

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-21009516-2

Project Outcomes and Summary Report

Project Description

The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project was developed by the Eastern European/Middle Eastern (EE/ME) Underserved Cultural Communities (USCC) subcommittee (under the Mental Health Services Act) for the purpose of increasing mental health access and reducing disparities for the Farsi speaking communities that reside in the County of Los Angeles. Cross Cultural Expressions was hired for the purpose of developing and implementing this project. This project targeted Farsi speaking older adults residing in Los Angeles County and consisted of 2-hour virtual poetry workshops two (2) times a month, for a period of ten (10) months.

Poetry is an important part of the Iranian culture and is traditionally used as a tool to help individuals heal from mental and emotional challenges. The poetry workshops were meant to provide a space for Farsi speaking older adults to gather and interact with one another. It also provided a safe space for them to share their emotional and mental health issues in a culturally appropriate and acceptable manner. The workshops were also instrumental in promoting mental health services, increasing mental health awareness and education, and reducing stigma's while reducing isolation by increasing opportunities for social interactions for Farsi speaking older adults. Participants were also educated on how to access mental health services and understand some of the cultural biases associated with mental health conditions and stigmatized societal issues that often lead to mental health conditions for the individual as well as within the family system.

The Poetry workshops were facilitated by a poetry expert and a licensed mental health professional. Each month a specific topic that related to mental health was selected and the poetry expert brought in a variety of poems related to the topic to share with participants. Interactive group discussions were had and the mental health specialist addressed mental health issues that were brought up and helped further illustrate healing techniques by utilizing the context of the poems as inspiration. Pre and Post survey's were given to all participants and demographic information was collected.

This Project was implemented in three (3) phases starting July 1, 2021 to August 31, 2022. Below is a description of each phase:

Phase One:

During phase one of this project we began with hiring or Persian poetry consultant, who co-facilitated the groups with the licensed mental health consultant/program director on the project. The consultants worked together on selecting 10 mental health topics and it was decided that each month we would focus on one of these topics. The Persian

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-21009516-2

poetry consultant then researched and selected poems that reflected the topic of the month to share and discuss with participants during each workshop. The consultants then chose the dates and times of all of the sessions. It was decided that we would offer one session during the morning/afternoon hours and one session during the evening hours each month. This allowed for participants to pick a time that works best for them.

The mental health consultant/program director then developed a pre/post survey questionnaire. The questionnaire included five (5) close ended questions and utilized a Likert Scale in order to conduct a matched pair analysis of the information gained by participants from the workshops. The pre/post survey's were meant to measure the degree to which the workshops may have affected the participants perception of stigma in relation to mental health issues, their understanding of certain mental health topics, and their knowledge of available mental health resources. Pre/Post survey's were turned in to LACDMH for approval and once approval was received, they were translated into Farsi.

In order to ensure sufficient advertisement of the workshops, the program director signed contracts with local Iranian radio station KIRN 670am, that ensured that we would have two (2), twenty-two minute time slots every month in order to advertise the workshops, which we titled, "Exploring Mental Health Through Persian Poetry." Additionally, we received two five minute time slots on a variety of shows on KIRN in order to speak about the workshops and further advertise them.

We also created flyers (in English and Farsi) that we sent out to our email lists and also posted on our social media a couple times a month in order to advertise the workshops. Additionally, we reached out to a variety of Iranian organizations and asked them to share our flyers with their participants and on their social media. All flyers were shared with LACDMH for approval prior to posting.

The first phase of the project was noted to have been completed on schedule.

Phase Two:

During phase two of this project the Persian poetry consultant continued researching poems that related to the chosen topic for the month. Meetings were held between the poetry consultant and the mental health consultant every month in order to review content of poems and outline the format and content of each session, making sure that everything makes sense and is presented in a clear fashion.

We began the workshops on October 14, 2021 and our final poetry workshop took place on July 27, 2022. We completed a total of 20 workshops (2 workshops a month for a period of 10 months). Each workshop took place on zoom and was two hours in length. Participants were asked to register for the workshops by completing the demographic information form as well as the pre test that was emailed to them before each program. After each program, we emailed each participant the post test form. Anyone who did not complete the demographic information form and/or the pre test form, we reached out to

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

first via email and then via phone call in order to ensure that forms were received. We also reached out to participants who did not turn in the post tests first via email and then via phone call in order to ensure that all documentation was collected. During each session, the DMH Access Line phone number was discussed and shared with all participants. Additional mental health resources were also discussed and shared with participants as requested.

The “Exploring Mental Health Through Persian Poetry” workshops continued to be promoted on a weekly bases to the public through: social media (facebook, instagram, linkedin and twitter); on-line magazines such as Iranianhotline.com; email lists as well as via other organizations including Raha International, JQ International, PARS Equality Center and other partnering organizations; and via the on-going advertisements on radio KIRN 670am. All promotional materials continued to be submitted to LACDMH for approval prior to distribution.

Below is a list of the topics, dates and times for the Exploring Mental Health Through Persian Poetry virtual workshops:

Month/Year	Topic	Date & Time Session #1	Date & Time Session #2
October 2021	Parenting & Children	October 14, 2021 7pm to 9pm	October 27, 2021 10am to 12pm
November 2021	Anxiety & Depression	November 11, 2021 7pm to 9pm	November 24, 2021 10am to 12pm
December 2021	Domestic Violence, Child Abuse & Anger Management	December 9, 2021 7pm to 9pm	December 22, 2021 10am to 12pm
January 2022	The Role of Women in Persian Poetry	January 13, 2022 7pm to 9pm	January 26, 2022 10am to 12pm
February 2022	Role of Ego Vs. Self in Persian Culture and Poetry	February 10, 2022 7pm to 9pm	February 23, 2022 10am to 12pm
March 2022	A Look at “Aberoo” and Secrecy in Persian Culture through Poetry	March 10, 2022 7pm to 9pm	March 23, 2022 10am to 12pm
April 2022	Suicide & Grief	April 7, 2022 7pm to 9pm	April 20, 2022 10am to 12pm

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

May 2022	Affirming References to LGBTQ+ Culture in Persian Poetry	May 12, 2022 7pm to 9pm	May 25, 2022 10am to 12pm
June 2022	Love & Transformation	June 9, 2022 7pm to 9pm	June 22, 2022 10am to 12pm
July 2022	Forgiveness & Gratitude	July 7, 2022 7pm to 9pm	July 27, 2022 10am to 12pm

Phase Three:

The third phase of the project consisted of the collection of all registration information (i.e. the demographic information forms and pre/post survey results). All documentation was reviewed and demographic information was tallied. All comments and questions that were made during the discussions as well as all community feedback communicated to us via social media, emails, texts and telephone calls was also recorded in order to gather qualitative information about the effects the poetry workshops had on participants and on the targeted community at large. All quantitative and qualitative data that was gathered was written up and included in the Project Outcomes and Summary Report that was completed during this phase.

Project Results

A total of 163 unique individuals registered for the 20 Exploring Mental Health Through Persian Poetry virtual workshops over the 10 month period. Out of that number, we were able to collect demographic information on 140 of those individuals. The demographic information indicates that the majority of participants were Farsi speaking, female and over the age of 60. This confirms that we were successful in engaging our target audience of Farsi speaking older adults. We must also indicate that we became aware that many individuals who registered were in actuality sitting in on the zoom sessions with multiple family members. Thus, we believe the numbers of participants are actually greater than those who registered. But for the purpose of this report, we will only be focusing on those who we registered with us.

Below is a break down of the demographic information collected:

Gender	# Registered
Male	44
Female	96
Other	0
No Answer	0

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

Age	# Registered
0 to 15 years	0
16 to 25 years	6
25 to 59 years	55
60+ years	79
No Answer	0

Country of Origin	# Registered
Iran	103
USA	37

Primary Language	# Registered
Farsi/Persian	132
English	8

During and after each workshop we received a great amount of feedback from participants. The majority of participants commented on how educational and engaging they felt the workshops were and how much they appreciated all the research that went into finding the poems that addressed the chosen topic of the month. Many people also commented on how the mental health specialist was able to really help them understand the different aspects of mental health that they struggle with while using the poetry as a frame of reference. Others voiced their gratitude for having these workshops and commented on how the information presented helped them identify the mental and emotional health issues that they struggle with in a much more profound and relatable way. A significant number of people also asked if these sessions could be on-going on a weekly or monthly bases, because they felt it was very helpful to them and they don't want the sessions to end."

One participant commented, "I loved the way poetry was used to help us really feel what we are mentally going through." Another community member stated, "I loved hearing the poetry and learning about how to deal with my emotions through those poems." Another comment stated, "I have left every session feeling so calm and at peace. I really feel like these sessions have made a difference in my life and how I choose to live my life."

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-21009516-2

Another person stated, "These workshops were so educational and I was never bored. I took a lot of notes that I like to review and talk to my family about."

Other comments included:

"Thank you for having these sessions. Is there any way we can continue to have them on a weekly or at least monthly bases?"

"I like these group sessions a lot because it is very helpful to see how others struggle with the same issues I do and to see how each person deals with this stuff."

"I loved how inspired I was by the poetry. It made me start writing my feelings myself and creating my own poetry."

"I have always struggles to understand these great poems. I loved the way the poems were explained and how the therapist related them to my life and how I feel."

" Persian poems are hard to understand - having them recited and explained was very helpful and interesting to me."

"Thank you for teaching me that I can find help in art. I also am interested in learning more about where I can get therapy services for my family."

"My husband and I loved joining these sessions every month. Can you please continue them?"

All questions were addressed by the Farsi speaking mental health professional and the phone number to the LACDMH Access line was given to all participants.

Community members also gave positive feedback in regards to the Pre/Post surveys. They felt that the questions were good indicators of where community members beliefs and understanding lied in relation to the Farsi speaking community.

Over the 10 month period, 128 participants completed both the pre and post survey's. The pre-tests indicated that only 5% of participants either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Open communication and dialogue around mental health issues is one of the main steps on a person's path to healing." With the majority of participants (88%) indicating that they either had no opinion or did not agree nor disagree with the statement. The post tests indicate that there was a 64% increase in the number of participants who "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with this statement, indicating that the majority (69%) had developed a better understanding about the fact that open communication around mental health issues can help a person heal.

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-21009516-2

The pre-tests also indicated that only 12% of participants either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement, “Fear of social stigma is one of the main reasons why individuals who suffer from mental health issues don’t seek help.” With the majority of participants (85%) indicating that they either had no opinion or did not agree nor disagree with the statement. In contrast, the post-tests showed that 69% of participants were in agreement with this statement, indicating that there was a 57% increase in participants who had gained an understanding that in fact social stigma’s is a main reason why individuals choose to live with mental health issues rather than get help.

In regards to the statement, “Participation and engagement in creative arts, such as poetry groups, can be a positive step towards overcoming mental health and emotional challenges.” again, the pre-tests indicated that only 15% of participants either “agreed” or “strongly agreed,” with this statement; while the post-tests indicating that opinions had shifted by 58% with the majority (73%) agreeing with this statement. Thus confirming the fact that the poetry workshops had helped participants understand that participation in the creative arts can be a positive step toward healing mental health and emotional challenges.

Participants again indicated that the presentations helped them gain awareness of where they can go to access culturally competent and affordable mental health services, when the majority (73%) of them “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement, “I know of two places I can call to find affordable mental health services, with professionals who speak my language and know about my culture,” on the post-tests. In contrast, a mere 2% of participants who initially “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with this statement on the pre-tests. That was a 71% increase in awareness that the participants gained.

Finally, the pre-tests indicated that only 19% of participants either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that “Mental health problems like depression and anxiety, can get better if a person goes to therapy.” While the vast majority (80%), indicated in post-tests that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this statement. Again indicating a shift of 61% that participants had attained an understanding that therapy is a helpful tool for overcoming depression and anxiety, as a result of participation in the poetry workshops.

Therefore, the results of the pre tests are in alignment with our hypothesis that the majority of Farsi speaking adults and older adults have limited awareness about the social stigma’s that exist around mental health issues and to what extent these false beliefs and perceptions keeps them from accessing appropriate mental health services that can improve their everyday lives. The results of the post-tests then indicated that after participation in the poetry workshops, the majority of participants had a better understanding and awareness in regards to how therapeutic interventions (including the creative arts) can benefit their lives and how and where to access such services.

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

Furthermore, the verbal feedback that was collected was in alignment with the pre and post survey findings, as evidenced by the statement's presented above. The verbal feedback, even more than the pre/post survey's appeared to indicate how important these workshops were to community members and how influential they were in creating open discussion around subjects that are rarely discussed in our targeted communities.

Below is a detailed breakdown of participant's responses to each Pre/Post Test questions:

FARSI PRE-TEST OUTCOMES: N = 128

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	No opinion (0)
	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %
Open communication and dialogue around mental health issues is one of the main steps on a person's path to healing.	3 - 2%	7 - 5%	89 - 69%	4 - 3%	1 - 1%	24 - 19%
Fear of social stigma is one of the main reasons why individuals who suffer from mental health issues don't seek help.	3 - 2%	12 - 9%	76 - 59%	2 - 2%	2 - 2%	33 - 26%
Participation and engagement in creative arts, such as poetry groups, can be a positive step towards overcoming mental health and emotional challenges.	5 - 4%	14 - 11%	53 - 23%	8 - 6%	3 - 2%	45 - 35%

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

I know of two places I can call to find affordable mental health services, with professionals who speak my language and know about my culture.	0	3 - 2%	82 - 64%	12 - 9%	16 - 12%	15 - 12%
Mental health problems like depression and anxiety, can get better if a person goes to therapy.	9 - 7%	16 - 12%	58 - 45%	3 - 2%	2 - 2%	40 - 31%

FARSI POST-TEST OUTCOMES: N = 128

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	No opinion (0)
	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %
Open communication and dialogue around mental health issues is one of the main steps on a person's path to healing.	59 - 46%	29 - 23%	15 - 12%	3 - 2%	0	22 - 17%
Fear of social stigma is one of the main reasons why individuals who suffer from mental health issues don't seek help.	53 - 23%	35 - 27%	17 - 13%	5 - 4%	2 - 2%	16 - 12%

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
 UsCC Capacity Building Project
 PO-MH-21009516-2

Participation and engagement in creative arts, such as poetry groups, can be a positive step towards overcoming mental health and emotional challenges.	64 - 50%	29 - 23%	9 - 7%	5 - 4%	2 - 2%	19 - 15%
I know of two places I can call to find affordable mental health services, with professionals who speak my language and know about my culture.	42 - 33%	60 - 47%	11 - 9%	4 - 3%	4 - 3%	7 - 5%
Mental health problems like depression and anxiety, can get better if a person goes to therapy.	63 - 49%	38 - 30%	7 - 5%	4 - 3%	2 - 2%	14 - 11%

Project Costs

For the services described in the Statement of Work’s Deliverables, LACDMH agreed to pay consultants (Cross Cultural Expressions) a total of \$50,000.

Barriers/Challenges:

The biggest challenge to this project is getting Iranian older adults to do things like register for zoom sessions and fill out the pre/post survey’s using their computers. Because using computers and on-line technology is difficult for this age group, it requires that we take extra time to walk them through these steps. It is also a challenge for them to access the virtual sessions via zoom, so again, we made sure to have the staff to help walk participants through this process in order to ensure that they are able to log in and participate in the sessions.

Additionally, many participants were also very reluctant to give the demographic information that we requested of them at registration and they also did not feel comfortable with filling out the survey questions.

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
The Farsi Poetry Night Mental Health Virtual Outreach Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-21009516-2

Two things that we did in order to work through these issues was first, since we had access to many community members emails and/or phone numbers, we reached out to them individually and asked if they would be willing to fill out the pre/post surveys. By having the program director reach out to them directly and provide them with assurance that their answers and demographic information would be confidential, we were able to secure a good number of pre/post survey's.

Recommendations

The idea of creating awareness, educating, and creating engagement opportunities for Farsi speaking older adults that reside in Los Angeles County around mental health issues and linkage to culturally appropriate mental health services through the creation of virtual poetry workshops, was very well conceived and proved to be a successful way to tackle these stigmatized issues within this community. However, it is clear to us that this is only another step in what needs to be on-going programming that will help educate and normalize this concept to this immigrant community. Due to the overwhelming response we received by community members about their interest and desire to continue to have these workshops run on an on-going bases, it is our recommendation that continued funding is granted in order for us to be able to offer the Exploring Mental Health Through Persian Poetry virtual workshops on a weekly, bi-weekly, or at minimum monthly bases to the Farsi speaking community of Los Angeles County. This will help get the information that we have gathered through this project to a greater number of people, help with decreasing isolation and increasing engagement for adults and older adults and will continue to allow for learning and growth within the targeted communities.

Conclusion

Overall, the data collected indicates that a significant number of Farsi speaking adults and older adults attended the 20 virtual poetry workshops over the 10 month period. And by engaging the targeted community in this way, it is clear that this project was able to shift their engagement with and thinking around mental health issues, provide them with correct information and with referrals to much needed mental health services.

The pre/post survey's that were collected show that there was a significant shift in participant beliefs and knowledge about mental health issues. And verbal and written feedback that we received from community members confirmed that this project has created a substantial transformation in the perceptions that participants have in regards to mental health issues and has increased the dialogue that community members are having about this subject. The information that we have collected supports and validates our conclusion that this program was a resounding and overwhelming success in accomplishing the goals and objectives that we set out to achieve.