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Work Incentives Support Center

Promising Practices

Creating Model Partnerships to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities

Reaching Out To The Vietnamese Community of Massachusetts

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Background

The hall marks of respect and quiet listening are continual themes running through outreach efforts to the Vietnamese community of Massachusetts. Particularly when dealing with the elderly, the notion of respect is critical in breaking through to the client. Quiet listening and a show of respect for the individual will allow "entrance" into this community that is seen as closed to the issue of disability. A general distrust of government, based upon prior life experience of many elderly members of this community, also adds to the difficulty of breaking through in an effort to provide needed services. Having a staff person who is also a member of the community has also been seen as a necessary component in outreach and education efforts.

Emmy began working with Project Impact a bit over one year ago. She is a young woman of Vietnamese heritage. The population of Massachusetts totals some 6.3 million people. Of that number 36,685 (.0058%) identify as Vietnamese according to the most recent census. Project Impact served 1200 individuals in Massachusetts in the past year. 206 (17%) of these individuals were Vietnamese. Through Emmy's outreach to this very discreet, private community services provided have increased exponentially.

Identification of the Barriers

- The language barrier remains the primary difficulty when reaching out to the Vietnamese community. Emmy's language skill allows her to relate to clients quicker and, over time, with more familiarity. Elder clients almost always must be addressed in their language. This is both a matter of respect and practicality.
- Significant discomfort and a lack of trust toward government entities exist in the Vietnamese community. This is particularly true in the case of older immigrants. Emmy must make it clear that she is confidential, trustworthy source of information. In order to accomplish this goal, Emmy presents herself more as an educator rather than a service provider.
- It is extremely important for Emmy to demonstrate respect for the client; particularly when the client is an elder. Acknowledging this basic need takes time but has proven to be a successful means of gaining both access and trust.
- It is not culturally acceptable in the Vietnamese community to disclose information to a stranger. This is intensified when dealing with matters relating to disability. Emmy must earn the clients trust and ease into this type of discussion. The decision to seek help for a disability related matter may be very stressful to the individual or family. Emmy recognizes the emotional stress involved when being approached by a client in order to ease the situation and allow for more effective communication.
- Outreach to and through Vietnamese professionals has helped reach this community. Professionals tend to be more receptive to the information and then make referrals to Project Impact. A trusting relationship has often already been built between the professional and client and, as a result, the information Emmy can provide is accepted more readily.
- Community information materials must be provided in Vietnamese. Flyers, ads in Vietnamese newspapers and subject oriented information pamphlets have all been translated from English to Vietnamese and are provided to the community at various community outlets.

- A constant presence in the community is necessary, requiring repeat visits by Emmy to outreach sites and professional service providers.

Methods used:

- Group presentations at Vietnamese Community Centers
- Radio call-in shows
- Tet Celebration

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