about how culture is good for healing. For that moment, my worries are gone and I feel I have value. Thank very much."*]

Based on the engagement in the workshops, the survey responses and comments, we saw participants gained:

- An increased sense of belonging to a cultural community and a greater understanding of cultural practices as sources for healing.
- Improved self esteem, social relations, and collective identity.
- Reduced stigma related to mental health and the expression of stress, anxiety, and trauma within the community.
- A stronger bridge between the Latinx community and DMH services

Creating a culturally supportive environment in the workshops reduced stigma and helped participants see more clearly the tools and solutions that are part of the contexts they grew up with, including daily activities such as cooking, walking, observing, listening to music, and organizing our personal or communal space at home, which includes setting intentions for healing. There was an understanding and acceptance in the workshops that although we all live with stress, we can be better at noticing those symptoms and proactive in doing the things that will help relieve the stress and stay connected to ourselves and community.

SUCCESSSES & CHALLENGES

Securing partner organization and Outreach: ACTA was able to rely on existing relationships with different community organizations in different parts of the county to create partnerships for these series. For Service Areas 2 and 3, we partnered with arts and culture organizations. The alignment in values and practices was, of course, welcome in the partnership. However, we realized that since they were already providing arts and culture programming, their members and networks may have been somewhat saturated with these programs. In those cases, we relied primarily on our own networks and DMH as well. For Service Area 7, we partnered with an environmental justice organization with a strong community base, which proved very fruitful for two reasons: (1) the strong participation from their committed members was visible in their attendance and (2) we surmise that since their work did not have a strong arts, culture, and healing focus, the La Cultural Cura workshop series created a ripe opportunity to connect with their members. We did struggle to secure a final partner in South LA. In some cases, they were cold calls, which likely influenced a lack of response, and in others, one organization expressed a lack of organizational capacity, particularly since they were just rebuilding their community outreach since the pandemic. In the end, the partnership with Wellnest in South LA was very productive, as they understand the mental health focus and our liaison, Betty

Mendoza, participated in all workshops, which allowed for Wellnest to share about their programs and a more clear connection between the series and their work. In the future, we would consider offering a larger honorarium for the partner organization since we understand capacity issues may be present, which would hopefully allow for greater participation in relation to outreach in their local communities.

Online and Hybrid Format: Most workshops were held on the ZOOM platform with bilingual interpretation. It proved to be a convenient method for participants, as some joined from their homes, or on their devices during their children's sports practice, for example. While it was sometimes difficult to gauge the experience of participants who shared less during the sessions, the majority stuck around for the full workshop, demonstrating some connection or appreciation of the material.

We had planned to hold the 4th and final workshop of every series in person; however, the pandemic, unprecedented issues with one of our partner's spaces, and the challenges of attending an in-person vs. Zoom meeting allowed for only two of the 4 meetings in a hybrid format. Our community partner in Service Area 7 had an excellent hybrid tech set-up, allowing some participants to join on Zoom and others in person, which enabled all participants to hear and interact with each other in a bilingual setting. Our last hybrid session in South LA was more challenging tech-wise because they did not already have a tech set-up for hybrid meetings. In the future, we would consider either staying fully online, fully in person, or ensuring the correct tech setup for each session to be hybrid so participants know what to expect from the beginning. Holding just one session in person/hybrid may have been a little confusing for some. The Zoom sessions also allowed people to join from different parts of the county, even when we focused outreach on specific areas.

Partnership with DMH Promoters: It was great to be connected directly to the Lead promoter of each service area. Some were more responsive than others and it's unclear whether distributing through their networks was very fruitful.

Obtaining Pre and Post Survey Responses: Holding this program online was accessible for many people, but made it more difficult to collect their survey responses. While we were able to get solid data for almost half the participants, there was not a strong way to require this for the majority of participants. We reached out to participants at the end with the incentive of joining a raffle, which helped get some additional responses outside of the workshop space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, we believe that providing the La Cultura Cura workshop series has brought mental health consciousness to Latino communities. In retrospect, there are a few suggestions we would like to emphasize. First, it is important to continue creating a stronger partnership between DMH outreach systems, mainly promoters and organizations, that are leading capacity-building projects. A stronger partnership would allow us to work more closely with the mental health promoters so that they can follow up with participants and continue to be a direct link connecting them to services in their area, which could help sustain the future impacts of this work. Perhaps the Latino Underserved Cultural Committee can also advise on outreach and serve in a similar role of serving as a bridge to the local communities where these projects are taking place.

Similarly, it could be very productive to provide direct information to the DMH community clinics and partners so that they are aware of the program and can share with their clients. This was very productive in our partnership with Wellnest, where their therapists referred their clients to the program when they felt it might benefit them. Having a map with the location of these community mental health centers could also be very effective in conducting outreach.

Finally, we suggest continuing to support community mental health programs that incorporate arts and culture, and developing opportunities for those programs to be offered directly in DMH clinics. We've witnessed how the positive impact of providing mental health information is deepened when offered in a culturally sensitive and accessible way. In addition to considering how these programs can be offered directly, we also see how productive it can be to partner with social justice organizations who have strong community bases, but may not have the capacity or focus to provide cultural mental health resources to support the wellbeing of their members, and therefore the sustainability of their organization.