

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
Strategic Communications Division
Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC)

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health

UsCC Capacity Building Project

Healing Through the Arts for Arabic Speaking People
Project Outcomes and Summary Report 2023

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Project Description:

Healing Through the Arts for Arabic Speaking people was meant to provide a place for Arabic-speaking community members to conduct collective pleasurable art activities and express their feelings. There is a great deal of stigma surrounding mental health treatment within the Arabic-speaking population. This project was intended to be helpful and relevant to provide information about mental health within the Arabic-speaking community, through art and provide an opportunity for Arabic-speaking community members to express emotions utilizing art. This was accomplished by developing and implementing this project by targeting the Arabic-speaking community members residing in Los Angeles County. The project was to consist of ten (10) art events, one (1) time a month, for ten (10) consecutive months, utilizing painting to express thoughts and feelings and open the door for healing. Each event was to be conducted in at least one of the eight (8) Los Angeles County Service Areas and will last total of four (4) hours in length. The first hour will introduce the idea of well-being through art, one & half hours will be painting, and the last one & half hours will include expression of thoughts, feelings, and mental health discussions. Historically, different types of art forms such as poetry, painting, drawing, music, and theater have been utilized within the Middle Eastern Communities to express emotions and have emotional healing. Research indicates that introducing alternative forms of mental health well-being through art could help individuals heal from their mental and emotional problems. The art events were facilitated by a therapist credentialed in art therapy, who conducted the interactive art events and mental health group discussions.

Key Findings:

This Project was implemented in 4 phases starting July 2022 to June 2023. Below is a description of each phase, the methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion of the interviews:

Phase 1: In Phase One of this project, a training curriculum for a four (4) hour program to be utilized to conduct the art therapy sessions was created along with group logistics, questions, fliers and promotional materials, a resource guide and identifying spaces around Los Angeles County to hold the events.

A one-page trifold Resource Guide was also created. The Resource Guide included a list of all Los Angeles Department of Mental Health providers that have Arabic language capacity. The Resource Guide was distributed to each participant.

All the requirements of Phase One were completed and approved.

Phases 2-3: In phases 2-3 participants were advertised to and recruited for the art therapy. Events were scheduled starting in September and every month thereafter through July. Unfortunately, there were not enough participants to reach the minimum number for recruitment until March of 2023. A lot of time, money, human resources, and capital were exhausted trying to saturate the community with just the idea of art therapy. This was a concept that was very new to the Arabic speaking community in Los Angeles County and people were hesitant to join for a few reasons. Some specific reasons included: 1) not liking the association to a government institution (logos on fliers), 2) distrust of governmental institutions, and 3) the association of Arabic language.

A team of six people worked on recruitment, and administrative logistics to create the events in Los Angeles County. Over 20 events were planned and attempted. However, only ten had at least 10 or more individuals registered to attend to qualify for the submission of the requirements of the contract. The average cost per event between administrative costs, experts, venues, food and supplies and advertisement was over \$3,200 per event (>20 events x \$3200 = on average \$64,000). The costs well exceeded any contract reimbursement. The original requirements were to have 10-15 participants per event with a goal of a total of 100 participants. The data on attendance is not completely exacting in that between the ten events there were 90 signatures, over 100 people registered with 103 pretests returned. There were people who refused to sign-in or be identified in any way. There were others who would only sign with the understanding that their signatures were the beginning and

ending of their identifying information. This community has a history of negative experiences with the government both in their countries of origin and in the United States. This makes executing these types of programs very difficult.

One of the keys to implementation requires having trust in the person leading the implementation. This is a fine line for the manager of the grant who is given two masters to please; both the DMH and the community need their needs met simultaneously, which may conflict with one another. This will be discussed later in this report in more depth in the discussion section.

In sum, phase 4 was accomplished through the completion of ten qualifying events with a range of attendance of 90 ⇔ 112. This appears to have met the goal of at least 100 people reached.

Phase 4: This phase includes the development of the outcome summary report. This can be seen throughout the rest of this report including an introduction, methodology, results section, discussion, and conclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to move forward with future capacity building projects for the Arab and Arabic speaking people with an understanding directly from the people served what the mental well-being needs of the people are. The Arabic speaking people are far underrepresented in attendance within the UsCC EE/ME cultural subcommittee. This effort was meant to balance this reality by going to the sources within the community that can speak more directly to the mental wellness needs through art therapy specifically.

Art therapy sessions were implemented from September 2022 to July 2023. The idea seemed to take root with the Arabic speaking people of Los Angeles County in the Spring of 2023 with more interest and increased participation with ongoing interest to have more sessions in July and beyond. A mommy and me event has been requested for September 2023 beyond the conclusion of this endeavor. Various adjustments had to be made along the way to meet the expectations of the grant. The first was adjusting timeframes. We were not able to meet the requirements in the fall for these events, because of poor attendance. We also discovered along the way an interest in a very underserved subgroup of elders ages 55+. This elder population requested a session online via ZOOM. We accommodated this request and it was in the top three in terms of attended events. This was an opening to further offerings, as this group indicated an eagerness of being engaged when they are provided access. There were both positive and negative consequences to adjustments. Each one was discussed in the monthly EE/ME meetings with other key stakeholders.

The objectives of this project were accomplished although not as strictly written, and some objectives that were not expressed in this project were accomplished, e.g., breaking into the elderly group, and this can provide insight into this underserved community and the direction of funding for the future. Further clarity is provided as one continues through this report to the methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion.

Methodology

The project was slated for ten art therapy events and consisted of more than 20 attempted events. A recruitment team of four people from, and with knowledge of the Arab community in Los Angeles were subcontracted to assist with the recruitment of participants. The Project Manager, administrative assistant, and the recruitment team recruited individuals for the events through advertisements on social media, through email, word-of-mouth and newsletters in Arab community serving institutions.

Once recruited individuals were provided a qualifying document on Google Forms to ensure the individual met the criteria of the Arabic speaking population. The qualifying questions were:

Qualifying Document

- | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. I am between the ages of 18 and 80 years old | Yes | No |
| 2. I am an Arabic speaking person or I am a person of Arab descent. | Yes | No |
| 3. I live in Los Angeles County | Yes | No |
| 4. I live in Service Area (please see the map) | | |
| a. 1 | | |
| b. 2 | | |
| c. 3 | | |
| d. 4 | | |
| e. 5 | | |
| f. 6 | | |
| g. 7 | | |
| h. 8 | | |
| 5. I am willing to attend a session in person. | Yes | No |
| 6. I am willing to share my ideas with others. | Yes | No |

Out of the individuals who attended only 86 completed both the pretest and posttest. Only 86 will be analyzed for responses for the pretests and posttests. Participants were also asked to give comments on their posttests. These will also be included in the analysis. Twenty-seven participants will not be included in the paired analysis as they are missing posttests, however they will have their commentary from question #20 included and any other anecdotal commentary shared on their pretests.

After filling out the qualifying document, qualifying participants were able to register for the session they wanted to attend. Once registered the participant would receive a pretest to fill out and email back. Each pretest was assigned a number to coordinate to the posttest so that a matched-pair analysis could be done. This also allowed for the anonymity that this population prefers and often requires for participation. They had the option to bring to the event, however, all chose electronic returns. There were a few exceptions to this also affecting the total number of participants. These exceptions were people who showed up with a friend who was registered or who just showed up to an event. These participants may have signed in but did not have a pretest nor a posttest, as we may have or may not have captured their signatures, but we also did not have their emails to follow up with them.

The events themselves included a discussion about Arab populations and mental well-being, emotional literacy, color theory and expressing those emotions through art, specifically, painting with acrylic paints. Participants chose their canvas, paint colors, and what they would paint.

Individuals were given a follow up email including the posttest, references for services, and contact information for the presenter. The participant had the option to return the posttest. Eighty-six people returned their posttests. Limitations to this methodology included the veracity of answers, understanding the meanings of questions, and the individuals' willingness to participate. Additionally, in at least one session, it seemed clear there were some people who may have had knowledge of Arabic, but Spanish was their dominant language. This still fits within the criteria; however, it demonstrated a more liberal understanding of "Arabic speaking."

Another limitation to the study is fact-of-life sampling. Those individuals who are Arabic speaking in Los Angeles County, but who do not have the technology of a computer or phone and who may be isolated from the larger community would not have had access to these events as recruitment was done via social media, email, word-of-mouth and community involvement and interface with organizations. Access to leaving one's home may have also been a limitation. As all of us our coming out of COVID, this may have also been a fact-of-life issue to affect participation in person/on-ground events.

Finally, one cannot quantify or capture the importance of trust when interviewing this community of interest. Historical narratives and realities that have caused intergenerational traumas and dislocations at the hands of government systems has created a significant distrust for many. To not recognize the significance of trust and how this is crucial in garnering truth and veracity in this study would be to miss the elephant and only look at its shadow. This is why confidentiality is so important when conducting any projects at all in this community.

Narrative analysis, demographics, and descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the answers in the qualitative interviews and are provided in the results section.

Results

Demographics

(90 ⇔ 112 Participants/ 90 qualifying participants)

	Age
18-25	31
26-32	12
33-45	5
46-55	9
56-65	3
61-70	23
71-80	7

	Gender
Male	31
Female	72
Other	

The following are the results of the responses of the individuals who completed the pretest/ posttest paired fully in simple descriptive statistics. There will also be ad hoc comments included in summary of all submitted pre/posttests at the end of this section. This was a regional sample. As such, the results of these statistics are seemingly only generalizable (at most) to the regional realities to Arabic speaking peoples of Los Angeles County.

In sum, each of the questions asked demonstrate a positive shift from pretest to posttest. However, this is to be expected given the nature of the questions. The questions asked assume some knowledge which may not have been obtained until after the event, unless the participant had previously been exposed to the information shared or the experience of an art event. Sometimes participants skipped the question. Therefore, you may read different sums of numbers due to unanswered or skipped questions. Question nine was skipped by all because the options for answers was accidentally left off leaving participants confused about what to do with the statement.

1. Q1: I understand the mental health issues that most affect the Arabic speaking population in .

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	0	0	0	103
posttest	79	0	6	18

2. *Q2: I can identify common mental health and behavioral health issues in children of Arabic heritage.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	0	0	0	103
posttest	89	0	7	7

3. *Q3: I can identify support and support systems within Los Angeles county that will help me access mental health resources within and for the Arabic speaking community when needed.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	0	0	0	103
posttest	69	0	2	15

4. *Q4 I have a clear understanding of what issues are most prominent within the Arabic speaking people in Los Angeles County*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	0	0	0	103
posttest	73	0	3	10

5. *Q5: Purpose of the event was communicated clearly.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	84	0	0	2

6. *Q6: The presenter was organized and easy to follow.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	84	0		2

7. *Q7: Presenter exhibited a good understanding of the topic.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	82	0	2	2

8. *Q8: Presenter spoke clearly/ effectively.*

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	84	0	0	2

9. Q9: Time for event used effectively.

This was a problematic question because it was missing the scale. So, most people did not have an answer to this question. They skipped the question entirely. In some of the posttests there were positive remarks.

10. Q10: Art Therapy enhanced my understanding of myself.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	100 + 1 skipped
posttest	82	0	0	2

11. Q11: Presenter responded effectively to audience questions and comments.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	100 +1 skipped
posttest	84	0	0	2

12. Q12: Presentation was done in a way that engaged audience.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	82 (2) skipped	0	0	2

13. Q13: Presenter spoke clearly/effectively.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	84	0	0	2

14. Q14: I feel like I understand emotions more clearly.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	84	0	0	2

15. Q15: The process group work helped me understand myself better.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	82	0	2	2

16. Q16: If I were given the opportunity to do more process work in groups, I would want to

participate in more services.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	74	2	6	4

17. Q17: If I were given the opportunity to do more process work in groups, I would seek services.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	74	0	7	5

18. Q18: If there were more financial resources to seek mental health services, I would seek Services

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	1	100
posttest	72	0	7	7

19. Q19: I would like more presentations on mental health and wellness topics.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	2	0	0	101
posttest	85	0	1	0

Q20: My top three topics of presentations I would like to see presented are:

Below is a list of the suggestions for further topics of presentations or seminars that the community self-selected as important to them. This is consistent with the community psychology principle of empowerment and meeting the community where it is. One person noted that they don't need any programs. Please note the number in parathesis represents the number of times an idea was requested. And like items were grouped together.

1. Eating disorders(8), cutting
2. Depression (4)
3. Men (8), male support groups (2), men's health (1), male mental health
4. Nutrition
5. Parenting (21)
6. Nutrition
7. Mind/ Body or Somatic experiencing
8. Islamic Psychology
9. DEI issues, discrimination, dealing with police, police brutality.
10. Anxiety (3)
11. Youth related events
12. Islamic Psychology (3)
13. Pornography(2)
14. Sex Addiction (2, drug addiction)
15. Domestic Violence
16. Grief (7); grief and loss(3), bereavement, death, death and dying.
17. Divorce(3), life after divorce
18. Marriage (9), premarital/pre-marriage(8), dating (5), relationships(3), wedding
19. Art(11), More Art (6), Anything art
20. Immigration

21. Youth, children's programming (3)
22. I am a mental health professional.
23. Women, women's health, women's support group (5)
24. Psychotropics
25. More emotional work (3), emotions
26. How to talk to my parents
27. Poetry (2)
28. HSP
29. Suicide Awareness(3)
30. Retirement
31. Physical Activity
32. Silver health, aging(3)
33. How to handle aging parents
34. Animation
35. Sex as aging
36. PTSD (2)
37. Life reviews
38. How to deal with kids moving away, separation from children
39. Neuroscience

20. Q21: I would attend an event involving Arabic poetry.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	70	0	2	31
posttest	80	1	5	0

21. Q22: I would attend an event involving Arabic stories/plays.

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	31	1	5	66
posttest	82	1	3	0

22. Q23: I would like to watch media that discusses mental health in Arabic or in English concerning the Arab community

	yes	no	I am not sure	No opinion
pretest	60	1	3	39
posttest	81	0	3	2

Comments Unfiltered. Participants were asked in their follow up email to give comments on their posttests, if they had any they wanted to share.

Dr. Laird is the best !!

Dr. Laird has been consistently amazing. She does so much for our community.

Thank you.

Dr. Laird really helped me understand myself and my relationship with my parents in this seminar. This was a life changing experience.

Dr. Laird made me feel like she understood me

I will take a lot of lessons from this. I won't forget to "Be the brush."

I wanted to note that Dr. Laird saved me at this day. She was not fully aware but I was barely hanging on. My friend at NYU had just died by suicide. She helped me get through this very difficult time.

Dr. Laird I just want to say thank you. I personally have been confirmed for four events. Each one prior was cancelled due to not enough participants. I am glad I didn't give up because this was well worth it. I am only sorry the community is not more supportive of your work. You have taught us so much. Thank you.

I didn't know what to expect. This was eye-opening and helpful. I never knew all this about emotions. Can we have more?

This was a wonderful experience.

Dr. Laird thank you for this event. I learned so much and feel relief.

I was really not sure about this. But, after this experience I would really recommend it to everyone. I would like to do more.

I have listened to Dr. Laird previously. She never disappoints. This time she opened me up in a way I never knew was possible. I am going through a divorce and this was just what I needed.

Dr. Laird was helpful in answering my questions. I am considering going to school for a helping profession. She helped me discern what path to take. I look forward to talking to her more.

This experience really helped me express myself. Thank you

I have always liked learning from Dr. Laird. She has shown genuine concern for me and others. We missed her during Covid. Hopefully, we get to see her more.

This was so great! I came to have a moment to myself and to meet Dr. Laird. I both got to reconnect to the beautiful expression of painting, and meet this wonderful teacher. I left feeling a strong sense of well-being.

This was a good experience for me.

Dr. Laird helped me a lot.

This was my first-time meeting Dr. Laird. What a gift for us. Thank you.

Thank you!

This was just what I needed. I learned so much about emotions. Thank you.

This was an excellent experience. We lost many people in our community due to COVID. It would be nice if Dr. Laird could help us with grief and also how to parent as a single.

Dr. Laird sat and listened to me and discussed my painting with me. I enjoyed explaining it to her and felt like she really heard me.

It was such an honor today. We had two of our eldest members in attendance. It was nice to see the young and old together. Dr. Laird made everyone welcome.

I don't like all this mention of Arabic. We raised our children to not speak Arabic after 9/11. We did not want them to be hurt by others.

We were so blessed to have Dr. Laird here today. She has been very helpful to our community. She saved my daughter and got us help we needed when agencies did not help us. Our family is so better now. Today was also special. I learned a new way to express myself. I would just like her not to talk about Arabic so much.

Dr. Laird was really insightful. Had a wonderful time.

Dr. Laird has been so good to us. I hope we can have more events like this with her.

This was my first-time hearing and meeting Dr Laird. She was fabulous. I would like to see more of her events.

Since Covid we have not seen Dr. Laird. This was a really great experience. Thank you.

Dr. Laird was fantastic! We need to see her more.

I recently lost my wife after a battle with cancer. Having this to look forward to with Dr. Laird was very helpful. I hope we get to see her more often.

I have been a big supporter of anything Dr. Laird does for years. She never fails to deliver superb work. Today was no exception in her ongoing service to our community. We awarded her a few years ago with a community award. She deserves it still today.

Discussion

There are no surprises in the match-paired analysis. It is expected that there would be a positive shift with the treatment applied. What may be more impactful within the findings of the pre/post tests are the many recommendations for furthering mental wellness within this Arab/Arabic community that LACDMH can take forward in future projects.

There were variables that impacted this project that are also important to consider for thought and discussion, as well as planning for the future. Within this community stigma remains a barrier. It took almost a year to saturate the new idea of art therapy for it to be palatable enough to be successful. Other influencing variables seem to include people returning to events post COVID, which seem to loosen and gain traction by the Spring. Additionally, there were some geopolitical and sociopolitical issues impacting events. For example, at least two events were impacted by an external meso-level decision of religious leaders who are also Arabic speaking who released a declaration of their views on LGBTQIA+ identifying individuals. At two events LGBTQIA+ representatives came to these events with the expressed purpose to challenge, disrupt and seek to challenge if they would be able to fully participate as themselves in the space of this project. While disruptive, participants who came for this purpose were able to fully participate in this space, and with this project. Nonetheless, there is no denying how this form of protest affected how people overall felt in the space.

It is also worth analyzing this project through the lens of the seven core principles of community psychology: individual and family wellness; sense of community; respect for human diversity; social justice; empowerment and citizen participation; collaboration and community strengths and empirical grounding. There is no doubt that based on the feedback and comments of the community, this project promoted individual and family wellness, a sense of community and respect for those who embody diversity, a need for these community members to be recipients of social justice, and a grounding in previous projects empirical findings. This project idea was taken directly from those previous empirical studies and demonstrate that the community is being listened to in this regard.

Conclusion & Project Recommendations:

Based on the challenges of this project, there are different recommendations which maybe a more effective manner for LACDMH to engage the Arabic community:

1. Recognize the history of this community and the repeated concerns for privacy, the tension that exists between this community and government, and the distrust that exists.
2. Set outcomes measures using cultural adaptations which will be realistically achievable when trying to increase capacity within a community makes meeting them unattainable.
3. It's recommended for governmental logos on all materials to removed from materials pertaining to the Capacity Building Projects.
4. Engage with listening with the Arab community's needs.
5. Meet the community where is at.
6. Dedicate funding targeting specific cultural groups vs. clumping them together by geographical region.
7. In terms of the principles of community psychology, it will be important to empower Arabic speaking citizens and attend to their mental health needs through collaboration.
8. It will be important for LACDMH and other governmental entities to recognize the history of the Arabic speaking community and the repeated concerns for privacy. Also, recognize the tension that exists between this community and government, and the distrust that exists. The way contracts are written must take these key principles into account.