

CULTURAL COMPETENCY COMPREHENSIVE WORK PLAN: SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Gary M. Beasley*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many years, the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) has recognized the value and rewards of serving the area's diverse community by striving to create a multicultural workforce and a culturally competent service delivery system. The SSA's Council on Cultural Excellence is the culmination of these efforts that began many years ago.

The SSA used James Mason's comprehensive "Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Tool, Administrative and Service Provider Version," for the purpose of assessing the existing level of skills and knowledge as the agency continues its journey towards cultural competence. The instrument measures the various levels of staff competencies as self-reported within the agency and is not designed to compare one department to another. It is designed to measure current agency capabilities with regard to cultural competency and to design a plan from which to further build upon existing agency strengths.

The assessment covers seven basic areas: Knowledge of Communities, Personal Involvement, Resources and Linkages, Staffing, Service Delivery and Practice, Policies and Procedures, and reaching out to communities for the identified population groups in Santa Clara County. The domains measure information regarding the skills and knowledge possessed for six population groups served by the agency. These seven areas provide information useful for population based planning and service deliv-

ery. The results of the assessment can be used to develop goals for increasing staff skill sets at four levels of the organization (management/supervisor, client service, provider and support staff) across specific ethnic groups.

Short term actions include:

1. Distributing a pilot assessment among agency managers and supervisors and setting up a stratified representative sample agency-wide by June 2000.
2. Distributing culturally appropriate artwork for display throughout the agency's buildings.
3. Expanding the library of cultural competency resources.
4. Identifying evaluation questions to measure the success of this work plan and evaluating progress.

*Gary M. Beasley is a Social Work Supervisor in Children & Family Services in San Mateo County's Human Service Agency.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY COMPREHENSIVE WORK PLAN: SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Gary M. Beasley

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my BASSC Internship in Santa Clara County Social Services was to learn about the Cross Cultural Competency program. Mary Helen Doherty, Director of Governmental Relations, served as my mentor. Ms. Doherty's experience and field of expertise afforded me the opportunity to connect with many talented, committed staff.

The Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) consists of three service provision departments and one administrative department that provides support for three service departments. The whole agency serves approximately 170,000 to 180,000 clients annually. Each services department is described briefly below.

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBD) consists of a variety of programs whose task is to provide employment services, training, and benefits to applicants and recipients of public assistance. The Department continues to move forward with efforts to promote employment and to transition customers from welfare to work as well as to provide health, food and cash benefits to those who are unable to work. A few of the benefit services and aid programs include Food Stamps, the Medi-Cal Program and General Assistance.

The Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) provides a wide range of social services to maintain a safe home environment for children threatened by abuse, exploitation, or neglect. Among the services provided are: emergency response, family maintenance programs, Children's

Shelter services, foster care placement, foster home licensing, child care, family preservation, family reunification, and permanent placement.

The Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) provides services that promote a safe and independent lifestyle for seniors, dependent adults and the disabled. The department's five programs include Adult Protective Services, In-Home Supportive Services, Public Administrator/Guardian/Conservatorship, Veteran Services, and Senior Nutrition. The Department focuses its efforts to provide a continuum of care to the frail and vulnerable elder and dependent adults of Santa Clara County.

PROGRAM CONCEPT/HISTORY

For many years, the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) has recognized the value and rewards of serving the area's diverse community by striving to create a multicultural workforce and a culturally competent service delivery system. The Social Services Agency's Council on Cultural Excellence is the culmination of these efforts that began many years ago.

Since 1968, El Camille has been an active employee organization working within the Social Services Agency to promote access and appropriate services for Spanish-speaking clients. Subsequently, the Agency's African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender and Advocates for people with disabilities have all formed similar associations. In 1993, El Comite published a five-year strategic plan to

respond to the cultural needs for our Latino clients and to reduce the number of Latino children in out-of-home placement. Later, strategic plans were developed by the African American and Asian/Pacific Islander employee organizations as well.

While these efforts provide valuable insights and pointed to the need for specific service alterations and augmentations, the employee groups recognized that their effectiveness in implementing change was hampered by competition among the groups for limited Agency resources. In 1996, responding to the suggestion of Agency Director, Yolanda Lenier Rinaldo (and with their growing understanding of the value of united action) an umbrella organization, the Coalition for Effective Services was formed to collectively advocate for cultural competency throughout the Agency. Ms. Rinaldo began attending the employee organizations' monthly meetings, and provided official designation for Coalition membership on all Agency planning committees.

The following year, the Coalition hosted a two-day planning retreat that was well attended by a wide spectrum of management and line staff. This 1997 retreat, entitled "Cultural Competency—Beyond Awareness, Into Reality" was the catalyst for the formation of the Council on Cultural Excellence. This Council, the partnership between agency managers and the Coalition for Effective Services, has been meeting monthly since its inception in March 1998 to identify and address the resources the Agency needs to serve the county's diverse population. To the credit of the Council and Agency administration, the Council had the vision and courage to commission an organizational assessment that identified the Agency's progress and actions required to accomplish the goal of becoming a cultural competent organization.

In addition, The 1999 Customer Services Survey conducted by the Agency's Office of Evaluation and Planning (OEP) helped to benchmark the diversity of customers served by the Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), Department of Employment and Benefits Services (DEBS) and Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The top five ethnicities most commonly self-declared by the respondents to this survey were; Latino 35%, White 22%, Vietnamese 18%, African-American 7% and Russian 4%. The four languages most preferred by these respondents were; English 62%, Spanish 15%, Vietnamese 15% and Russian 4%. In Addition, this survey identified customer satisfaction indicators relative to the language needs of our clients. For example, when customers surveyed were asked, "Did you feel that we respected your cultural values?", 83% said "Yes" their values were respected. Over half of the customers receiving services in a language other than the one preferred felt the services received were helpful even when their preferred language was not used.

Serving a growing and diverse population effectively is an on-going priority for the Social Services Agency and is in the process of being met through a variety of parallel strategies and programs.

Essential Elements of Cultural Competency

There are six elements necessary for the development of cultural competence at an individual and organizational level. Cultural competence at the individual level requires that staff:

- Be aware of their own cultural values.
- Be aware and accept that there are differences among cultural groups.

- Understand and respect the dynamics of difference (a reciprocal process that occurs when individuals of different cultures interact).
- Be open to the development of cultural knowledge in addition to their own.
- Have the ability and skill to adopt practices to the cultural context of clients.
- Have the ability to engage with different cultures using universal similarities within cultures.

At an organizational level organization should:

- Value diversity as strength.
- Be willing to do an organization self-assessment.
- Institutionalize cultural knowledge at all levels of the organization.
- Have skilled management and supervisors who manage the dynamics of difference which occurs in organizations with a culturally diverse staff.
- Adopt policies and procedures, and design programs and infrastructure to respond
- Respond to the culturally diverse needs of its community and clients.
- Develop standards of practice which are congruent with cultural needs of clients.

The High Performance Culture Survey was administered to provide the Agency with a baseline on Management and Leadership practice and behaviors. It provided the Agency with a baseline of employee's perception in the following areas:

1. Managerial effectiveness.
2. Effectiveness of organizational structure and operational systems/processes.
3. Individual and team effectiveness.

Cultural Competency Self-Assessment

Santa Clara County SSA used James Mason's comprehensive "Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Tool, Administrative and Service Provider Version," for the purpose of assessing the existing level of skills and knowledge as the agency continues its journey towards cultural competence. This instrument has no wrong or right answers. It measures the various levels of staff competencies as self reported within the agency and is not designed to compare one department to another. It is designed to measure current agency capabilities with regard to cultural competency and to design a plan from which to further build upon the existing strengths of the agency.

The assessment covers seven basic areas: Knowledge of Communities, Personal Involvement, Resources and Linkages, Staffing, Service Delivery and Practice, Policies and Procedures, and reaching out to communities for the identified population groups in Santa Clara County (e.g. Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, African American, American Indians and Gay/Lesbian/bisexual/Transgender, and White/Caucasian). The domains measure information regarding the skills and knowledge possessed for six population groups served by the agency. These seven areas provide information useful for population based planning and service delivery. The results of the assessment can be used to develop goals for increasing staff skill sets at four levels of the organization (management/supervisor, client service, provider and support staff) across specific ethnic and cultural groups.

Knowledge of Community

This domain addresses existing knowledge about the respective communities being served. It draws

on the importance of knowing who are the customers/clients/consumers in the community and the social and economic conditions that shape the environment in which they live. This domain assesses knowledge about the communities to whom your clients belong. The information is necessary to determine the type of services from the community that will derive the greatest benefit. With this knowledge base, existing services and staff skills can be matched, gaps can be identified and programs redesigned as necessary.

Personal Involvement

Personal involvement and interaction with the targeted communities provides the administration and staff with an opportunity to relate to the healthy and functional aspects of multi-cultural communities rather than the pathology of individual members. Social interactions facilitate understanding and appreciation of community strengths and are the first steps along the way to incorporating them in the service delivery and planning process. Furthermore, this interaction with the community provides a balanced perspective and restores the normative perspective to both the service provider and administrator. The personal involvement domain addresses the level of connection and involvement of staff within various ethnic communities.

Organizational Policies and Procedures

Policy drives organizational behaviors that in turn assure culturally competent practices.

Written policies and procedures provide for consistent response among staff, and enhance the application of the agency's vision, mission and values at all levels. The domain reviews important areas for which policies need to be available to support Culturally Competent practice.

It also reviews the staff's knowledge, understanding and operationalization of these policies and whether the systems are user friendly.

The following describes the work that is ahead. In addition, new initiatives will emerge as progress is made towards the goal of being a culturally competent organization.

Short-Term Action Plan

1. Receive support from the Children and families Committee for the Cultural Competency Comprehensive Work Plan endorsing the Agency's continued implementation.
2. Distribute the pilot Cultural Competency "Tool Kit" among Agency's managers and supervisors by December 2000. Actions required include:
 - Setting up a stratified representative sample Agency-wide by June 2000 totaling 26 participants.
 - Establishing a review committee to support and evaluate the pilot's progress by May 2000.
3. Distribute culturally appropriate artwork reflecting diverse cultures for display throughout the Agency's buildings June 2000.
4. Expand the library of cultural competency resources by October 2000. This library will include materials in alternate formats that are accessible to people with visual and other impairments.
5. Ensure that a memo is distributed to the Agency's managers and all staff stating the Agency's procedure for allowing staff release time to participate in cultural awareness events by July 2000.

6. Identify evaluation questions to measure the success of this work plan in partnership with stakeholders.
7. Assess the progress towards cultural competency practices Agency-wide by June 2001.
2. Increase opportunities for staff to interact cross culturally to enhance work practice skills and knowledge, progressing beyond Stage 4 (Cultural Pre-Competent) to Stage 5 (Cultural Competent) by September 2001.

Long-Term Action Plan

1. Establish additional Cultural Competency Committees and define strategies in additional Agency programs by June 2001.
2. Develop tools and strategies that ensure the continued implementation of the Cultural Competency Comprehensive Work Plan.
3. Design and implement an evaluation finding of the Cultural Competency Comprehensive Work Plan by December 2001.
4. Implement outcome evaluation findings of the Comprehensive Work Plan by December 2003.

3. Establish an evaluation methodology to determine the impact of the design, process and outcomes of the Agency-wide Cultural Competency Comprehensive Work Plan by December 2001.

The Santa Clara County Social Services Agency remains committed to permeating the principles and practices of cultural competency throughout the Agency. This commitment is grounded in their core value of providing quality, respectful services to the needy individuals and families that is their responsibility to serve.

Other

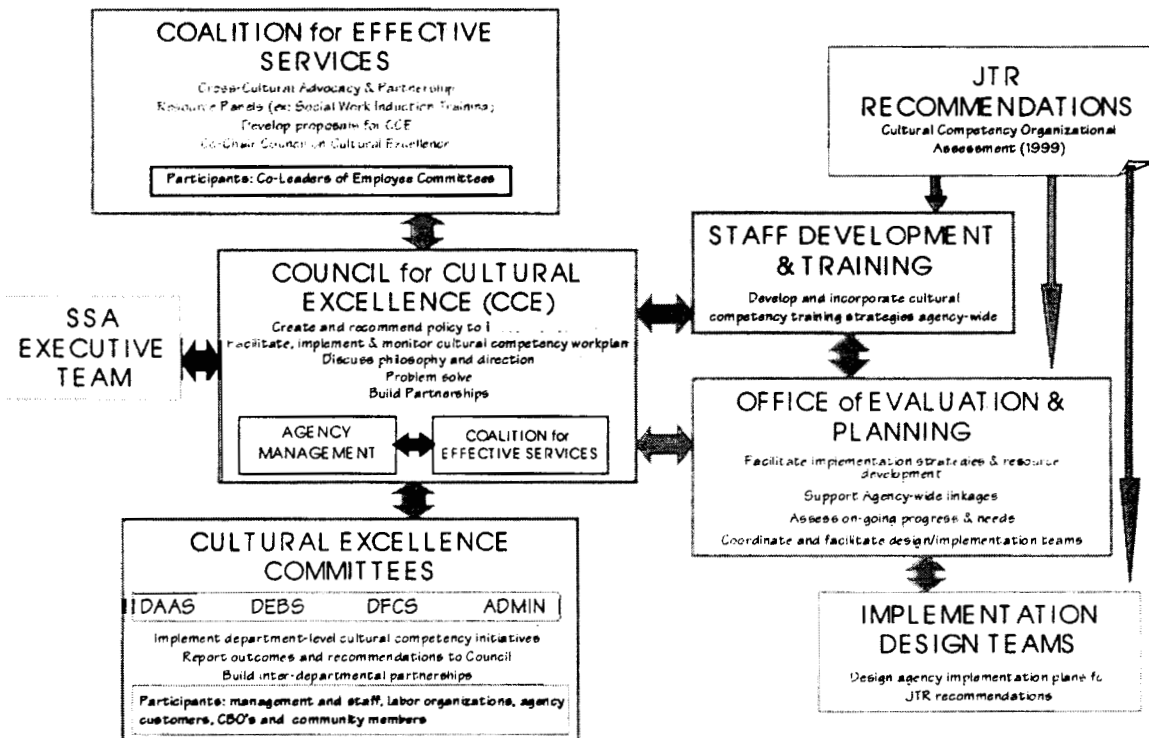
Other JTR Report recommendations involving “organizational environment” are being examined for integration with other organizational changes. These recommendations will be impacted by new technology opportunities, newly required mandates, and a growing capacity for evaluating organizational performance. They include:

1. Increase the level of cultural competency among managers and supervisors progressing beyond Stage 4 (Pre-Competent) in the “Building Bridges Model” to Stage 5 (Cultural Competent) by September 2001.

AGENCY STRUCTURE FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The following is intended as a structure for the Social Services Agency's action and planning efforts to implement the Cultural Competency Self Assessment recommendations and the multiple parallel initiatives that exist throughout the Agency. Agency initiatives that are currently in place and those that are in the planning stages that will positively impact future progress are included.

AGENCY STRUCTURE for CULTURAL COMPETENCY



SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY - MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Social Services Agency is to provide life protecting, life sustaining, and life enhancing culturally competent services to adults, children, families, elders, and economically dependent individuals.

Keeping in mind population and economic trends and their influence on the Agency's goals for cultural competency, a strong organizational structure serves to ensure the design and accountability for the implementation of culturally competent practices. A diagram of this structure is found above. Core components of the structure and their interrelationships are illustrated on this diagram. Highlights of core structural components are discussed below.