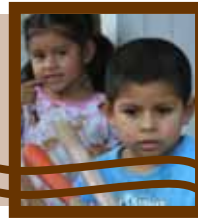


Healthy Together:

Creating Community with New U.S. Americans



Focus Group Summary with Bloomington Public Health Staff

On February 4, 2009, ten Bloomington Public Health (BPH) staff representing various program areas participated in a focus group to discuss their perceptions regarding the barriers and needs of new U.S. Americans. Staff was also asked to identify ways to improve health and social integration of new U.S. Americans in Bloomington and Richfield.

Funding support for this focus group and others was provided by a “Healthy Together: Creating Community with new U.S. Americans” planning grant awarded to Bloomington Public Health. The overall goal of the grant is to improve health and reduce health inequities for new U.S. Americans by building social connectedness and relationships between newcomers and the broader communities. In this report, the term “new U.S. Americans” and “newcomer” are used interchangeably.

Name a service or program you provide that serves new U.S. Americans?

- WIC program to qualified mothers, infants and children
- Family health home visiting to at-risk pregnant and postpartum women, parenting support and education
- Provide breast cancer and cervical screening, detection and follow-up services to uninsured or underinsured women enrolled in the SAGE program
- Spanish interpreters at WIC clinics, family health home visits and phone calls
- Nursing services to Richfield’s MIRI/Multicultural Family Center and LaMision (affiliated with Assumption Church), Head Start and Family School

What do you think are the main 2-3 challenges new U.S. Americans and families face in staying healthy here?

Unhealthy and crowded living conditions. Many home visiting nurses observe frequent infestations of pests, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and rodents in homes and apartments. Mold is a problem due to high moisture levels created by many people living and cooking in the same space. In some households, there are major stressors due to the social dynamics that take place when so many people live together.

Lack of public transportation in our communities. Many newcomers often cannot afford a car to get to their doctor or public health appointments, schools, jobs, and other places, and the lack of public transportation is a major barrier.

Mental health problems, particularly depression and feelings of isolation, among Latino and African mothers. Home visiting nurses observe that many mothers with children don’t leave their homes or apartments. Cultural factors, lack of transportation, lack of child care options, and personal fears all contribute to mental health issues. Many do not have other family members nearby so there is little support. The sun is often seen as the “enemy” in their native country and the curtains often are closed so that family members are not getting any sunlight.

Others Challenges Noted:

Lack of affordable healthy foods and an overabundance of cheap “junk foods”.

Fresh produce is too expensive for many families to purchase at the grocery store.

Lack of health insurance and affordable health care especially among certain ethnic/cultural populations

Language and communication technology barriers (i.e. phone use)

Health and safety concerns regarding appropriate winter dress as most new immigrants come from warmer climates

What strategies work best in helping new U.S. Americans feel welcome and “at home” at BPH?

- Having Spanish interpreters helps to overcome language and cultural barriers.
- BPH staff is respectful and caring. Clients appreciate staff, making comments such as “everyone is so nice”. They feel like they are treated with respect.
- Staff continuity of care - clients appreciate seeing the same nurse and staff.
- Health information provided in their own language.

In what ways could BPH improve or change its existing programs or services to better serve new Americans?

More outreach is needed about BPH services, as many uninsured or underinsured people are not aware of local public health services and programs. There is also a perception by some that the cost of public health services will be too expensive.

In WIC clinics, purchase display food and models that people from different cultures are familiar with. Staff would like to explore whether WIC clients can get approval to use vouchers at local Farmer’s Markets.

Staff could provide additional community resources to clients that help foster involvement in their communities, such as information about local libraries and recreational opportunities.

Consider providing certain public health services and/or programs in neighborhood satellite sites.

Explore whether there can be improved public transportation services to BPH and/or a location that is easier to find and access.

People are healthiest when they feel safe, supported and connected to their families, neighborhoods, workplaces and communities. What things do you think help new U.S. Americans feel connected to their new neighborhoods and communities?

Staff identified the following ways to help newcomers feel connected:

- Learning English is important
- Helping newcomers and their families learn about community resources
- Others noted that many local faith-based organizations are helping new U.S. Americans feel welcome and are providing help to families in different ways

Staff also talked about their observations regarding cultural and religious differences that make it difficult for certain groups to participate in community programs. Some mentioned that integration is not always seen as desirable. Some newcomer groups fear what might happen to them if they become more active in their community, especially undocumented workers.

The following is a list of ideas that have been suggested as ways to facilitate the integration process of new U.S. Americans. What do you think of each idea?

Idea #1: Develop some type of Welcome program in Bloomington with bilingual staff/volunteers that would provide information and resources for new families and individuals.

Staff supported this idea, particularly in Bloomington (e.g. Creekside or new Community Center) where co-location of services would be possible, such as WIC, legal aid, transportation, counseling, and help with applying for health care insurance. Staff realizes this would be a major undertaking and that a coordinator would be needed.

Another option discussed was a Welcome program during school registration in which organizational representatives provide local resource information to new U.S. American families.

Idea #2: Provide more networking and resource sharing opportunities for organizations and providers so that they can better serve new U.S. Americans clients/participants.

The Hennepin South Services Collaborative (HSSC) may already serve this role through its programs and the Coordination teams (e.g. Self Sufficiency, Health/Mental Health). BPH staff serve on the Board and on a Coordination team. Coordination teams have helped develop a number of useful guides such as Transportation and “Navigating the Waters” that provides an extensive list of organizations and what services and programs they provide. A Primer for Families is being developed. Also, HSSC provides trainings for community providers on a number of topics. For more information, go to www.hsscmn.org. The City of Bloomington Human Services has some helpful community resource guides.

Idea #3: Sponsor “talking circles”, cross-cultural exchanges or events that would include new U.S. Americans and existing community members

Staff identified successful cross-cultural events hosted in Bloomington and Richfield, such as one hosted by Georgetown Apartments and the Bloomington Public Schools, the Valley View event, and Day of the Child/Day of the Book in Richfield.

Are you interested in any staff development trainings about New U.S. Americans?

Staff thought it would be helpful to find out more about how other public health agencies and local organizations are working with new U.S. Americans and the programs they are providing. There was also interest in learning more about the major cultural/ethnic groups living in our communities.

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