

OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL HEALTH EQUITY (OMHE)

Quarterly Newsletter

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Happy December DMHAS Family!

As we end the new year and I reflect back on the many activities and services we have offered, I can already tell you that 2024 has already surpassed all of our training goals and numbers! Be on the lookout for our annual impact statement to see for yourself after the new year! Here are some highlights for 2024:

- We have graduated our 1st cohort for the Champions for Diversity & Health Equity program in June
- Started the 2nd cohort for Champions in September and are already four months in! The group is phenomenal, and we can't wait to celebrate their growth at the June graduation!
- OMHE has been awarded a \$25,000 grant in support of the Champions program
- Conducted a Train-the-Facilitator training adding to our DEI Facilitator family and are grateful for their time and effort in making DMHAS a better place for us all
- Published our OMHE Brochure and Training Catalogue, so everyone knows what services we provide and can utilize the Training request form
- Collaborated with Health Equity Solutions, a non-profit in Hartford, to conduct our mandatory 3.5 hour NEOP Diversity Trainings
- Oversee the implementation of our OMHE/MCAC Strategic Plan
- Continue to offer technical assistance and support to LMHAS and PNPs

I am so proud of the wonderful OMHE Team, Cynthia, Tara, Sharon, and Beth and our OMHE extended family, such as the Multicultural Advisory Council (MCAC) members and the DEI Facilitators for their dedication and commitment to this cause. For 2025, I am looking forward to our Champions program graduation and launching enrollment for cohort 3 in the spring (make sure to stay tuned for the announcement!)

In this newsletter edition, you will see many wonderful activities and events conducted by the DMHAS facility's Multicultural Committees. Make sure to take a moment to read through all the multicultural happenings! Thank you for all that you do. Wishing you and your family a wonderful holiday season and a prosperous new year!

Warm wishes,
Samia Hussein

MCAC MEMBERS

SULAIMAN AVERY(DAS)
JESSICA JEAN-
BAPTISTE(RECOVERY NETWORK
OF PROGRAMS, INC.)
LUIZA BARNAT (OOC)
MICHELLE BEECKMAN (OOC)
JAMIE CHANDLER(SMHA)
ELLEN ECONS (OOC)
CLAUDE FIELDS (CRMHC)
ELIZABETH FLANAGAN
(PRCH/YALE)
ROBERTA GOLDBERG
(SWCMHS)
SHARON GREAVES (OOC)
TARA HALL (OOC)
MUI MUI HIN-MCCORMICK
(PRIVATE PRACTICE)
SAMIA HUSSEIN (OOC)
CAROL KNIGHT (WFH)
LATANYA MANU (RVS)
CYNTHIA MARTIN (OOC)
STEPHANIE LAZARUS (RELIANCE
HEALTH, INC.)
CHERYL LEONE (RVS)
KASHEENE LEVETT (WCMHN)
ALINETTE MONTEIRO
(SWCMHS)
WILLIAM PIERCE (OOC)
STACY DEMARCO (CVH)
JYOTHI VAYALAKKARA (CVH)
KYLE PEDERSEN(CMHC)



MCAC MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Roberta Goldberg



Roberta Goldberg is employed as SWCMHS as a staff ASL interpreter for twelve and a half years. Roberta described her educational journey as circuitous. She obtained her AS in interpreting from Northwestern CT. Community College and a BA in Communications/Human Relations from WCSU. She has been an active member of the MCAC since 2017 and joined due to her passion for social, environmental and cultural justice at DMHAS, not just SWCMHS.

When asked about her profession, Roberta said what she enjoys most is the chance to help people connect with other people. It provides a bridge between the Deaf and Hearing cultures and can open doors for people and change lives. She likes working in mental health because Deaf people, like anyone else, need mental health care and the chance to have a provider who shares their lived experience is very rare. While sharing, Roberta added she wished she knew earlier in her career that interpreting by nature, is a power imbalance. As an interpreter, one literally controls communication between people. They must always be aware of the privilege and power they have in any situation and recognize everything they do can have an influence on the people involved.

Roberta described her meaning of culture and its importance in her profession. She stated culture influences how a person thinks, lives and interacts with the world. It is also the food we eat, sights and sounds we are most comfortable with and most importantly, the language we feel most comfortable using, whether it's spoken or visual. My profession is all about culture and language. It's bridging the gap between people who are from two distinct cultures and who use different languages and making it possible for them to communicate with each other.

Turning to inspiration, Roberta is inspired by Peter Seeger and his wife, Toshi who are huge influences in her life. She described Peter as a gentle, humble, unassuming man determined to bring people together and create peace through music. Toshi was his equal in all things and believed in bringing people together through action. Is there litter on the ground? Well, pick it up! Does something need to get done? Well do it! Don't complain or expect someone else to take it on, if it needs to be done, just do it, and encourage others to do the same. They both fiercely believed in egalitarianism and making the world a better place, and that active participation is the only way to make that happen.

When asked about values and beliefs, Roberta believes all people are equal, that nobody is better, or more valuable, than anyone else. We can all make a difference and should work to make our corner of the world a better place for us, but especially for the future. "The true meaning of life is to plant trees; under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

Roberta shared a fun fact that many people would not know. She has been swimming with sharks! Intentionally, she also caught, tagged, and released them for research. Roberta shared when she was 14, she was connected with the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, founded by Pete Seeger, which shaped her humanitarianism, social justice and environmental ethics that have influenced her life.

Growing up in a small town with her single father, following her parents' divorce, Roberta shared her community was one where people looked after each other. Currently, Roberta lives in Danbury and if money, family and disability weren't factors, she be a marine biologist on a ship somewhere in the world!

Who let the Dogs in?

by William “Bill” Pierce, ADA Title II Coordinator

A dog trained to perform a task(s) or do work for a person with disabilities is a service animal. While some tasks are obvious, the work many service animals do may not be evident as 90% of disabilities are “invisible” disabilities. I often tell the story of meeting someone who’s dog was trained to alert them when they raised their voice. If you want to know about other tasks, check out “Doggy- U” and similar websites.

Service animals do not have to be trained by organizations and an animal’s user cannot be required to show proof the animal has been trained. Also, the dog cannot be required to wear something that says it is a service animal. Along with observing the interaction between dog and user, the user can be asked two questions: 1. Is the dog a service animal required for a disability? 2. What task(s) has the dog been trained to perform? For example, providing comfort is not a task. But responding to the user’s anxiety by putting paws on the person’s feet is. In short, the task has to be a response to something that happens.

The ADA allows a service animal to accompany its user everywhere the public goes regardless of how other people react to it. But an animal may be removed if it poses a safety risk or is out of control such as growling at people or incessant barking. Also, the user is liable for damage the animal may cause.

When I encounter a service animal, I ignore it. As a friend who uses a service animal as a guide dog told me distractions can be dangerous.

Western Community Mental Health Center (Danbury)

Self Care September

by Taleshia Taylor, Case Manager

On September 27th, 2024, WCMHN Danbury's cultural diversity committee decided to dedicate a day for employees to submerge themselves with selflove. The committee agreed that this day which is called "self-care September" would allow employees to take time out of their busy schedules and participate in any number of wellness activities available. Staff also participated in a potluck which made deciding on lunch much easier and relaxing. There were a few employees that volunteered their services to help with the functioning of this event that took place throughout the day. Listed below are all the actives open to any staff that was present.

- Meditation and sound healing by Taleshia Taylor and Kristen Hankins
- Yoga by Sara Van Doren
- Auricular acupuncture by Nancy Wang D'Amato
- Art Therapy by Ally Labarca
- Stem Room Therapy (rooms that were open all day) including aroma therapy

The listed services ran two time slots that allowed staff to pick a time that would fit in their schedule. The Stem Room gave staff the chance to utilize devices that were available for massage therapy, some examples were hand massager, legs and back massagers and many more. The committee was great with providing some of their own therapy items to help support this event. Staff really enjoyed the idea of being able to come to work and receive therapy that would take some strain off any stress that they were going through.

It is very important to take time for yourself. Self-care is an intentional exercise in articulating ones physical, emotional and mental well-being. We spend so much time doing what we need to do in life yet, we never stop and appreciate ourselves to the fullest. We must show up for ourselves and our health is our biggest wealth. Last but first this comes last, but you come first self-care is not selfish. "When we strive to become better than we are, everything good around us becomes better too."-Paulo Coelho.



Southeastern Mental Health Authority

Cultural Spiritual Enhancement Committee Updates Restroom Signage to Promote Inclusivity

by Jamie Chandler, Trainer, MS

THE SMHA CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE (CSEC) IS COMMITTED TO FOSTERING A DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR BOTH STAFF AND VISITORS. AS PART OF THIS COMMITMENT, THE COMMITTEE ADDRESSES KEY ISSUES RELATED TO CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY.

ONE IMPORTANT INITIATIVE THE COMMITTEE HAS EXPLORED IS THE GROWING CONVERSATION AROUND GENDER-NEUTRAL RESTROOMS IN PUBLIC SPACES. RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVITY, CSEC RECOMMENDED AN UPDATE TO THE SIGNAGE ON SINGLE-STALL RESTROOMS IN OUR FACILITY. THIS CHANGE AIMS TO ENSURE THAT OUR RESTROOMS ARE WELCOMING TO ALL INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF GENDER IDENTITY.

THE SIGNAGE ON FIVE SINGLE-STALL RESTROOMS NEAR THE LOBBY AND MAIN HALLWAY NOW HAVE NEW SIGNS THAT SHOW THAT THESE RESTROOMS ARE GENDER-NEUTRAL AND ADA ACCESSIBLE. THE UPDATED SIGNAGE FOCUSES ON THE RESTROOM'S FEATURES (E.G., "TOILET" AND "ADA ACCESSIBLE") RATHER THAN INDICATING A GENDERED SPACE. THIS CHANGE IS DESIGNED TO BETTER SERVE THOSE WHO DO NOT IDENTIFY WITH TRADITIONAL GENDER CATEGORIES OR WHO MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE OR ANXIOUS USING A RESTROOM THAT DOES NOT ALIGN WITH THEIR GENDER IDENTITY.

THIS CHANGE IS PART OF OUR ONGOING EFFORTS TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ALL STAFF AND VISITORS FEEL SAFE, RESPECTED, AND VALUED. BY REMOVING GENDERED LABELS, WE ARE HELPING ENSURE THAT OUR FACILITY IS MORE INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE FOR EVERYONE.



River Valley Services Multicultural Committee

Make an Impact

by LaTanya Manu,
Marriage and Family Therapist

The Multicultural Committee at River Valley Services has continued to make an effort to make a positive impact. Over the last quarter we have continued to share information with staff regarding state and federal holidays and observances. The committee also held a contest during Hispanic Heritage month for staff. Staff were encouraged to enjoy one item of content by a Hispanic/Latinx creator to be entered into a raffle for a prize. We were able to award three participants with a prize! The committee continues to make an effort to explore opportunities to celebrate the diverse community we are all a part of. We look forward to continuing to bring programming and sharing information with the RVS community.

Southwest Community Mental Health Services

The Story Behind the Vejigante Masks from Puerto Rico and How They are Made

by Alinette Monteiro, Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor

On October 15, 2024, SWCMHS celebrated Hispanic Heritage month with an exploratory illustration by Artisan, Jose Sanchez who demonstrated his rich talent and method for making Vejigante masks. These masks date back to the Taino culture in Puerto Rico. These stunning works of art adorn many walls in Puerto Rican households. The origins of the tradition go back to 12th century medieval Spain. The vejigante represented the evil Moors who were defeated by St. James. People dressed in a procession to honor St. James. The timely and meticulous formation of the masks made from various materials such as layers of newspapers, the “glue” of flour and water to allow them to take shape and strengthen, then painted. Consider a trip to Ponce, Puerto Rico to experience ‘Carnaval de Ponce’ to see these remarkable works of art.



Whiting Forensic Hospital

Hispanic Heritage Month

by Carol Knight, Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor

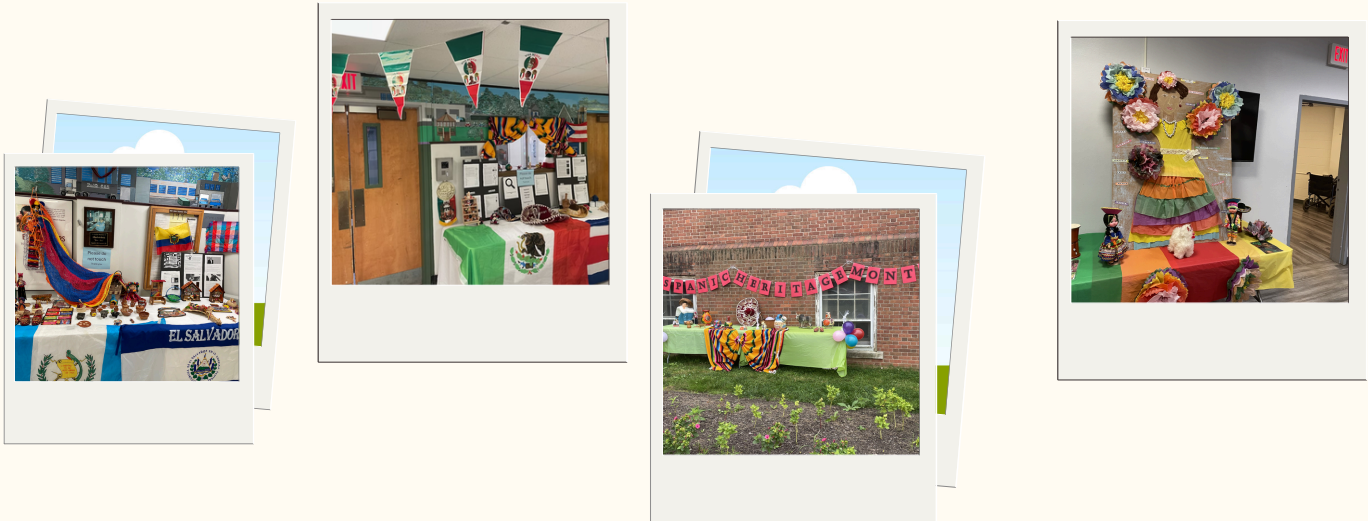
The Whiting Forensic Hospital's IDREAM Team has continued to meet monthly and has maintained a commitment to fostering diversity, inclusion and health equity.

Our celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month (9/15/24 -10/15/24) was particularly special this year. Each lobby in our 2 buildings had a display of the Hispanic Culture. A festive outdoor celebration for both patients and staff was held on September 25. This included a Trivia competition, reflections on norms/cultural identity of several Hispanic countries by staff/patient, a La Plena dance lesson to the song Que Bonita Bandera was taught. Live music was provided by experienced performers, Leisha and Lucho. This event was attended by our CEO, Jose Crego who also did the welcome, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Nadia Gilbo and Chief of Forensic Service, Julie Wright, PsyD, all 3 individuals of Hispanic Heritage.

A sumptuous potluck was held on October 2nd for staff, and it was well attended. This potluck provided quite a "spread" of dishes from multiple Hispanic countries. Several employees were also proudly linked with several different Hispanic countries.

In addition, daily emails acknowledging the many important figures, contributions, and culture of the Hispanic community, were sent out hospital wide on behalf of the IDREAM Team.

Photos are from the hospital's lobbies and the decoration of the outdoor celebration on 10/25/24.



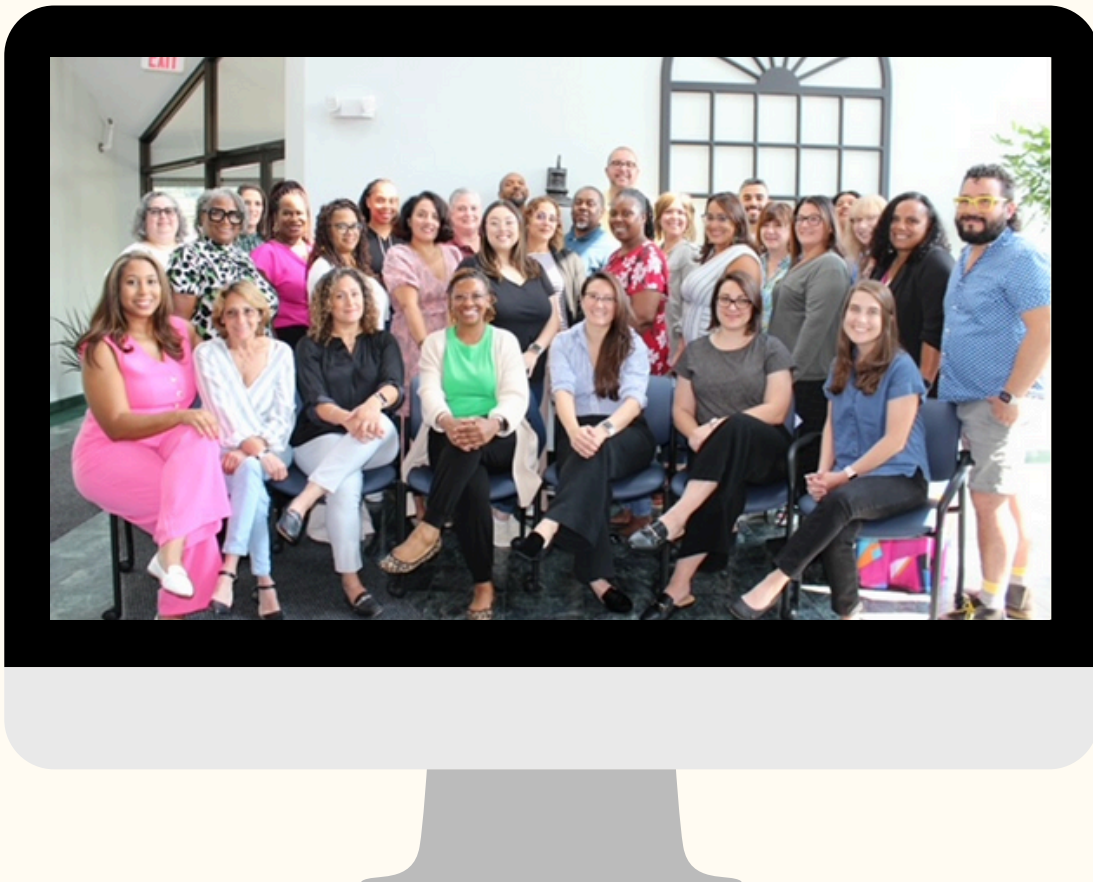
Champions Cohort 2

New Beginnings

by Tara Hall, MS, OMHE Trainer

On September 13, 2024, the Office of Multicultural and Health Equity launched its second cohort. This year the journey began with 31 participants from a combination of state agencies from DMHAS, DDS, DCF, DPH, DSS, Department of Aging and Disability Services and our Private Non-Profit Provider Network. Participants work in a myriad of roles such as Administrative, Clinical services, Nursing, Chaplain, and Fiscal to name a few.

This cohort will experience 15 days of personal and professional development in the domains of racial, health equity and social justice topics. With the generous \$25,000 grant awarded from the Ct. Health Foundation, the Champions program features additional opportunities for us to provide a light breakfast as well as lunch for our participants. In addition, we will host a field trip in the spring to provide an experiential learning opportunity to solidify and culminate the learning prior to the participants' graduation in June, 2025. Let's congratulate our participants for embarking on a life changing experience!



Pictured front row (l to r)

Christine Senu (DMHAS/SWGBMHC), Elsa Ward (DMHAS/OOC), Enaida Mendoza (Aging and Disability Svcs.), Denise Learmand (DMHAS, RVS),
Stephanie Bozak (DCF), Valerie Cammarota (Easter Seals), Angela Vasquez,

2nd row (l to r) Maggie Young (Liberations Programs, Inc.), Talitha Coggins (DSS), Sha'Kenya Whittaker (DMHAS/OOC) Lisette Cobb (DCF), Caitlin
Bisaillon (DMHAS/CVH), Veronica Colon (DMHAS/SWCMHS), LaShanda Crump (DMHAS/CMHC), Jeanette Laureano (DMHAS/SWGBMHC), Samantha
Crees (DDS), Isabelle Pierre-Louis (DMHAS/SWGBMHC), Jaime Ortega (Aging and Disability Svcs.),

Back row (l to r) Vanessa Malley (Friendship Service Ctr.), Lindsey Fenton(DMHAS/WCMHN), Sherese Ponder(Friendship Service Ctr.), Karen Gardner
(DMHAS/CVH), Andre Powell (DMHAS/WFH), Curtis Jerome(DMHAS/CRMHC), Rick Casey(Extern), Claire Cote(Aging and Disability Svcs.), John
Fernandes, Jr.(DMHAS/WFH), Jazz Borst (Mental Health Ct.), Jamie Chandler (DMHAS/SMHA) *Not pictured Devin Brown (DPH), LaToya Clark-Still
(DMHAS/GBMHC) and Jennifer Gambacorta (DMHAS/OOC)

Diversity Equity and Inclusion Resource Corner



racial equity tools



2024 diversity calendar



kgdiversity news

The Multicultural Advisory Council (MCAC) was established in 1996 to “be the multicultural change agent for DMHAS.” The Director of the DMHAS OMHE chairs the MCAC, which is comprised of people passionate about the importance of multiculturalism in a recovery oriented system of services and supports, who volunteer their time to the council. The Council meets the 1st Friday of each month. Each of the five DMHAS regions have developed Regional MCAC’s, to further the work of the Council. They provide activities that improve multiculturalism within the DMHAS system, and educate and enhance awareness of the importance of multiculturalism at the local level. Through these efforts, DMHAS will reduce healthcare disparities within its system.



Diversity is a fact.
Equity is a choice.
Inclusion is an
action.
Belonging is an
outcome.



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