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# Defining a Paradigm for the Dissemination of Health Information to Immigrant Populations at the Fletcher Free Library

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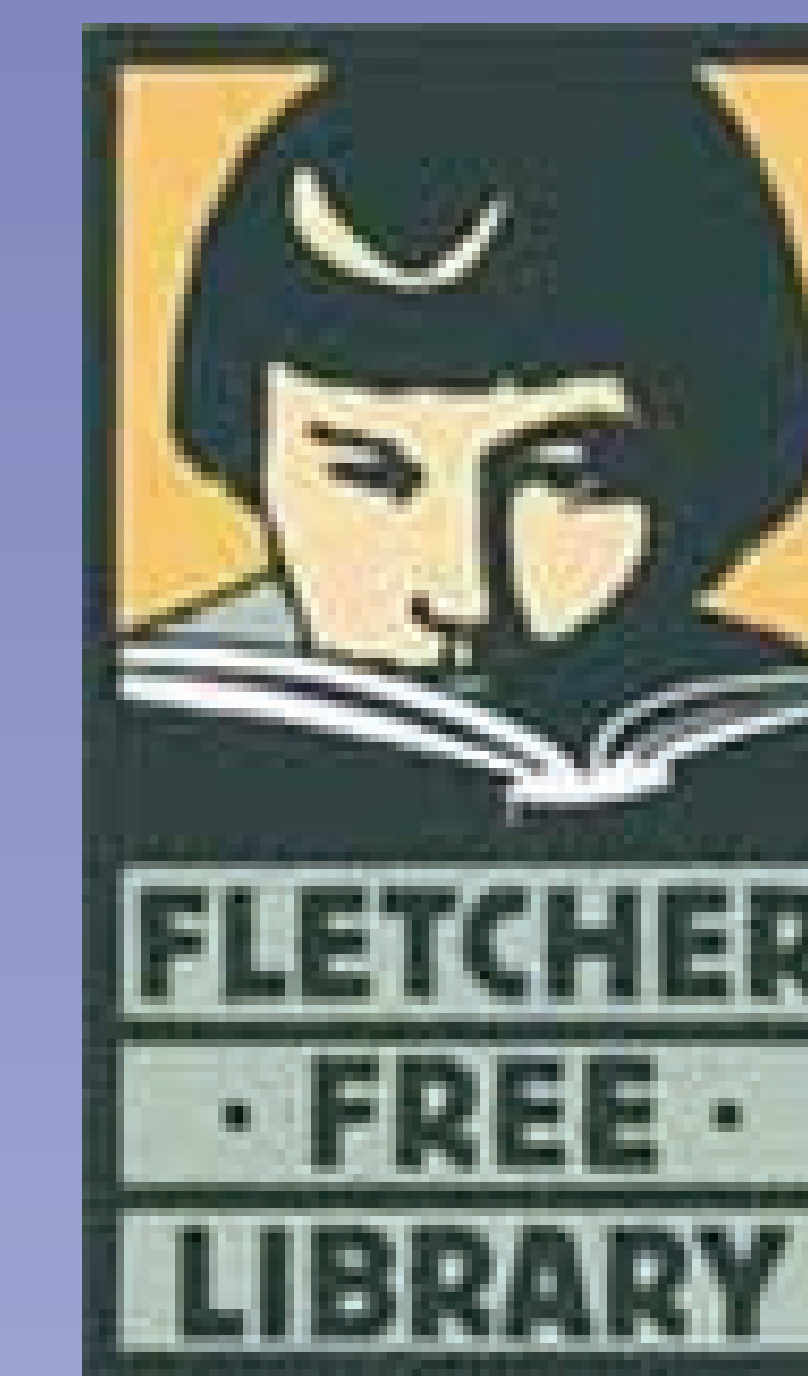
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# Defining a Paradigm for the Dissemination of Health Information to Immigrant Populations at the Fletcher Free Library



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## Abstract

In recent years, the surge of refugee families to the greater Burlington area has led to a significant increase in the minority population of the city. The Fletcher Free Library (FFL) represents a potential health information resource for this population; it is, however, little utilized. Our project sought to target one of these minority populations, the Somali Bantu, and to diminish the barriers to the use of the FFL's resources within the Somali population itself. To reduce barriers to access of health information by the Somali Bantu population, we educated the FFL's reference librarians on Somali culture, developed a compendium of health information in both English and Somali for inclusion within the library's collection, and staged a one-day intervention at the Community Health Center of Burlington to present the FFL as a potential source of health information for refugee populations. Somali Bantu use of the library, as well as reference librarian confidence in serving this minority population, was objectively assessed via pre- and post-interventional surveys.

## Introduction

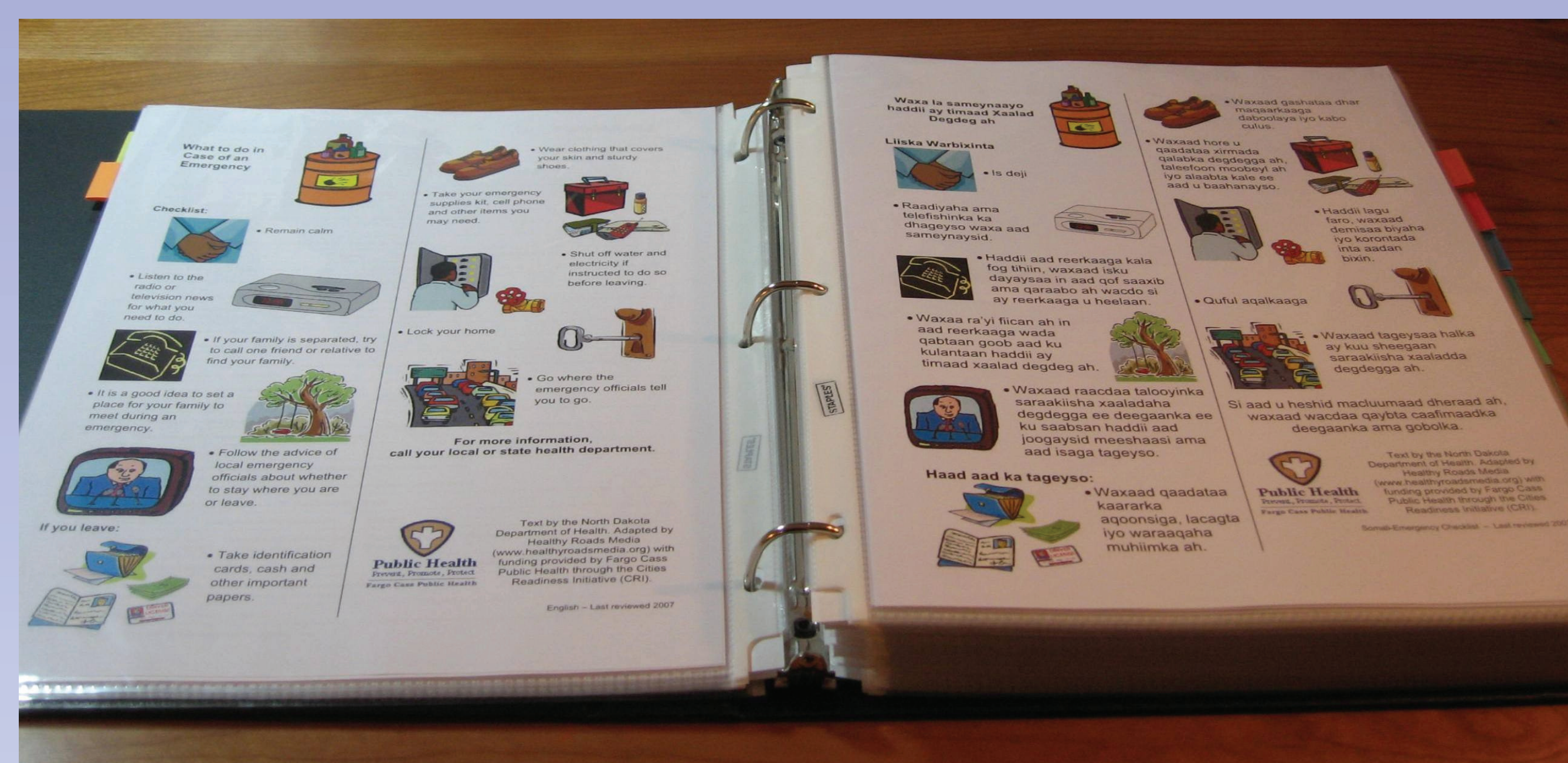
In order to address the aforementioned issues, we decided to focus upon the refugee Somali Bantu population within the Burlington area to establish a paradigm by which minority access to health information at the FFL might be increased. Due to recent war and famine in Somalia, Burlington has seen an influx of Somali Bantu refugees in recent years. As of 2006, the number of Somali Bantu living in Burlington was 282.

To help ensure the FFL is able to better serve Burlington's burgeoning minority populations, we sought first to identify barriers to the utilization of health information at the FFL by the Somali Bantu, including obstacles present at the library and within the Somali Bantu community at large. In order to address barriers at the FFL, we conducted a focused survey of the reference librarians to assess both Somali Bantu use of the library and the confidence with which librarians were able to direct Somali Bantu patrons to relevant health resources.

In order to properly assess barriers to access in the Somali Bantu community, we collaborated with George Wright, the director of the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV). This allowed us to identify relevant health topics to include in our reference packet for the library, as well as the physical, economical and cultural barriers to use of the FFL by the Somali Bantu. In order to overcome some of these barriers, we elected to conduct a community intervention to present health information directly and, moreover, to identify the FFL as a source of health information for the Somali Bantu. The impact of our intervention was assessed using the post-intervention survey provided to the reference librarians at the FFL.

## Objective

Address lack of access to /utilization of health care information at the FFL by minority populations within the greater Burlington area.



*In order to better serve minority populations, such as the Somali Bantu, at the FFL, we designed a Somali-English patient manual to discuss relevant health topics.*

## Methods

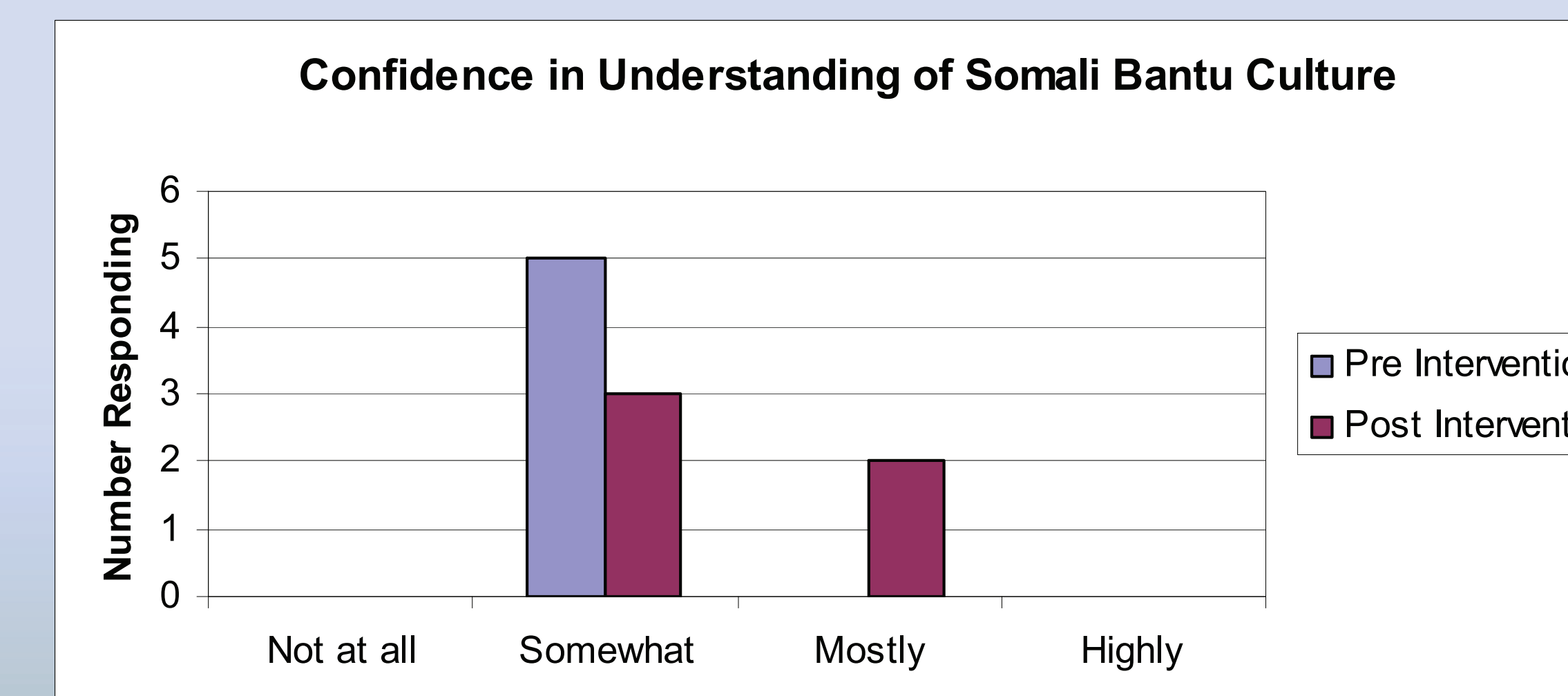
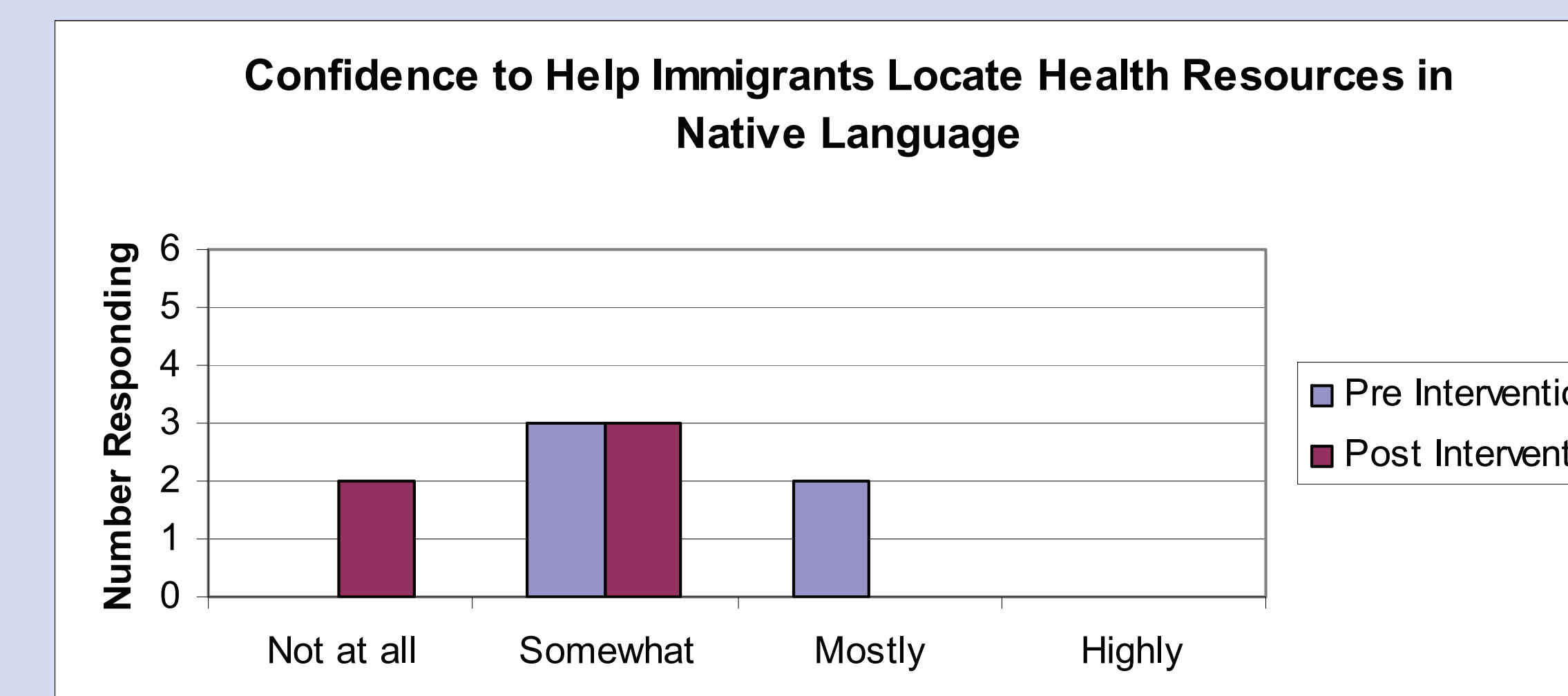
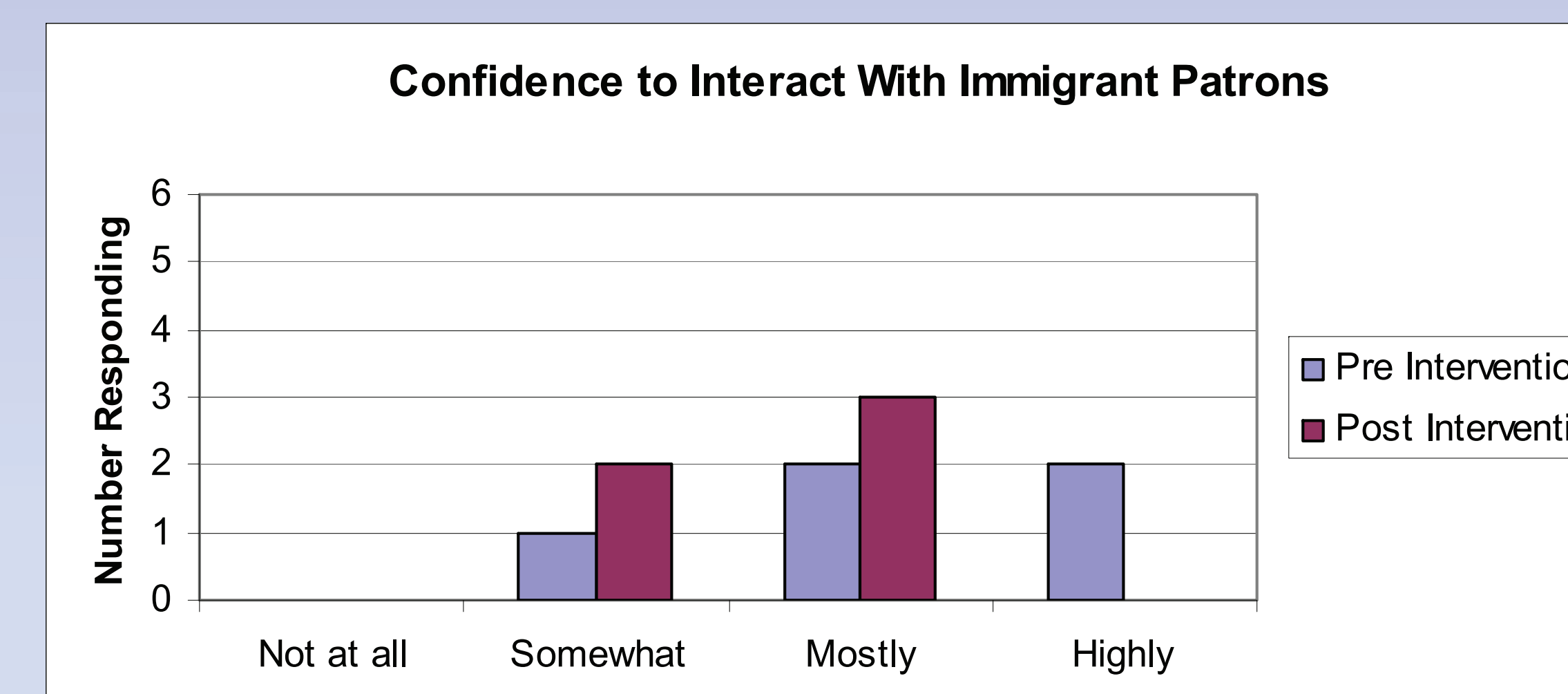
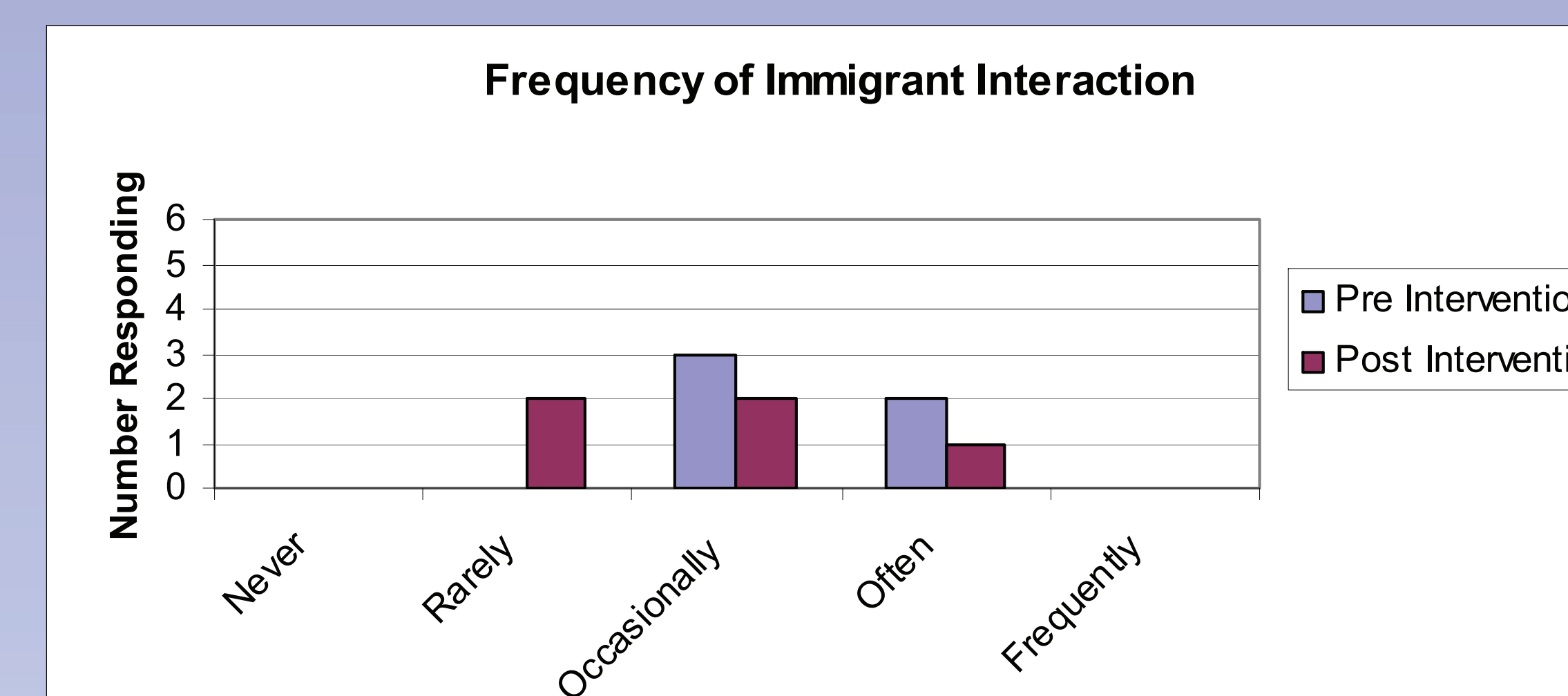
Prior to our study, we distributed a baseline survey to the five reference librarians at the FFL to assess the reference librarians' level of confidence in working with minority populations such as the Somali Bantu. Following the initial survey, an informative module was designed to educate the reference librarians about Somali Bantu culture. We then surveyed the confidence levels of the reference librarians following participation in the module.

Lastly, we staged a one-day health literacy intervention at the Community Health Center of Burlington in order to provide health information to Somali Bantu refugees in English as well as Somali, Arabic, Kirundi, and French. This intervention also served to provide library cards to members of the Somali Bantu population and to disseminate the idea of the FFL as a source of health information, where resources such as our self-designed health information packet might be found.



*Fletcher Free Library*

## Results



## Discussion

The principal aim of this project was to increase the use of the Fletcher Free Library as a health information resource by minority populations such as the Somali Bantu. In order to achieve this objective, we educated the reference librarians at the FFL about Somali Bantu culture and history so they would be better equipped to serve this minority. We also successfully designed a health information packet to be placed in the library's collection, which the Somalis will hopefully use to educate themselves about various health topics and concerns. In order to popularize the idea of the FFL as a health information resource to the Somali Bantu population, we successfully staged a health literacy intervention at the CHC. Following our module and the intervention at the CHC, a repeat survey of the reference librarians demonstrated a trend toward improved cultural competency.

This project has focused chiefly upon the Somali Bantu population in the Burlington area. Despite this focus upon a single minority population, the design of this project might well be used as a paradigm for improving minority community utilization of the FFL for health-related information.

## Lessons Learned

Our group has learned from this project the difficulty of balancing the goals of our designated agency with those of the population we have endeavored to serve. In speaking to groups which work closely with the Somali Bantu in the Burlington area, we soon discovered that accessing the FFL is difficult for this population due to barriers such as transportation. Therefore, we felt it was best to locate our health intervention at the Community Health Center, rather than at the FFL, in order to reach the largest number of Somalis possible.

Additionally, we learned the necessity of recruiting a credible community liaison to represent and communicate with our target population. This principle applies equally well to both the Somali Bantu population and the reference librarians with which we worked.

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Content for the Burlington-specific information was provided by interviews with George Wright of the AALV and Jon Bourgo of the Community Health Center.