

Circles of Health & Well-Being Program

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Project Description:

Somali Circles of Health & Well-Being is a program that brings health, education, and culture together to support optimal health in underserved communities. It is an eight module program typically delivered in a smaller, more intimate setting. It uses a culturally-based curriculum designed to empower women by sharing important (evidence-based) health information and resources to support a healthy diet and lifestyle.

** As a result of the present Pandemic, the program has been adjusted and redesigned for online delivery**

Entities Involved:

UCare, Somali Community Refugee Resettlement, Minneapolis Foundation and Intercultural Strategies.

How Health Plans Support the Project

UCare supports this program by providing grant funding for the Circles of Health & Well-Being program in Rochester, Faribault and Minneapolis. We are planning for implementation in Central Minnesota in 2022.

Stories:

Storytelling is an integral and essential part of the Circles of Health program. However, it can take time to build trust. With that in mind, the program focuses on creating a safe and welcoming environment where trust can flourish and grow.

Each module within the Circles of Health & Well-Being program has a different theme (compassion, forgiveness, resilience, etc.). That theme is then woven throughout the class content. As we continue to nurture and develop a trusting environment, participants are encouraged to share stories related to the “theme” of that day.

It is in telling their “stories” that participants can begin to heal their pain and trauma while giving voice to their feelings.

We have include a few stories and summaries of our discussions below, to illustrate the program’s impact and the importance of storytelling as a healing and positive transformation vehicle. The stories shared are prompted by quotes, questions, and discussion related to the themes.

Question: What makes you happy and helps you connect with your community or neighbor?

“I find joy and happiness when I am with my friends and with other Somalis during Ramadan and times I spend with them at the mosque. I find happiness and healing when I attend group prayers. Being with my people gives me peace of mind and helps me to sleep at night. I feel secure and comfortable to face the difficulties of our daily lives knowing that I have people around me who care about me.” – Zahra

“When I wake up every morning, I thank God for allowing me to be alive then I pray and ask God to bless my day. I feel blessed and happy to be part of this class. It takes my stress away. The class gives me tools to connect with my group here. We call each

other and ask questions as well as holding each other accountable. For example, I often call some of the ladies here and we exchange discussions about the food we cooked here and if we are drinking the eight glasses of water Mona recommends. We also visit each other and cook together and make smoothies together. All these connections help me to cope with any stress I have.” – Surer

Question: Would you share a time when resilience helped you through a difficult time in your life?

“During the civil war in Somalia, I lived far away from my father and one day the news came to me that he was shot. There were looters and killers everywhere but I have decided to walk to the town where my father was, so I can help him. I walked 5 hours and finally got to where he was. After going back and forth several times to help my father. I decided to rent a car so I can take him to the nearest hospital. As we were riding the car we were hit by a bomb and our car flipped. When we tried to get out of the car, we were hit by another car. I sustained some spinal injuries and was in pain. Both me and my father were taken to the hospital and we both got better except I felt traumatized by the accident. Today I feel pain and most of my friends here think that I have some kind of mental health issue. I honestly feel fine but still experience shock and pain. I am lucky that I am getting better by taking some medications.” – Asha

We are in the process of adjusting the intake and exit interviews. However, we spoke with participants at the beginning to gather general health information, and again at the end, to capture their experience and results once they completed the program.

The following offers a few examples of the experiences the women

had in the online session:

Amal Osman told us that she did not use a specific diet and ate whatever was in front of her, including finishing the food her children left on their plates. She shared with us that she is very healthy but can use a change in her diet. After participating in our program, Amal learned how to manage her blood sugar through diet. She learned which foods raised her blood sugar and which foods kept it at a healthy level. She also became aware of the sugar content in various foods and began to read labels.

In her exit interview, Amal shared that she was very excited about this program and so thankful for the things she has learned. She said she uses the recipes Mona shared and is drinking the smoothie she learned to make. She would love to attend this program again.

Mana Hassan made a few simple changes that significantly improved her life. She stopped sugar completely. She had been experiencing a great deal of joint pain, making it difficult to walk and move comfortably in the world. After eliminating sugar, the pain subsided, and she feels great. She also lost 6 lbs. She found the Blood Sugar Chart to be helpful and thinks of it whenever she craves sweets. She also is drinking more water. She and Fadumo encourage each other since they work together. They each bought large containers for water and continue to take them to work every day. They are also substituting Quinoa for rice, which is higher in protein and fiber.