



LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Capacity Building Project

Fiscal Year 2025–2026

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The Laughter Is the Best Medicine Comedy Project (Laughter) was designed to increase understanding of mental health within Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities by exploring stressors, emotional impacts, and culturally resonant recovery strategies. The Project further aimed to promote mental health services, reduce stigma, and expand the capacity of Los Angeles County’s public mental health system.

Objective 1 — Comedian Training

Train a cohort of eight Asian adult comedians through six structured workshops focused on developing comedic narratives that reflect personal experiences of stress, emotional impact, and recovery.

Objective 2 — Community Events

Host three live stand-up comedy events to increase mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and build positive identity among API communities.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND PROJECT TIMELINE

The implementation process was planned and executed across five sequential stages:

- Venue Procurement
- Talent Recruitment
- Mental Health Workshops
- Community Outreach and Promotion
- Hosting the Three Laughter Events

THE TEAM AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Staff

Name	Role
JR Kuo	Project Lead, Producer, Host & Workshop Trainer; CEO of CoffeeWithJR
Lilian Lin	Lead Coordinator
Sebastian Feo	Event Coordinator

Comedians

Comedian
Bryan Siu
Fumi Abe
Joy Regullano
Lao
Milan Patel
Pauline Yasuda
Prav Mukhi
Tony Shriller

Additional Performers

Name	Role
Mary Jane	DJ
Natalie Lortz	Dancer
Kahni Toria Shi	Dancer
Cece Wen	Dancer
Kimberly Lin	Storyteller

Partner Organizations

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Southern California
- Asian Youth Center
- Cambodia Town
- Changing Tide
- Dimple Kaur at iMatter
- JACL
- Laura Kim, Mental Health Therapist
- Pacific Clinics — Multicultural Family Center (APFC-East)
- Radiant Futures
- Taiwan Center
- Visual Communications

PROJECT RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

1. Venue Procurement (November–December 2025)

The Statement of Work specified that the three Laughter events be held in Service Areas 3, 7, and 8, each capable of accommodating up to 100 attendees, with a sound system and free parking. The team successfully secured three distinct venues:

Venue	Service Area
UDOM Khmer Banquet Hall — Long Beach	Service Area 8
Memorial Chapel at Whittier College	Service Area 7
Covina Center for Performing Arts	Service Area 3

2. Talent Recruitment (December 2025–February 2026)

Comedian recruitment relied primarily on social media outreach and referrals. Applicants completed a short application, followed by a review of their stand-up materials, social media presence, and website content. Candidates then advanced through two rounds of interviews, with the selection criteria centering on their openness to discussing mental health and their relationship with Asian identity and heritage.

By early February 2026, eight comedians aligned with Laughter’s mission had been recruited. In addition, the team engaged a DJ, three dancers, and two storytellers to enrich the events’ mental health and entertainment aspects.

3. Mental Health Workshops (March 2026)

Three separate mental health workshops (six hours each) were conducted for the comedians:

Workshop	Focus
Workshop 1 — Mental Health 101	Mental health stigma in the Asian community: data, facts, and related topics
Workshop 2 — Stressors & Trauma	Common stressors, trauma, and the emotional impacts of distress
Workshop 3 — Humor as Healing	Connecting personal narratives through humor as a mental health and recovery tool

4. Community Outreach and Promotion (March–June 2026)

Outreach and promotion were built on three complementary strategies:

- 12-Week Email Campaign — Weekly email blasts to CoffeeWithJR’s 2,000 followers throughout the campaign period.
- Social Media Outreach — The @Laugh_Out_Louder handle accumulated approximately 21,466 unique views from inception through the final event.
- Community Partnerships — Ten community-based organizations in Service Areas 3, 7, and 8 reshared Laughter materials with their networks; partner organizations collectively reached approximately 2,000 additional email subscribers.

5. Laughter Is the Best Medicine Events (April–June 2026)

Event	Details
Event 1 — Long Beach	UDOM Khmer Banquet Hall Sunday, April 5, 2026 6:00–8:00 PM 97 attendees
Event 2 — Whittier	Memorial Chapel at Whittier College Saturday, May 16, 2026 2:00–4:30 PM 114 attendees
Event 3 — Covina	Covina Center for Performing Arts Saturday, June 13, 2026 2:00–4:30 PM 104 attendees

Total Attendance <i>317 people attended across the three events, averaging 100 attendees per event.</i>

PARTICIPANT SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The following demographic data was collected across all three Laughter events.

Age Distribution

Age Range	Percentage
18–24	2.1%
25–34	14.7%
35–44	31.4%
45–54	21.5%
55–64	14.1%
65 and older	4.7%

Gender Identity

Gender	Percentage
Female	61.3%
Male	24.6%
Non-binary	2.1%
Unspecified	12.0%

Race / Ethnicity

Race / Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian American	70.2%
Hispanic / Latino	8.9%
White / Caucasian	7.9%
Unspecified	7.3%
Black / African American	2.6%
Multi-Ethnic	2.1%

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY ANALYSIS

Participants completed eighty-two pre-surveys and post-surveys to measure the impact of the Laughter events on mental health knowledge, awareness, and attitudes.

Pre-Survey Results

Survey Question	Responses
“I am knowledgeable about general mental health concepts and stressors.”	Strongly Agree 36.7% Agree 27.1% Neutral 23.4% Disagree 8.5% Strongly Disagree 4.3%
“I understand the importance of cultural influences on mental health.”	Strongly Agree 81.0% Agree 24.1% Neutral 21.9% Disagree 5.9% Strongly Disagree 4.8%
“I am aware of mental health resources and services available.”	Yes 61.3% Not Sure 30.1% No 8.4%
“I understand how comedy and humor can be validating and healing for mental health.”	Strongly Agree 50.3% Agree 16.9% Neutral 16.9% Disagree 11.6% Strongly Disagree 4.2%

Post-Survey Results

Survey Question	Responses
“I learned something new about mental health.”	Strongly Agree 55.5% Agree 24.5% Neutral 14.8% Disagree 1.3% Strongly Disagree 3.9%
“I understand the importance of cultural influences on mental health.”	Strongly Agree 72.9% Agree 19.4% Neutral 5.2% Disagree 0.6% Strongly Disagree 1.9%
“I am more aware of mental health resources and services available.”	Yes 92.3% Not Sure 5.8% No 1.9%
“I feel more inspired to talk about mental health and reduce stigma.”	Yes 94.9% Not Sure 3.8% No 1.3%
“I have a deeper appreciation for how comedy and humor can be healing.”	Strongly Agree 77.6% Agree 16.0% Neutral 2.6% Disagree 0% Strongly Disagree 3.8%
“Would you recommend the Laughter event to family or friends?”	Yes 97.4% Not Sure 2.6% No 0%

Key Takeaways: Level of Knowledge Gained

Dramatic Boost in Mental Health Resource Awareness

Awareness of available mental health resources and services saw the largest overall improvement across all metrics, with positive responses increasing by 31.0%. The share of participants who were “Not Sure” dropped from 30.1% in the pre-survey to just 5.8% in the post-survey.

Deeper Appreciation for Culture and Humor in Healing

Positive responses to the importance of cultural influences on mental health rose by 24.9% (from 67.4% to 92.3%). Recognition of comedy and humor as healing tools increased by 26.4% (from 67.2% to 93.6%).

Increased Comfort and Inspiration to Reduce Stigma

94.9% of post-survey respondents reported feeling inspired to talk about mental health and reduce stigma — an increase of 24.3%. Only 1.3% reported feeling uninspired, down from 9.1% in the pre-survey.

AUDIENCE FAVORITE HIGHLIGHTS

Comedy as a Gateway to Mental Health Conversations

67% of responses identified comedy and laughter as the overwhelmingly favorite element of the events. Attendees valued the physical act of laughing together, which effectively lowered the emotional barriers typically associated with mental health discussions. Culturally specific humor — including references to fish sauce, 18-letter names, and shared family dynamics — resonated deeply with the audience.

Audience comments:

“The amazing comedian”

“All three comedians are funny and made me laugh”

“How relatable some jokes were. I loved the talk about fish sauce.”

“My name is 18 letters — it’s a whole Wi-Fi password.”

Storytelling and Community Resources

21% of responses highlighted the mental health storytelling and community resource components. Attendees expressed deep appreciation for the vulnerability of personal stories and felt a strong connection to the performers’ experiences. The presence of a therapist booth and community resource tables bridged the gap between entertainment and actionable support.

“Great line-up and balance between the mental health awareness and entertainment.”

“The blending of mental health with comedy.”

“Personal stories, using comedy to share Asian mental health topics.”

“The intentionality behind the entire event, the comedians and storytellers.”

A Multi-Sensory, Festive Environment

22% of responses highlighted the dancers, music, food, and raffle as significant contributors to the celebratory atmosphere. These elements helped balance the emotional weight of mental health discussions and maintained positive energy throughout the events. 15% of respondents stated that “everything” was their favorite part, reflecting an overwhelmingly successful overall experience.

“Everything”

“All of it. Good perspective.”

“The whole event was awesome.”

“The whole show was great!”

LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges

Timeline Constraints

The Laughter contract was awarded in late October 2025, with the Statement of Work finalized in mid-November 2025 — immediately before the holiday season. Talent recruitment began in early December, a period when many comedians had already committed to other engagements months in advance. The compressed timeline, compounded by holiday scheduling conflicts, presented notable challenges in assembling the talent roster.

Managing Attendee Turnout

As a free public event, Laughter faced the common challenge of uncertain turnout: attendees often do not register in advance or arrive without prior notice. This created difficulties in managing venue capacity and complying with the Statement of Work's attendance targets. Venues with greater seating flexibility, such as Whittier College, were more accommodating of last-minute arrivals. At the same time, spaces like the Covina Center for Performing Arts had fire code capacity limitations that required careful coordination.

Tailored Marketing Across Service Areas

The requirement to host events in three distinct Service Areas (3, 7, and 8) necessitated three separate outreach strategies tailored to the unique communities within each area. While manageable, the additional coordination required was a meaningful operational consideration.

Successes

Mental Health Workshops

All eight comedians participated in the required six-hour mental health workshop. While the comedians brought familiarity with various mental health topics, each reported gaining new knowledge and perspectives through the workshop curriculum.

Community Partnerships

Laughter established partnerships with approximately ten mental health providers and community-based organizations serving Asian and Asian American communities across Los Angeles County. These partners promoted Laughter's marketing materials through their own networks, and seven organizations set up resource tables at the events to connect attendees directly with mental health services.

Event Attendance and Reception

A total of 317 people attended the three Laughter events, averaging approximately 100 per event. Based on verbal feedback, post-surveys, and project evaluations, the overwhelming majority of participants expressed high satisfaction. Selected attendee comments:

“The mental health themed comedy, but it’s hard to choose! I appreciated the personal stories and community resources, too.”

“How relatable some jokes were. I loved the talk about fish sauce.”

“Everything about this event was so fun and well done. Thank you for putting this on for the community.”

“Resources, snacks, music, and dance, plus laughs. The whole shebang was amazing!!!!”

“Loved the event — awesome learning experience.”

“Everything was wonderful. Thank you!”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mental health stigma remains prevalent across many communities, including Asian and Asian American populations. The Laughter Is the Best Medicine project demonstrated the unique power of comedy and cultural storytelling as vehicles for meaningful mental health engagement. On behalf of the CoffeeWithJR and Laughter teams, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health and the Asian Pacific Islander Underserved Cultural Communities for this extraordinary opportunity.

Humor can serve as a powerful protective factor for mental health. Throughout the Laughter project, comedy proved to be an accessible and non-threatening entry point for conversations that are often considered taboo. Numerous attendees and partner organizations expressed interest in bringing Laughter directly into their own communities and spaces. Research consistently shows that individuals are more likely to engage with programs in environments where they already feel comfortable and connected.

As a result, we offer the following recommendations to the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health:

- **Expand Community Partnerships** — Continue building relationships with community organizations, cultural centers, educational institutions, and other trusted gathering spaces to bring Laughter programming directly to the communities it seeks to serve.

- Sustain Culturally Relevant Programming — The strong resonance of culturally specific humor and storytelling underscores the need for ongoing investment in programs that reflect the lived experiences of API communities.
- Invest in Follow-On Programming — The significant post-event interest in continued engagement — reflected in survey data and verbal feedback — demonstrates clear demand for expanded, innovative approaches that combine humor, storytelling, and mental health education.

The following testimonials illustrate the community’s enthusiasm for continued programming:

“How can I get you to come to my organization?”

“Do more of these events!!”

“I want to get to know more about mental health.”

“Helping folks suffering, not to pathologize their own cultures.”

“Spotlighting the legal and mental health.”

In conclusion, the survey results and audience feedback affirm the power and effectiveness of the Laughter Is the Best Medicine project in engaging Asian community members and reducing mental health stigma through culturally resonant comedy. We strongly recommend that LACDMH continue to support and fund projects of this nature to expand access to mental health services and promote community well-being across API communities.