

County of Los Angeles - Department of Mental Health
Wellness Circles For Russian/Ukrainian & Farsi Speaking Communities Project
UsCC Capacity Building Project
PO-MH-26006696-1

Project Outcomes and Summary Report

Project Description

The Wellness Circles for Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi Speaking Communities 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 Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi speaking communities that reside in the County of Los Angeles.

Cross Cultural Expressions was hired for the purpose of developing and implementing 12, in-person, 3-hour Wellness Circles (six for the Russian/Ukrainian speaking communities and six for the Farsi speaking community). Each wellness circle needed to have a minimum of 15 participants. The wellness circles were meant to focus on introducing and utilizing a variety of alternative healing techniques, such as movement, sound baths, music, storytelling, poetry, art therapy, mindfulness, etc. to help participants gain knowledge of and experience useful coping techniques that they can utilize in their journey towards mental health and wellbeing.

Additionally, participants were to have the opportunity to connect with others who share similar experiences, reducing sadness, anxiety, and loneliness, and increasing happiness and creating a sense of belonging and peer support within the community.

The goal of this project was ultimately to promote empowerment and resilience, while reducing the stigma associated with mental health services, by offering a safe space for participants to receive mental health support and alternative healing methods; as well as to provide outreach, educate, and increase knowledge pertaining to mental health services by utilizing a non-stigmatizing and engaging method which aims to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Increase awareness and knowledge related to mental illness and combat stigma and discrimination within the Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi speaking communities.
2. Provide resources and information regarding available mental health services in Los Angeles County, especially those services geared towards the Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi speaking communities.
3. Encourage help-seeking behaviors and provide linkage to mental health services, whenever possible, when encountering individuals in need in the community.

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4. Build and strengthen the confidence of Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi speaking community members so that they can be better equipped to face the challenges and barriers associated with having loved ones who suffer from mental health conditions.

This Project was implemented in four (4) phases from November 17, 2025 to June 19, 2026. Below is a description of each phase:

Phase One: Project Development

During Phase One of the Wellness Circles Project, the project coordinator focused on community engagement, program development, outreach planning, and preparation for implementation of the Wellness Circle series for both the Farsi speaking and Russian/Ukrainian speaking communities in Los Angeles County.

The first phase began with a series of conversations and informal needs assessments with members of the target communities to better understand the types of wellness activities and topics that would be most relevant, engaging, and culturally meaningful. Community members expressed a strong interest in opportunities that combined emotional support, community connection, stress reduction, creative expression, and alternative wellness practices. Feedback gathered through these discussions directly informed the design of the Wellness Circle series.

Based on community input, the project coordinator developed the titles, descriptions, dates, times, locations, and facilitator selections for each Wellness Circle. Special attention was given to ensuring that the activities reflected the cultural values, interests, and language needs of each community while supporting the overall goals of reducing stigma, increasing emotional wellbeing, and fostering community connection.

In preparation for project implementation, a retrospective post-then-pre survey was developed to measure participant outcomes related to increased knowledge of mental health resources, increased awareness of mental health and wellness topics, and reductions in stigma surrounding mental health. The survey was designed to align with Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health reporting requirements while also capturing meaningful participant feedback.

A comprehensive outreach and promotional plan was also created. Outreach efforts included the development of social media campaigns, collaboration with community partners, announcements through local Iranian radio station, KIRN 670 AM, distribution through organizational email lists, and direct outreach to community-based organizations serving the target populations. These efforts were designed to maximize community awareness and participation.

While the original project timeline anticipated launching Wellness Circles for both communities in March, changing world events required an adjustment to the



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implementation schedule. Following the outbreak of war in Iran in January, our team at Cross Cultural Expressions observed significant distress, anxiety, grief, and concern within the local Iranian community. In response to this urgent need, the organization accelerated implementation of the Farsi speaking Wellness Circle series and conducted three Wellness Circles during the month of February. This adjustment allowed the project to provide timely support, connection, and culturally responsive wellness programming during a period of heightened community stress and uncertainty.

The following is a complete list of Wellness Circle activities (including titles, descriptions and dates/times/locations of activities) for the Farsi speaking community:

Title	Description	Date/Time	Location
Meditation, Intention Setting & Channeling: A Journey Inward for Iran	Led by Master Channel Riz Mirza, this wellness circle offers guided meditation, intention setting, and channeling to support grounding, clarity, and emotional balance. In these challenging times for the Iranian people, participants will be invited to slow the nervous system, connect inward, receive insight through channeling, and set meaningful intentions for personal and collective healing within a supportive community space.	Sunday, February 8, 2026. 4:30pm to 7:30pm	Topanga Community Center 1440 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd. Topanga, CA 90290
TRAPPED: A Film Screening and Conversation on Intergenerational Trauma for the Farsi-Speaking Community	We will screen the movie TRAPPED. With Farsi sub-titles. We will have an in-depth, 1-hr discussion about intergenerational trauma, facilitated by Sara Farhang, AMFT along with writer/director and LCSW, Mastaneh Moghadam and the cast of the movie. This event offers participants a supportive space to explore how inherited trauma impacts emotional well-being, identity, and relationships. Through film, guided discussion, and shared reflection, this wellness circle promotes insight, connection, and healing. Participants will gain greater awareness, feel less isolated in their experiences, and leave with tools and resources that support emotional resilience, self-understanding, and overall mental wellness within a culturally responsive community setting.	Sunday, February 15, 2026 12:30pm to 4pm	The Braid Theater 3435 Ocean Park Blvd, #107-85 Santa Monica, CA 90405

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Creating Calm: An Art Based Wellness Circle for the Farsi speaking Community	Facilitated by seasoned art therapist Hanieh Mohammad Bagher and Mastaneh Moghadam, LCSW. This wellness circle invites Farsi-speaking community members to slow down, relax, and reconnect through creative expression. Using gentle, guided movement and art-making, participants can calm the nervous system, release stress, and cultivate a sense of peace, grounding, and emotional balance—no art experience needed.	Wednesday, February 28, 2026 12pm to 3pm	Hanieh Art Studio 10871 Washington Blvd. #101 Culver City, CA 90232
Rumi in Motion: A Night of Music, Poetry, and Movement for the Farsi-speaking Community	This wellness circle invites the Farsi-speaking community into an evening of shared rhythm, reflection, and connection. Renowned Sufi musicians Mohammad Ehrari and Yuval Ron will perform and sing the poetry of Rumi, guiding participants through chants and gentle movement. Together, music, poetry, and motion create space to release stress, feel grounded, and experience joy, expression, and a deep sense of community.	Sunday, March 22nd 4:30pm to 7:30pm	Marine Park Auditorium at Marine Park Building 1406 Marine St. Santa Monica, CA 90405
Come Home to the Body Through Sacred Movement for the Farsi Speaking Community	An inspiring talk and guided workshop with internationally known sacred dancer, choreographer, spiritual embodiment teacher, and author Banafsheh Sayyad, based on her book Dance of Oneness. Through sacred movement, you will be invited to soften, reconnect, and return to yourself— restoring balance, calming the mind, opening the heart, and awakening clarity, courage, and presence. No dance experience is needed.	Sunday April 26th 4pm to 7pm	Reed Park Auditorium 1133 7th St. Santa Monica, CA 90403

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Our Voices, Our Stories: Music and Stories from the Iranian Diaspora	This wellness circle offers the Farsi-speaking community a warm, supportive space to connect through shared expression. Facilitated by Mastaneh Moghadam, LCSW, and featuring Iranian-American musicians Navah Rahbar, Sabrina Halavi and Seena Khoshbin; participants are invited to sing original songs or meaningful covers, and to share short personal stories or stories that have touched them deeply. Through music, storytelling, and listening, this circle fosters connection, emotional release, and a sense of belonging and collective healing.	Sunday, May 17th 5pm to 8pm	Miles Memorial Playhouse 1130 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica CA 90403
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The following is a complete list of Wellness Circle activities (including titles, descriptions and dates/times/locations of activities) for the Russian/Ukrainian speaking community:

Title	Description	Date/Time	Location
Tea and Conversation for the Eastern European Community: Discussing the Art of Positive Thinking	Facilitated by Natalia Ewalt, LMFT, this wellness circle will include afternoon tea and sweets while participants engage in thoughtful conversations about positive thinking. The gathering will explore practices such as gratitude, stress reduction, and shifting perspective, while introducing practical tools and techniques to support emotional well-being.	Sunday, March 15, 2026. 1pm to 4pm	Joslyn Park Craft Room 633 Kensington Rd. Santa Monica, CA 90405
Create & Connect: A Family Art Wellness Circle for the Eastern European Community	This wellness circle invites Russian/Ukrainian speaking individuals and families to slow down, relax, and reconnect through creative expression. Guided art-making helps participants release stress, calm the nervous system, and cultivate a sense of peace and emotional balance while sharing a meaningful experience together. Facilitated by Olha Nikolaenko, MFTI, Svetlana Linetskaya, MFTI, and Natalia Ewalt, LMFT.	Sunday, March 29, 2026 11:30pm to 2:30pm	Joslyn Park Craft Room 633 Kensington Rd. Santa Monica, CA 90405

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Our Immigrant Stories: Healing Through Story and Shared Experience	While enjoying a light dinner and dessert, community members are invited to share selected stories from the book, Our Immigrant Stories: Essays from the Eastern European Diaspora. Facilitated by Natalia Ewalt, LCSW, community members will learn about the healing power of storytelling while enjoying food, engaging in meaningful conversation, and connecting with members of the community. Sharing our stories can help process lived experiences, reduce isolation, and foster a deeper sense of connection and emotional well-being. Each participant will receive a free copy of the book.	Thursday, April 16th 6:00pm to 9:00pm	Traktir Restaurant 18588 Ventura Blvd. Tarzana, CA 91356
Harmonizing the Self: A Sound Healing Experience for the Eastern European Community	Facilitated by sound bath practitioner, Svetlana Linetskaya, MFTI. This wellness circle offers Russian/Ukrainian speaking community members a soothing space to rest, reset, and reconnect. Through gentle sound healing, participants are invited to calm the nervous system, release tension, and restore inner balance—creating a sense of harmony within themselves and in their daily lives.	Sunday April 26th 1:30pm to 4:30pm	Reed Park Auditorium 1133 7th St.. Santa Monica, CA 90403
Tea and Discussion: Polyvagal Therapy Techniques for the Eastern European Community	Facilitated by trained Polyvagal therapy practitioner Olha Nikolaienko, MFTI this wellness circle will engage Russian/Ukrainian speaking community members in learning about and engaging in polyvagal therapy techniques that will activate the vagus nerve to shift the nervous system from a state of stress (fight-or-flight/freeze) to a state of safety, calm, and social connection. These somatic-based exercises regulate the autonomic nervous system to reduce anxiety, trauma symptoms, and physical tension while increasing resilience.	Sunday, May 24th 1pm to 4pm	Cross Cultural Expressions Offices 15315 Magnolia Blvd., #400 Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

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Hiking, Breath Work and Grounding Exercises for the Eastern European Community	This wellness circle offers the Russian/Ukrainian speaking community a warm, supportive space to connect to nature and calm their nervous systems and decrease stress while engaging with other community members. Facilitated by Natalia Ewalt, LMFT participants are invited to foster connection, emotional release, and a sense of belonging and collective healing through a breath work and meditation session followed by a hike and a picnic in the park.	Sunday, May 31st 10am to 1pm	Franklin Canyon Park 2600 Franklin Canyon Dr, Beverly Hills, CA 90210
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Phase Two: Promotion and Implementation

During Phase Two of the Wellness Circles Project, Cross Cultural Expressions continued implementation and preparation activities to support the successful delivery of wellness circles for both the Farsi speaking and Russian/Ukrainian speaking communities throughout Los Angeles County.

Project staff finalized locations for upcoming wellness circles and continued developing and distributing culturally and linguistically appropriate promotional materials. Outreach efforts included the creation of flyers, posters, brochures, handouts, social media content, and other community engagement materials. All promotional materials were submitted to the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) for review and approval prior to distribution. Outreach and advertising efforts continued throughout this phase in service areas where the target populations reside and included collaboration with community partners, social media campaigns, community announcements, and direct outreach efforts.

The Program Coordinator developed a seminar evaluation form that was administered at each wellness circle to gather participant feedback regarding facilitator effectiveness, presentation quality, participant engagement, and overall satisfaction with the wellness activities. The evaluation form utilized a Likert scale and provided valuable information for ongoing quality improvement and project evaluation.

To support participant tracking and reporting requirements, sign-in sheets were developed and maintained at the resource table during each event. A designated volunteer managed participant registration, ensured confidentiality of participant information, and provided attendees with access to community resources and educational materials. Resource tables were established at each wellness circle and included culturally relevant mental health information, wellness resources, and referrals tailored to the needs of the Farsi-speaking and Russian/Ukrainian-speaking communities.



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In addition to these implementation activities, Cross Cultural Expressions successfully conducted three Wellness Circles for the Farsi speaking community during this phase. These events provided participants with opportunities for connection, emotional support, stress reduction, community building, and increased awareness of mental health and wellness resources in a culturally responsive environment. Each of these events was very well attended and received by community members.

Phase Three: Project Implementation

Phase Three focused on the full implementation of the Wellness Circle series for both the Farsi speaking and Russian/Ukrainian speaking communities. During this phase, Cross Cultural Expressions successfully conducted all 12 Wellness Circles, including six 3-hour circles for the Farsi-speaking community and six 3-hour circles for the Russian/Ukrainian-speaking community.

All Wellness Circles met or exceeded the participation requirements outlined in the project Statement of Work. Each circle had a minimum of 15 participants, with most Russian/Ukrainian speaking Wellness Circles averaging approximately 18 attendees. Due to the ongoing war in Iran and the resulting emotional distress experienced by many members of the Iranian community, Cross Cultural Expressions broadened participation in the Farsi speaking Wellness Circles. This adjustment was discussed with our LACDMH liaison and members of the Eastern European/Middle Eastern (EE/ME) UsCC Subcommittee, who agreed that, given the circumstances (and where funding allowed), expanding participation was appropriate and responsive to community needs. As a result, most Farsi speaking Wellness Circles averaged approximately 30 participants, with two circles attracting more than 100 community members.

Each Wellness Circle included a resource table staffed by a volunteer and featured culturally relevant mental health information, community resources, and referrals. A licensed mental health professional was present at every event to provide support, answer questions, and connect participants with services when needed. Participants received the project resource guide and completed retrospective post-then-pre questionnaires and event evaluation surveys to help measure project outcomes and participant satisfaction.

Food and refreshments were provided at all events to encourage community connection and create a welcoming atmosphere. One particularly memorable Wellness Circle for the Russian/Ukrainian speaking community included a traditional Russian dinner and dessert, which fostered a strong sense of warmth, connection, and shared cultural experience as participants gathered for storytelling and discussion.

Overall, Phase Three was highly successful. Despite the significant coordination required to implement 12 Wellness Circles, the events were well attended, ran smoothly,

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and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both participants and facilitators. The project successfully created opportunities for connection, emotional support, community building, and increased awareness of mental health resources within both target communities.

Phase Four: Outcomes and Summary Report

This final phase of the project consisted of the collection of all retrospective post-then-pre questionnaires, event evaluation surveys and registration information (i.e. the demographic information of all participants that was collected). All documentation was reviewed and demographic information was tallied. All comments and questions and feedback that community members communicated with us via social media, emails, texts and telephone calls was also recorded in order to gather qualitative information about the effects the wellness circles had on participants from our targeted communities. 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

We at Cross Cultural Expressions are absolutely overjoyed by the end results of this multifaceted complex project. In consideration of our time constraints and limited budget, we feel that this project delivered above and beyond expectation both in the final quality of the wellness circles, but also in the way community members showed interest and were receptive of the events that we offered.

A total of 483 individuals attended the 12 Wellness Circle Events (108 for the Russian/Ukrainian circles and 375 for the Farsi-speaking circles). A breakdown of the number of participants who attended each circle plus the demographic information that was collected is as follows:

Farsi-speaking Wellness Circles:

Title	Number of Participants
#1: Meditation, Intention Setting & Channeling: A Journey Inward for Iran	23
#2: TRAPPED: A Film Screening and Conversation on Intergenerational Trauma for the Farsi-Speaking Community	34
#3: Creating Calm: An Art Based Wellness Circle for the Farsi speaking Community	24
#4: Rumi in Motion: A Night of Music, Poetry, and Movement for the Farsi-speaking Community	126

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#5: Come Home to the Body Through Sacred Movement for the Farsi Speaking Community	37
#6: Our Voices, Our Stories: Music and Stories from the Iranian Diaspora	131

Russian/Ukrainian speaking Wellness Circles:

Title	Number of Participants
Tea and Conversation for the Eastern European Community: Discussing the Art of Positive Thinking	16
Create & Connect: A Family Art Wellness Circle for the Eastern European Community	18
Our Immigrant Stories: Healing Through Story and Shared Experience	16
Harmonizing the Self: A Sound Healing Experience for the Eastern European Community	22
Tea and Discussion: Polyvagal Therapy Techniques for the Eastern European Community	17
Hiking, Breath Work and Grounding Exercises for the Eastern European Community	19

Gender	# Participants
Male	150
Female	333
Other	0
No Answer	0

Age	# Participants
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0 to 15 years	11
16 to 25 years	63
25 to 59 years	233
60+ years	176
No Answer	0

Country of Origin	# Participants
Russia	56
Iran	298
USA	64
Ukraine	46
Armenia	6
Afghanistan	13

LA County SA Resident	# Participants
SA 1 – Antelope Valley	0
SA 2 – San Fernando Valley	170
SA 3 – San Gabriel Valley	18
SA 4 – Metro LA	96
SA 5 – West LA	157
SA 6 – South LA	11
SA 7 – East LA	9
SA 8 – South Bay	22

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Primary Language	# Participants
Russian	56
Farsi	302
Armenian	6
Ukrainian	46
English	73

We received many comments, questions and feedback from community members who attended the wellness circles. The majority of the comments were focused on thanking us for hosting these sessions for their community and inquiring about therapy referrals in their language. Many people also commented on how they wish such wellness circles would continue and they were sad to know that we were only offering 6 sessions (for their community). Some of the comments we received included:

“The art activity that we did was so emotional and intense. I didn’t realize how much I needed to do something like this. I felt so light afterwards.”

“I really enjoyed the sound bath. I had been to a few sound baths before, but I really feel like the facilitator did an incredible job keeping the focus on each individual as well as the group. It was a very different experience that I enjoyed very much.”

“It was so healing to be in a space with a group of people who are struggling with the war like I am but to not feel judged by anyone for believing what I believe. I really felt safe and that was very healing.”

“When I first was told that we were going to do an art activity, I thought it would be fun, but I didn’t expect anything more than that. I was so surprised when I started crying while doing the activity. I released so much tension and got to share that moment with others, that was very special.”

“Where can I get a Farsi speaking therapist for my Son? He is dealing with a lot of anxiety related to the war and what is happening in Iran.”

“I really enjoyed watching the movie and I loved the group discussion that we had afterwards. I thought the therapist who lead the discussion was very knowledgeable and I learned a lot about myself and my family.”

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"I was honestly so impressed by the young people who sang those songs at the Our Voices, Our Stories Wellness Circle. What a powerful, meditative journey through music and storytelling."

"Thank you for having these wellness circles. I came to several of them and I got so much out of each one."

"I really enjoyed sitting with a group of people at a beautiful Russian restaurant and eating dinner together and listening to the immigrant stories and learning about each other. It was a very special evening for me."

"My partner and I talked about the meditation and channeling session for days and days. The whole experience was so powerful for us. It was such a unique event and we got so much out of it."

"I really related to one of the immigrant stories that was shared. It made me so emotional to hear. I also loved the music and the talented singers. The 3-hour event went by so fast. I was never bored."

"Where can I receive information on therapy in my language?"

"I really wasn't sure if I can celebrate Norooz (the Persian New Year) this year because of everything that my family is going through in Iran. It was hard for me to come to this event but I am so glad I did. It was the perfect way to come together and honor the new year and have gratitude for the good stuff while still being connected to those who are living in hell right now. Thank you for having this event. Also, the music was amazing."

"I was always wondering where I can find a Russian speaking therapist. Thank you for helping me find one."

"You guys created such a special day for me and my family. I loved the music. I loved the dancing and when we all started chanting as a group I was so happy I cried."

"The wellness circle was one of the few places that I have come with my grandmother, my parents and my two kids and we all enjoyed it so much. The musicians blew us all away!"

"I really loved going on a hike and learning about breathing techniques. I also had never been to that park and it is pretty close to me so I will go more often. I think I just need to do hikes and be in nature more often."

"I like learning about polyvagal therapy. I think these techniques will help me when I feel nervous and I will try them at home."



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“I really liked having a relaxing tea at a beautiful space in the park and learning about positive thinking and why it is important. I am usually very negative in my thinking and I want to change that.”

“Please have more of these events. My husband and I came to 4 of them and we loved it so much. It was so different and so needed. I wish there was one every month.”

Out of the 483 individuals who attended the wellness circles, 316 people completed the Retrospective Pre/Post Questionnaires and returned them to us. Using the Retrospective format also made it much easier to distribute and collect the surveys.

Responses to the retrospective post-then-pre questionnaires indicated that the Wellness Circles were successful in increasing participants’ awareness of common mental health challenges. When asked to respond to the statement, “After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I can better recognize signs and symptoms of common mental health challenges (such as stress, anxiety, depression, or trauma) affecting individuals and families in my community,” the majority of participants reported positive outcomes. Specifically, 67% of participants either “strongly agreed” (31%) or “agreed” (36%) with this statement. An additional 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that participation in the Wellness Circles helped many attendees develop a greater understanding of mental health concerns and improved their ability to recognize signs and symptoms of emotional distress within themselves, their families, and their communities.

Participants also reported increased knowledge regarding available mental health supports and resources. In response to the statement, “After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I have increased knowledge of different types of mental health supports (such as counseling, support groups, crisis resources, and community-based services),” 69% of participants either “strongly agreed” (32%) or “agreed” (37%). Another 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that the Wellness Circles were effective in increasing awareness of available mental health services and supports. This outcome is particularly important given the barriers that often exist within immigrant communities regarding access to information about mental health resources. The results suggest that participants left the Wellness Circles with a stronger understanding of where support is available and the various forms that mental health assistance can take.

Additionally, participants reported increased awareness of how to access mental health services in Los Angeles County. In response to the statement, “After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I know specific steps for accessing mental health services in Los Angeles County (for example, who to contact, how to schedule services,

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or how to find low-cost or free options),” 64% of participants either “strongly agreed” (25%) or “agreed” (39%) with the statement. An additional 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings indicate that the Wellness Circles successfully increased participants’ understanding of how to navigate the mental health system and identify available resources and services. The results suggest that participants left the Wellness Circles with greater confidence in their ability to seek mental health support for themselves, family members, or others in their community.

Participants also indicated that the Wellness Circles helped reduce stigma and shame associated with mental health challenges and help-seeking behaviors. In response to the statement, “After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I feel less stigma or shame related to mental health challenges and seeking mental health services for myself or others,” 56% of participants either “strongly agreed” (26%) or “agreed” (30%) with the statement. Another 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that participation in the Wellness Circles contributed to a meaningful reduction in mental health stigma among participants. Given that stigma remains one of the primary barriers preventing many individuals in immigrant and culturally diverse communities from seeking support, these results indicate that the Wellness Circles were effective in creating safe and supportive environments where participants could openly explore mental health topics, challenge misconceptions, and develop more accepting attitudes toward seeking help.

Below is a detailed breakdown of participant’s responses to each question:

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE OUTCOMES TO RETROSPECTIVE POST-THEN-PRE QUESTIONNAIRE: N = 316

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %

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After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I can better recognize signs and symptoms of common mental health challenges (such as stress, anxiety, depression, or trauma) affecting individuals and families in my community.	97 - 31%	113 - 36%	57 - 18%	36 - 11%	13 - 4%
After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I have increased knowledge of different types of mental health supports (such as counseling, support groups, crisis resources, and community-based services).	102 - 32%	117 - 37%	56 - 18%	23 - 7%	18 - 6%
After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I know specific steps for accessing mental health services in Los Angeles County (for example, who to contact, how to schedule services, or how to find low-cost or free options).	78 - 25%	123 - 39%	64 - 20%	41 - 13%	10 - 3%
After participating in this Wellness Circle, compared to before, I feel less stigma or shame related to mental health challenges and seeking mental health services for myself or others.	81 - 26%	96 - 30%	88 - 28%	40 - 13%	11 - 3%

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In addition to the 4 quantitative questions on the questionnaire, we were also asked to include a fifth open-ended, qualitative question. Of the 316 participants who completed questionnaires, 298 responded to the following open-ended question, “What is one specific thing you learned from this Wellness Circle that increased your understanding of mental health or helped reduce stigma about seeking support?”

The most common theme identified in participant responses was the importance of community and connection. Sixty-three participants reported learning how helpful it is to be with a group of people who share similar experiences, while an additional 57 participants noted the value of being in a safe, accepting environment where they did not feel judged for their beliefs, experiences, or identity. Together, these responses suggest that many participants experienced the Wellness Circles as a supportive community space that reduced feelings of isolation and fostered a greater sense of belonging.

Another significant theme involved the healing power of creative expression. Forty-nine participants reported learning that music, art, storytelling, and other creative activities could help them cope with feelings of depression, anxiety, grief, or emotional pain. These responses indicate that participants gained awareness of alternative approaches to supporting their mental and emotional well-being beyond traditional mental health services.

Participants also reported increased self-awareness and emotional insight. Thirty-six participants shared that the Wellness Circles helped them recognize the extent to which they were experiencing fear, sadness, anxiety, or emotional distress. Additionally, 33 participants stated that they learned how meaningful and enjoyable it can be to share their feelings and personal stories with others. These findings suggest that the Wellness Circles created opportunities for reflection, emotional expression, and greater understanding of one's own mental health needs.

Several participants also reported shifts in their perceptions of mental health support and help-seeking. Twenty-four participants indicated that they learned that therapy is not the only path to healing and that support can come in many forms, including community connection, creative expression, wellness practices, and peer support. Sixteen participants specifically noted the benefits of leaving their homes, engaging with others, and participating in community activities, while eight participants reported learning about the positive impact that spending time in nature can have on mental health and emotional well-being.

Only a small number of participants reported that they did not know what they learned (7 participants) or that they did not learn anything new (5 participants).

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Overall, the questionnaire findings indicate that the Wellness Circles were successful in achieving the project's primary objectives of increasing mental health awareness, improving knowledge of available services and supports, increasing understanding of how to access culturally responsive mental health resources, and reducing stigma associated with mental health challenges and help-seeking behaviors. The results demonstrate that participants gained valuable information and resources while also benefiting from opportunities for connection, reflection, and community support within culturally and linguistically responsive settings.

Furthermore, the qualitative feedback that was collected was in alignment with the pre and post survey findings, as evidenced by the statement's presented above. The qualitative feedback, even more than the pre/post survey's appeared to indicate how important this project was to community members and how influential it was in bringing community members together.

To assess facilitator effectiveness, participants were asked to complete a Wellness Circle Facilitator Evaluation Form following each of the 12 Wellness Circle events. A total of 206 completed evaluation forms were collected. The evaluation utilized a Likert scale to measure participants' perceptions of facilitator knowledge, communication skills, cultural responsiveness, ability to create a safe environment, effectiveness in explaining the purpose of the activities, and overall facilitation skills.

Responses to the statement, "The facilitator demonstrated clear knowledge of the wellness activity and guided the session with confidence and competence," were overwhelmingly positive. A total of 160 participants (78%) either "strongly agreed" (37%) or "agreed" (40%) with this statement. An additional 20% responded neutrally, while only 2% disagreed. These findings indicate that participants viewed facilitators as knowledgeable, prepared, and effective in leading the Wellness Circle activities.

Participants also reported very positive experiences regarding facilitator communication and cultural responsiveness. In response to the statement, "The facilitator communicated in a way that was clear, respectful, and culturally responsive to the community," 174 participants (84%) either "strongly agreed" (39%) or "agreed" (46%). Approximately 15% responded neutrally, while only 1% disagreed. These results suggest that facilitators were successful in creating culturally responsive experiences that were respectful and accessible to participants from diverse backgrounds.

The strongest ratings were received for the statement, "The facilitator created a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment that encouraged participation and comfort." A total of 194 participants (94%) either "strongly agreed" (50%) or "agreed" (45%) with this statement, while only 5% responded neutrally and 1% disagreed. These findings are particularly significant given that one of the primary goals of the Wellness Circle Project was to create safe and welcoming spaces where participants could openly engage in discussion, reflection, and wellness activities without fear of judgment or stigma.

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Similarly, participants responded very favorably to the statement, “The facilitator effectively explained the purpose of the activity and how it supports emotional well-being and stress reduction.” A total of 194 participants (94%) either “strongly agreed” (49%) or “agreed” (45%) that facilitators successfully communicated the purpose and value of the activities. Only 5% responded neutrally and less than 1% disagreed. These findings indicate that participants clearly understood how the Wellness Circle activities related to mental health, emotional wellness, stress reduction, and overall well-being.

Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the facilitator. Responses to the statement, “Overall, the facilitator was effective in leading the wellness activity and meeting the goals of the Wellness Circle,” showed that 190 participants (92%) either “strongly agreed” (48%) or “agreed” (44%) with the statement. Only 7% responded neutrally and 1% disagreed. These findings demonstrate a high level of participant satisfaction with facilitator performance and suggest that facilitators played a critical role in the overall success of the Wellness Circle Project. Overall, the facilitator evaluations indicate that participants viewed the facilitators as highly effective, culturally responsive, knowledgeable, and skilled at creating safe and supportive environments. The consistently high ratings across all five evaluation categories suggest that facilitator quality was a significant factor in fostering participant engagement, encouraging meaningful participation, and contributing to the positive outcomes achieved throughout the Wellness Circle series.

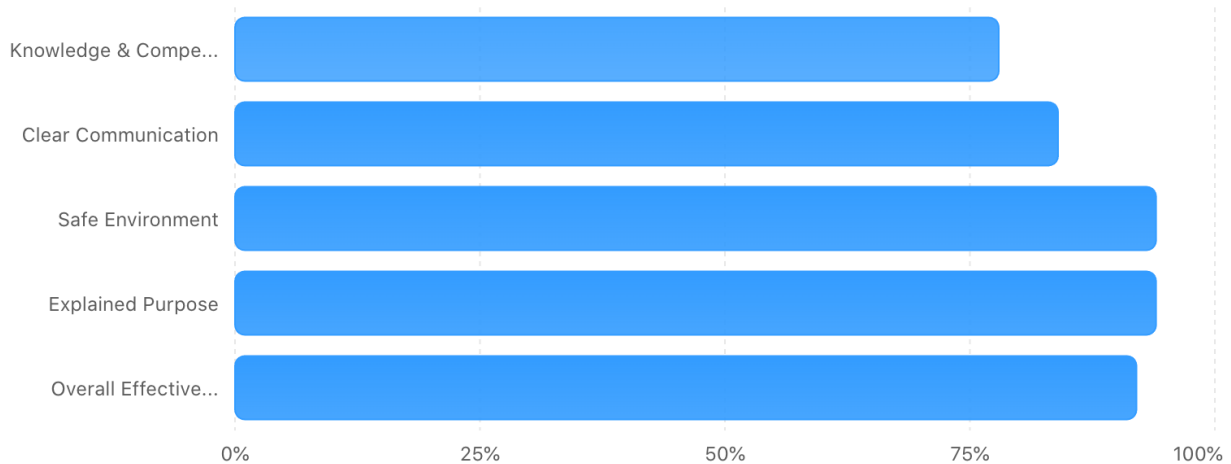
Facilitator Evaluation Results (N=206)

Evaluation Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Facilitator demonstrated knowledge and competence	77 (37%)	83 (40%)	41 (20%)	5 (2%)	0
Facilitator communicated clearly and respectfully	80 (39%)	94 (46%)	30 (15%)	2 (1%)	0
Facilitator created a safe and inclusive environment	102 (50%)	92 (45%)	10 (5%)	2 (1%)	0
Facilitator explained purpose and benefits of activities	101 (49%)	93 (45%)	11 (5%)	1 (<1%)	0
Overall facilitator effectiveness	99 (48%)	91 (44%)	14 (7%)	2 (1%)	0

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Facilitator Evaluation Results

Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with each evaluation statement (N=206).



The key findings from the facilitator evaluations demonstrated exceptionally high levels of participant satisfaction. Across all five evaluation categories, between 78% and 94% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that facilitators were knowledgeable, culturally responsive, effective communicators, and successful in creating safe and supportive environments. The highest ratings were received for facilitators' ability to create an inclusive environment and explain the purpose of the wellness activities, with 94% positive ratings in both categories. These findings suggest that facilitator quality was a major contributor to the success of the Wellness Circle Project and participants' overall experience.

Project Costs

For the services described in the Statement of Work's Deliverables, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health agreed to pay Consultants (Cross Cultural Expressions) a total of \$50,000 for services rendered.

Lessons Learned

Implementing 12, three-hour Wellness Circles for two distinct cultural communities within a seven-month period was an ambitious undertaking that required significant planning, coordination, and flexibility. While the scope of the project presented many challenges, Cross Cultural Expressions successfully met and, in many ways, exceeded its original goals and expectations. The strong attendance, positive participant

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feedback, and meaningful outcomes demonstrated the value and impact of the Wellness Circle model.

One of the most significant challenges arose from the outbreak of war in Iran during the project period. In response to the increased emotional distress, anxiety, and uncertainty experienced by members of the Iranian community, we made the decision to accelerate the implementation timeline and begin the Farsi-speaking Wellness Circles earlier than originally planned. This required additional coordination and resources but allowed us to respond to an urgent community need. The ongoing sociopolitical climate also created challenges, as some community members arrived feeling heightened levels of fear, mistrust, division, or emotional vulnerability. Creating spaces that felt safe, supportive, and inclusive became even more important under these circumstances.

Similarly, outreach to the Russian and Ukrainian-speaking communities required thoughtful consideration given the ongoing tensions associated with the war in the region. We learned that language and messaging matter. To foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment, we chose to refer to the target population as the “Eastern European Community” in promotional materials rather than specifically identifying Russian and Ukrainian-speaking communities. This approach appeared to reduce barriers to participation and helped create spaces where individuals felt more comfortable attending and engaging with one another.

As with many community-based projects, operating within the available budget while responding to evolving community needs was an ongoing challenge. Nevertheless, through careful planning, collaboration, and adaptability, we were able to maximize available resources and successfully implement all project activities.

Overall, this project reinforced the importance of remaining flexible, responsive to community needs, and culturally sensitive in both outreach and program implementation. Despite the challenges encountered, we are extremely pleased with the outcomes of the Wellness Circle series and the positive impact it had on participants and the communities we serve.

Recommendations

Based on the success of this project and the feedback received from participants, Cross Cultural Expressions strongly recommends continued funding for Wellness Circle programming within the Farsi speaking and Eastern European communities. The ongoing wars and resulting divisions affecting both communities have created increased levels of stress, anxiety, fear, grief, isolation, and uncertainty. Now more than ever, community-based programs that foster connection, understanding, healing, and mutual support are critically needed.

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The Wellness Circle model proved to be an effective and culturally responsive approach for engaging participants, reducing isolation, promoting emotional well-being, and creating opportunities for meaningful connection. Participants consistently reported that the circles helped them feel supported, less alone, and more connected to others facing similar challenges. Programs such as these serve as an important counterbalance to the fear, polarization, and social disconnection that many community members are currently experiencing.

We also recommend extending the duration of future Wellness Circle programs. While offering six circles within a relatively short period was successful, a longer-term model would likely increase community participation and sustainability. Offering one Wellness Circle per month over a two- or three-year period would allow more individuals to become aware of the program, build trust over time, and participate on a consistent basis. Establishing Wellness Circles as an ongoing community resource would strengthen their impact and create lasting opportunities for connection, resilience-building, mental health education, and peer support.

Given the strong attendance, positive outcomes, and overwhelmingly favorable participant feedback, we believe the Wellness Circle model should be continued and expanded as an effective strategy for promoting mental health, reducing stigma, and strengthening community well-being within culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Conclusion

Overall, both the qualitative and quantitative data collected indicates that a significant number of Russian/Ukrainian speaking and Farsi speaking community members engaged with this project through the 12, in-person Wellness Circle events.

Both the qualitative and quantitative feedback provided by participants strongly suggests that the Wellness Circle Project successfully achieved its intended goals. Participants consistently reported that the Wellness Circles provided meaningful opportunities to connect with others who shared similar life experiences, cultures, and challenges. Many described feeling less isolated, less anxious, and more supported as a result of their participation, while also reporting increased feelings of connection, belonging, hope, and emotional well-being.

The primary goal of this project was to promote empowerment, resilience, and community connection while reducing the stigma associated with mental health challenges and seeking mental health services. Through the creation of safe, culturally responsive spaces that incorporated both mental health support and alternative healing practices, participants were able to engage in open conversations, build supportive

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relationships, and access valuable resources in a non-stigmatizing and engaging environment.

Participant feedback further indicated that the Wellness Circles increased awareness and understanding of mental health issues, helped challenge stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness within the Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi-speaking communities, and improved participants' knowledge of available mental health resources and services in Los Angeles County. Participants also reported feeling more comfortable seeking help for themselves or encouraging others to access support when needed.

Finally, feedback suggested that the Wellness Circles strengthened participants' confidence and resilience in navigating the challenges associated with mental health concerns, whether for themselves, family members, or loved ones. The responses demonstrate that the project successfully fostered connection, education, empowerment, and a greater sense of community support among participants, thus making this project a very successful one.