

Summary

Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Cultural Humility, Health Equity & Social Justice Committee

March 24, 2022
10:05 am – 11:00 am
Behavioral Health & Recovery Services Facility
Teleconference via Zoom

Present:

Sharon Jones, Jose Chavez Diaz, Maria Colomer, Dee Espinoza, Fernando Granados, Maria Haro-Veloz, Heydi Herrera, Melyssa Hintz, Adam Lane, Cindy Mattox, Jennifer McQueen, Marilyn Mochel, Ismael Muñoz, Maria Ocegueda, Jesse Ornelas, Nancy Ortiz, Julissa Ruiz-Ramirez, Sandra Sandoval, Cari Urquiza, Belle Vallador, Pangcha Vang

Presentation and Discussion:

All Members

I. Check-in/Conocimiento

II. Approval of Minutes

The approval of minutes for February 24, 2022 was motioned/seconded (Fernando Granados, Sandra Sandoval) and carried.

III. Discussion on Diversity of Committee

Sharon explained that this committee is a requirement as a part of the work that we do, as a part the performance agreement, as a part of being a mental health plan, and providing mental health specialty and preventive services. Sharon would like to have a conversation on the diversity of the committee and what we need to make it more inclusive and more robust. There are so many things going on in the world related to diversity. She noted that we have a really great committee – a committee that is taking action, with a strong voice, and that is moving outcomes forward.

Pangcha Vang thinks we need more family advocates and peer advocates with lived experience of being in the BHRS and MHSA programs to be on the committee. Sharon agreed; in the past they had very robust participation from our Wellness Center. It appears after COVID that many participants have not been able to attend. Sharon added that the voice is so strong of our peers.

Fernando Granados shared that he participates in two other committees. A grid was created in those committees to identify who needs to be at the table such as someone from the community that represents and not necessarily speaks for, the Hispanic, Latinos, African Americans, Asian, LGBTQ, etc. If we identified who needs to be at the table and recruited those individuals to sit on the table, as well as who within the BHRS system and who with the contracted agencies also needs to be in attendance. Sharon thinks that may be something they could do there. She asked for any suggestions. Sharon said that one thing she can do is develop a draft grid with who needs to be at the table. Then they could further refine it and add or take away to the list. Sharon will start by taking a look at who has historically attended the meeting, and sending it out for suggestions on who needs to be added.

Pangcha feels that it's not just like non-profit or organizations that should be on this list and participate in the committee, but people from underserved communities should be there, such as undocumented communities, formerly incarcerated, LGBTQ – not as a non-profit person, but someone from the community. She also thinks there's a lack of participation from the public and feels that the committees should be at 6:00 PM or later because there's a lack of access for people of low-income working families to participate. Sharon agreed about a time where we can get the biggest voice, and the voice that we really need to support.

Pangcha shared that in Sacramento they have a peer advocate from each group or population. They have a peer advocate for youth, a peer advocate for TAY youth, an advocate for older adults, as well as a family member who represents each group; it really allows for a lot of different perspectives. Having advocates from these different groups of people our communities is so important. Pangcha thinks that each program that MHSA has, whether it's non-profit or county, should require them to hire a peer advocate and a family advocate and should be required to attend these board meetings. Sharon shared that California for the first time is starting to recognize and Cal MHSA is working on a peer certification training. Sharon noted the power, voices, and experience of peers that they bring – they have lived this life in a certain way and really do have a lot of valuable feedback. Families have gone through a lot of big experiences as well.

Jennifer McQueen, executive director of the Merced Pride Center, completely agrees about the peer advocate and peer support being on this meeting. They are a non-profit, all their staff are identifying, and they are peer support facilitators so they are consistently

interacting. Not only are they part of the community, but they are consistently interacting with the folks that go through their doors. In the first few days of being open, they had 62 participants go through their peer-support groups. Right now, they are running 9 support groups all peer led, with 18 peers running them. Jennifer does think it would be really great to have more of those voices present because in those groups and conversations, there is a lot of really valuable feedback and information being shared. She completely agrees that having a lot more peer voices and identifying community members to speak and share would be really valuable. Sharon agrees that the power of peers is really what brings forth healing and helps with a lot of the stigma. Jennifer added that they actually have a few staff members right now who are volunteering as peer advocates because it is so needed from people in the community to have that peer side by side to help them through a lot of things. Sharon asked if Jennifer has a peer training or a specific training that the peers go through. Jennifer explained that they do receive peer-support facilitator trainings and it actually is in conjunction with the work that they do. Yes, they do have a very formulated training that all the folks go through. She noted that their staff manager just attended the ASIST Training at BHRS, and had great feedback saying that it would be great training for all of the peer support facilitators. Jennifer will be reaching out to Sharon to see if there is any way to get all of the facilitators in that training. She said that it is a very rigorous process between the training provided by BHRS, as well as additional training for their standards and requirements through the Merced Pride Center.

Pangcha said that she really liked what Jennifer said. However, she feels like the peer-supports should be paid and that Merced County needs to put more effort into employing peer advocates and family advocates, having them on the committee, and having them get paid for that process. When Pangcha was in Sacramento, she was a peer advocate and she served on the board – it was a stipend and she would get a stipend every time she went. Every organization had to have an advocate, and that's what we need.

Jennifer added that they are in a very exciting time where at the Merced Pride Center they have blasted with this growth and they are lucky enough that through their work with MHSA, they are partially funded for their facilitators to receive a stipend – they are funded to run 6 peer-led support groups twice a month. They just have so much more of a need to run more groups as the community wanted more. They currently run 9 groups and are adding 3 more groups starting in April so they will be running 12 groups; 6 of them are funded, and the other 6 are just from staff who see the need and want to provide the support. She agrees that they have to get these folks paid – the peer support advocates that help make phone calls for appointments, help fill out paperwork, or that go to those initial appointments. Jennifer has done that herself and has taken a transgender community member to his medical appointment for the first time seeing a doctor. That aspect is volunteer because they see that it's much needed. They are not there yet but it is definitely something that they are working on because she agrees that it is a much-needed resource and the only way to make it sustainable is to have it via paid position.

Pangcha clarified that she is not saying Merced Pride Center needs to do it, but she feels that it's Merced County that needs to take the lead when employing and providing that funding so that you could pay your workers. Sharon Jones said that at Behavioral Health & Recovery Services, they have had support. It used to be referred to as consumer assistance workers, but they upgraded to peer support specialist. They do have at any given time 23 hired peer support specialists. Added to that is to branch it out in the community in a natural setting, where there is a peer advocate and a family advocate at different sites. Stipends are money, but it is more or less a value of what you are doing, which is very valuable work. Sharon agrees because it builds self-esteem and self-confidence.

Nancy Ortiz, CI4CI (Community Initiatives for Collective Impact), shared that she came from San Bernardino County. She worked there for 25 years and for the last 12 years she was at the Department of Behavioral Health in the Transitional Aged Youth Center, where they dealt with the LGBTQ community. Their staff consisted of therapists, social workers, peer and family advocates, and she herself did employment and education. They were like parents and would do groups, have monthly meetings, and all the stakeholders would attend. Her program manager would attend and they were able to have their own groups, their own president – they would just oversee them. Any complaints or problems they had with each other would be brought up in these meetings, and the peer-family advocates were very vital in those roles because most of the time they were around the age group and some of the peer family advocates were actual clients trained into that position, hired, and paid. When Nancy left, they had 3 that were originally clients, and they got all the assistance. They would also assist with their high school diploma, identification card, took them to the doctor, etc. Nancy thinks it's very important to have all of those positions possible or access to those positions for those youth. They even had a probation officer that they dealt with at Juvenile Hall youth as well. She said it's very important to have the peer advocates as well as a probation officer, social workers, mental health specialists. It was a clinical unit and they helped with everything. She thinks they could bring those people to the committees. Nancy shared that they have projects currently going on at CI4CI that she is working on with Ismael Muñoz. They work with childcare providers and rescue food from the food bank, try to go to local groceries, and have been delivering from July of last year. They have been delivering food boxes weekly and are up to 24 providers. They take anywhere from 20-30 lbs of fresh produce that they get for free – they really appreciated it and have received a lot of messages back. They do a newsletter for them every week and have pictures from that of the children. They are appreciative of the services they offer because it helps them. They have partnered with the United Methodist Church and assist with food boxes and also distribute them every week.

Belle Vallador, Healthy House, added that in order for us to be able to have an effective way of giving out services to very diverse communities, is being able to provide interpreters in different languages. She thinks having that is very essential based on their experience with different groups they serve in their office. Belle has mentioned so many times in meetings that they are actively serving the homeless community in Merced. At the same time, they are also through the AFIA (American Feed Industry Association) Assistant Camp – the mothers who have 0-5 children. In some cases, even the quick start grants serve the breast cancer survivors and most of them out in Planada just speak Spanish so it's really important that we have them in the equation to involve interpreters here as we serve the community.

Sharon asked if Healthy House does interpreter training. Belle said that they do, but they stopped having those trainings during the pandemic. Candice is planning to have it done again in the next couple of months. The last training that they had was the trauma-informed training for their interpreters and they will be having that again. Belle informed everyone that Healthy House has 18 languages available and also do translations – in fact, BHRS is one of their very active clients for this.

Marylin Mochel, Merced NAMI, shared that they have some non-profits that may not realize that complexity of providing stipends. Small non-profits often stipend people because they don't have enough resources to actually employ people. There are some IRS considerations and it is a topic that we are starting to have regarding possibly the formation of a worker's cooperative focused on community health workers. A lot of the peer counselors fall under that umbrella. They are doing this in collaboration with UC Merced, UC Berkeley, and a few other organizations to really look at the possibility of this model. Marylin highlighted that certainly want to collaborate with anybody interested in working with them and learning more about it. Marylin shared her contact information.

Pangcha Vang, stated that we shouldn't have probation officers or law enforcement on the board because MHSA serves medi-cal people so a lot of times it's black, brown, and poor people who are on medi-cal. It is often that probation officers and law enforcement who conflict violence and oppression, even intimidation on these communities. It is so important that we welcome people to our board and have them participate. When we have a probation officer or law enforcement on our board, it is very intimidating for these communities to come and talk, so it is better that they don't have them there at the table; it is better that we welcome them and hear them out. It is actually a better strategy to have a formerly incarcerated advocate – someone who has been incarcerated and who knows how it feels. It can validate their experience and help them navigate the resources in the system. We should not have probation officers or law enforcement on the board because it creates a conflict of interest. When someone brings up an issue to the board, that they have faced police brutality, people who are on the board will have a conflict of interest because they are friends with that probation officer that's currently serving on the board. Pangcha does not advise that they have a board with a probation officer or a law enforcement on the board. Sharon explained that the MHSA allows for law enforcement to be at the table. Sharon definitely understands what Pangcha is saying; it creates a dilemma. Even Sharon, when she sees law enforcement, gets those thoughts as well as to what is going to happen. Sharon also is and has been the trainer for law enforcement in Merced County. She has learned to create a win-win situation out of this. Sometimes what happens is that we generalize all people. It can happen where incidents happen repeatedly, and then we generalize a whole group of people. That makes it difficult because we don't have enough time here to talk about toxic stress and how it triggers our amygdala and all of that through the experiences that we've had or have seen other people that are similar to us or look like us have. Sharon mentioned that Human Services Agency has Leadership for Life. It is run by peers that have been incarcerated and have been in the legal system. You're giving back and they're sharing their powerful stories, and really supporting. Sharon stated that she is not disagreeing with Pangcha, but just the way the structural systems are set up, one thing that has helped Sharon over the years because she understands totally what she is saying, is adaptability and how do we still create a win-win situation and move our voice forward. It can be difficult because just as you say, who holds the power in the room and how is the power perceived, is another whole topic and training.

As they were working on the Innovation Project, Transformational Equity Restart Program, that came up with one of the state staff who was working on the project; the co-location of law enforcement with certain programs. For people that are experiencing these encounters, and then all of a sudden, they walk in the room and the very person or organization that they've had an encounter with is there– that needs to be looked at. Sharon agreed and said that usually this is not brought up in rooms at all but there are allies in law enforcement and in all different areas. She said they want to tap into those allies and people who have a trusted messenger voice. It is definitely something to think about when you look at adverse childhood issues and trauma-informed care, it's definitely something to look at. How you perceived a certain group or organization, and then all of a sudden, you're asked to be a part of something and that organization is in the room.

Adam Lane, shared that one thing about stipends it's paying somebody in whatever fashion helps with accountability, helps guarantee quality and follow through. Sometimes that cannot be the case if you just have somebody that is purely volunteering and maybe burnt out or overly stressed because they're trying to work and get some money, and on the side, they're trying to help the community but it takes up a lot of time. Adam thinks there's a lot to be said for paying people versus just having them volunteer, whether it's stipends or whatever the case may be. Adam expressed to Pangcha that he really has enjoyed and was fascinating a lot of the things that she mentioned. He welcomed her because he thinks her voice really does seem like it comes from a city that's perhaps a bit more

progressive. Adam thinks it's nice to have her insight kind of shake them up a little bit. What Pangcha mentioned about the peer advocates is so important; whether it's peer-advocates for different types of folks in the community, or whether we're looking for a more inclusive cultural humility. Adam was wondering about the process for finding people with certain lived experiences and was just considering some kind of flyer saying that MHSA BHRS Cultural Humility meeting is looking for the following people. That could be something that we could share throughout our different organizations because when it comes to getting people who are like peer advocates, Adam found that you really want to put the word out there and let the people that are passionate about it and know about it contact you, rather than finding or identifying the one person that you already know that has the lived experience and asking them to fulfill the role. Adam is curious about the process of accruing different kinds of people for a group or for peer advocacy if anybody could answer that.

Pangcha said that it was how Sacramento did it – the county required every non-profit and every BHRS program to have an advocate and a family advocate, and you would get in trouble if you didn't employ one. The counselors would go through their case load and review which client they thought would be a good advocate and a client that graduated already.

Sharon noted that in Alameda County they have a pull of consumer champions; that is similar to what Pangcha was saying. That pull of consumer champions would be on panels and work throughout various locations within Alameda County; they were the go to for all these peers.

IV. Training Needs for Committee

Sharon asked, what trainings do we need and what trainings can we provide. Sharon does the multicultural training and it has various parts to it – it's a requirement here at BHRS.

Nicky Carasco, Healthy House, stated that it is ironic that people were asking questions that pertained to her story. She shared that she experienced a domestic violence situation where she had to get out of it and people at Healthy House literally helped her out. The board asked her to go and tell her story after they helped her find housing. Nicky was able to tap into a lot of resources that they taught her about. The thing that they found with her is that a lot of people share their story. It's not always just mental health, it's all the issues together that create that problem. After they heard her story, she was asked to be part of the board to represent the formerly homeless. In that meeting she was able to meet some people and ultimately, she wanted to give back. For all the people that represent boards, all you have to do really, to the gentleman that asked "how do you find people like me?" she said you just ask people to share your story. The very people you help might contain those gifts that can reach the other people. Then your life's experience helps you help the next person and the next person; then the community comes together naturally at that point. Nicky represents the African American community, the Mexican community – she was a single mom, raised 5 boys and they all have educations, and she is educated but she just got "down and out." When Nicky went to Healthy House, she didn't know anybody there but there are a lot of people in this community that she thinks are literally living angels. She can see that it is what everyone here are probably trying to come together with. She shared that she has lived a lot of things in her life and is 52 but at the same time there is a lot to learn. She is thankful for this community and expressed to the group that they are doing a great job and at least trying to come together. The whole law enforcement versus the formerly incarcerated is a big issue as well. As she was listening she realized that there's a lot going on just in itself, but she can relate to everything the council is talking about. Nicky thinks her story may touch someone or any board members in this meeting. She used to work for a stipend and taught youth. It wasn't much and she didn't do it for a living, but it did promote follow through and felt that the community gave her some value for what she was doing, even though she would've done it for free. If there are any questions, she would be happy to tell her story to anyone who it might help. She is not trying to commercialize herself, she just wants to help people come together.

Sharon stated that she would like to invite Nicky back to this committee because she feels that she brings a lot of intersectionality to what she just mentioned. She represents many communities, has that lived experience, and Sharon thinks that's where it starts. Sharon said that unless you've gone through it and someone can share your story, and have that empathy, it's kind of like we're just talking. Sharon appreciated Nicky for listening in. Sharon noted that she brought up another thought that she had when she was speaking that as a standing agenda item, we should have diverse people come to share their story. Not only would it help the committee, but it would really help out the committee. NAMI has something called *In Your Own Voice* and Sharon loves that program that they have as well where people share their stories and their voices.

Belle Vallador thanked Sharon and thinks that instead of her just talking about others' stories, they might as well hear it from the source itself.

Sharon shared some of the comments from the chat.

In regards to law enforcement, she mentioned having a credible trusted officer that reflects the community values and understands the culture of the community, as well as the perception of the community. Trainings for advocates and non-profit individuals. Someone brought up the history of racism in mental health. It has not been that long where people were placed in state hospitals – some needed to be there and others didn't. That's why we have the whole 5150 conservator process because often there can be misuse and

oppression within systems and that's the whole social justice piece and health equity. The people who need to get the services sometimes do not get it, and other people get the services and don't need to; just being aware of that.

Jennifer, Merced Price Center, shared that she and Nancy Reding are putting together a training that they think will be really valuable for the community. It ties a lot in mind with the prior conversation. If they could bring together a panel of LGBTQI+ identifying folks to seek and share their lived experience stories, that would be a really effective way to give a training on cultural sensitivity and awareness. They are really looking forward in finishing putting that together and bringing it forward to the group.

Pangcha thinks we need a training to explain the role of a peer advocate and family advocate. It's to help management and staff understand that peer advocates are used for several tasks – the first being providing peer-to-peer services to clients and sharing your story because counselors are not allowed to share their stories. Having a peer advocate share their story to clients is really useful. Number two is to attend the meetings and advocate for the people, the population. Advocating for them on board meetings; they should be required to go to hiring panels and be required to attend budget meetings, policy meetings, training meetings, because we need that client voice at each level. If management is hiring someone, they are going to choose someone from their perspective. When you have a peer advocate on the hiring panel they will make sure that staff is appropriate for that population. Three, we need to create peer advocates where their role will be to create many projects to reduce stigma. There's a lot of stigma around mental illness and getting services for counseling. Having peer advocates and family advocates, and taking the lead of what a project would look like in reducing stigma. Four, to share their story whether it's with clients or training for staff. It creates a positive empowerment if peers are taking the lead and they have that strong voice.

Sharon agreed that it's a shift in thinking and so that's part of the work there - the humility piece to allow peers to come forward just like the lady that came forward earlier and embrace that because it creates these powerful moments where healing can come forward; it can benefit and help everybody.

Belle Vallador shared about the upcoming training that Healthy House will be staging. It will be soon, most likely before the end of April. This will be about Southeast Asian Mental Health issues. It will be focusing on the Hmong, Ming, Lao community. In fact, they started the training yesterday. It was staged in her CCR meeting for elder abuse and they were able to show some PowerPoints. They are planning to put this in a bigger place like one they have in the Cultural Arts building. They are still working on that but just a heads up they will invite the rest of the group for this mental health training that they will be staging before the end of April.

V. Culturally Inclusive and Specific Outreach

Sharon noted that this was already covered in the conversation, but Sharon suggested to go out to the community and get those individuals who are trusted in the community. Make sure that they are a part of this committee and also be mindful to some of the contemporary issues that are going on as they recruit people because we know that there are certain issues that create a fear among certain cultural groups or population groups as they set up committee, invite people in and structure them to be mindful of who's sitting on the committee because maybe that's why some people do not show up for the committee.

Belle Vallador added that from what she has heard from Pangcha regarding the law enforcement board, in the case of elder abuse grant that they have there since she has been working for a number of years already, law enforcement is part of their MOU and they have a really good relationship with the law enforcement rehab in Merced. In fact, they have successfully done several trainings for advances law enforcement in relation to elder abuse. What happens in the community is that if there is somebody that is a domestic violence victim, the first thing they will do is call 911 and the first responders will be the law enforcers. Sometimes there are things that law enforcement doesn't know what to do – if it's elder abuse they need to have an agency that is ready to help them address the case. It is important for Belle that they have a good relationship as far as the law enforcement. In order for them to be able to share the services that we are rendering that we can offer to our clients. AP Guests is one that they can call when they need to report elder abuse cases, but sometimes the case is so serious that the tendency is just to call the law enforces immediately; law enforcers need to be trained when it comes to these things.

Sharon said that we know it's difficult because there has been a lot of pain and suffering in certain areas for some people there's ongoing trauma and fear as we set up structures and systems. That is why cultural humility is so much needed to be able to have these courageous conversations because unless you've experienced it, you think you're setting it up properly but for people going through it, it's a different lens.

Julissa, Youth Leadership Institute, stated that when talking about mental health she really disagrees with having law enforcement as part of these conversations or having them at the table for various types of reasons. There was an occasion where the police department of Modesto also mentioned that they were not equipped to have the types of calls that they would be getting for mental health. They broke down the amount of calls that they would be getting; they said that they were not equipped to deal with it. Julissa also disagrees and doesn't think that should mean more training for them. From personal experience, regarding mental health interactions with law enforcement at home, law enforcement has been called for her brother's mental health crisis. As soon as entering the door, the cop looked at her and told said he would not be hesitant to shoot her brother while holding his hand on his gun. She said

to keep in mind that this is a mental health situation. Law enforcement are not equipped to deal with these types of calls. There are different types of programs that are occurring across California and other states that basically have a specific number for people to call when people are having these types of crises or need these types of resources. Instead of having a law enforcement officer go attend these calls, they have someone that is prepared in mental health – they have advocates available. Julissa really wanted to reiterate that point because she thinks it goes along with being mindful of who is present and who's at the table. If we are trying to get impacted communities to attend these meetings, she mentioned that for example, her mom would not want to attend these meetings after what happened with her son. All other impacted communities are not going to feel safe because at the end of the day, they don't just feel safe, they aren't safe.

Sharon thanked her and said it's very important that she brought that voice into the room because it's a real-life family experience and she hears quite a few number of reports similar to what she shared.

Belle explained that in the case of elder abuse, the reason why they conducted these meetings and trainings is that there are so many cases that have happened in the past, even when they answer for elder abuse cases they don't know what to do – she agrees with that which is why they are conducting this meeting so that they could identify if it's real elder abuse, or just looking at the medicine cabinet, is the refrigerator empty in the case of the caregiver and the elder relationship. She said that is the purpose of the training they are conducting. Belle agrees with Julissa that a lot of those calls are not helping at all. She has heard a lot of stories about that. As they call the police, they think they add more to the problems than solving them. That's the reason they brought this training for them so they know and can be aware of what to do as they answer for calls.

Sharon said that what she hears is trauma-informed meetings to mitigate the trauma because we do have experiences such as what has been described. Also, thinking if we are causing any secondary trauma the way we provide services and set up meetings.

Pangcha stated that she disagrees with having training for police. When we say training for police, it just means more money for police. There are good police and police that do good things, but that should be only what they do, is solve crimes. We shouldn't call for them for domestic violence, mental health needs; we shouldn't be calling them for schools and they shouldn't be at our schools, yet they are. It's mental health counselors who should be responding to domestic violence since they understand domestic violence issues. Police don't understand domestic violence and the behaviors. Police have a lot of power and they shouldn't be at the board meetings or committee meetings. They already have a lot of power. We don't need police everywhere. We need to think about other ways to respond and not just with police, but with mental health services, affordable housing, ending poverty, having staff who help with housing, having LGBTQ staff, having different responses that help people and not just law enforcement where they monitor, have aggression, and weapons. Also, if you have more privilege, you are less likely to be scared of cops and cops are likely to treat you better if you have privilege. If you are rich, if you are white, or even if your skin tone is lighter, the more privilege you have. She shared that she is Asian, and she does have the privilege. She stated that she is not scared of cops because cops will treat her better. They will assume that she's Asian, obedient, a nice person, but if she was black or brown she knows her privilege and her life would be different – her feelings towards cops would be different.

Sharon said that when you speak of privilege there is definitely better outcomes or opportunities based on skin color. She noted that is a whole other training but it is great feedback.

VI. Focus Group Feedback

Item tabled.

VII. Discussion on How to Reduce Inequities

Item tabled.

VIII. May is Mental Health Awareness

Item tabled.

IX. Building Capacity with Peer Support Specialist

Item tabled.

X. Substance Use Division Reports

Item tabled.

XI. Client /Consumer Reports

Item tabled.

XII. Updates

Item tabled.

XIII. Possibilities and Success Stories

Item tabled.

XIV. Next Steps

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 24, 2022.

XV. Adjourned

The meeting adjourned at 11:01 AM.