

Observations and Summary of Focus Group Outcomes---Adult Women

This was the first of four planned focus groups of Somali Bantu clients in Buffalo, NY. From this experience it was clear that a quiet, controlled environment is needed, away from crying children. Childcare issues influenced the success of the sessions. The need for a translator who can help keep the clients on task and not stray onto personal issues was also an important learning outcome for the grant team. We learned that our questions needed to be very targeted, in order to elicit responses relevant to the topic of health. A summary of the issues that arose and the learning needs they indicate follows below.

Home Economics

Not referring to the cooking and sewing class of high school, but rather to financial literacy issues and management of the home. Explaining general apartment set-up, budgeting needs and monthly expenses

Public Services System

The women struggled with issues involving numerous social service agencies. A basic overview of the legal system, perhaps from Neighborhood Legal Services or a similar agency would seem to prove useful. They were plagued by problems with Medicaid and welfare. They need to know the assigned caseworker, how to contact him/her, and to understand the re-certification process. These are definitely opportunities for education and advocacy. If the local social services agency would appoint a contact to help this population it may be a benefit.

English Classes

There is an extensive need for practical English classes. One of the major complaints is that the English the women are learning in current ESL classes does not meet their real world needs. One teacher is preferred over classes that have numerous teachers. Time and convenient locations were also issues but to a lesser extent. A chance to practice English in non-threatening environments is needed.

School

For the most part, our clients are quite satisfied with the help their children receive in school. The major concern was fighting among children. There seems to be a need for in-school diversity training, as much of the fighting is reported to be culturally motivated.

The women often lack transportation to school functions.

Health

It was difficult to pin the clients down on specific areas they want to know more about. They are eager to learn “whatever we want to tell them”. Nutrition was a considerable topic of concern. Also mentioned were child development and family planning. Low health literacy in general was apparent. For example, when discussing immunizations it was clear that the families received immunizations at physician visits, but do not understand what they are for or that there is any kind of schedule to adhere to.

Summary of Focus Group Outcomes ----Youth

The second of our focus groups was much more centered. The children, ages 11-13 years old, were very interested in the questions. Below are the main topics that emerged as areas for further education.

Nutrition

Once again with the abundance of food, often times unhealthy food, in America, some education about healthy food choices is needed. It is probably reasonable to consider obesity prevention education since the children discussed eating pizza and cookies for breakfast.

A concern was the frequency and lack of substitute choices when hot dogs or other unpopular foods are served for lunch in school. While turkey hot dogs were minimally acceptable, some of the children seem to avoid hot dogs altogether. These children do not eat pork and the school system may need to be reminded of the importance of this issue for various cultural groups including the Somali Bantu children. Poultry, goat, rice, fruit and pasta were popular, preferred choices.

Health

While there seemed to be good compliance with hand washing and teeth brushing routines, there was a lack of knowledge regarding the definition of a dental cavity. A basic dental curriculum seems in order. Also note worthy was that only half (3 out of 6) of the children had ever seen a dentist.

At least one child was very curious about why immunizations are necessary.

There was good evidence that dangers of smoking, drugs, and alcohol is being taught in health class at school.

School

The children indicated that they are often bullied in school by peers of other cultures. This has led to some mutual tension. For example, the quote "I don't like the White people", provides another piece of evidence supporting the need for diversity training and anti-bullying programs in school.

The children indicated that they have plenty of help with their homework through teachers, peers, and after-school programs. However, there were widely diverse answers as to how much time is spent on homework. It is not clear whether this is due to actual wide variations in time spent on homework or a due to cultural differences in understanding the concept of time.

Summary of Focus Group Outcomes ----Adult Men

The third in our series of four focus groups was with four adult males from the Somali Bantu community. The general consensus among this group was that life in America is a great improvement over life in Africa. Concerns are noted below.

English Classes

The common concern among the men was that English classes are not being offered at times that coordinate with employment schedules. Once they start a job they often have to stop taking English classes.

Nutrition

Repeatedly the abundance of food in America, over the supply in Africa, was mentioned. Again this leads to need for education regarding healthy food choices and obesity prevention.

Education

The men were full of praise for the education that their children are receiving in the public schools. They asked for any additional help in educating their children that we could provide.

Health

These men were surprised that American teachers were not beating the children with sticks in school as they witnessed in Africa. This leads one to wonder what type of events the children have been exposed to, and how acceptable, or unacceptable, physical punishment could be within a typical household. Some type of domestic violence and/or child abuse training may be beneficial. Clients may not understand what is acceptable in the United States. Legal issues could ensue from lack of understanding American culture.

Once again, although the men and their families have received immunizations, there was a general lack of understanding as to why or what for.

The men appeared to believe that family planning is strictly between the doctor and the women.

While the men indicated that they go to the doctor when they are sick, there seemed to be a lack of compliance with routine physicals. There may be a need for education regarding the importance routine health screenings, exactly what screenings are recommended, at what age, and why.

Summary of Young Children's Focus Group

This was the last of our planned assessment-phase focus groups. The younger children, ages 8-10 years old, were often soft-spoken or easily distracted. The children were reluctant to give more than one word or simple phrase answers to questions. Their English skills were not as advanced as the older children's. A volunteer, teenage translator was helpful. Below is a summary of the significant outcomes.

English Skills

The difference noted in the need for an interpreter between the younger children and the older children may indicate a need to increase awareness of Head Start and other early intervention literacy and ESL programs.

Nutrition

While the children could identify a few healthy foods, the conversation was brief and the need for basic nutrition information and education was apparent. They indicated that they enjoy foods such as pineapple and banana, and understood that fruit is healthy, but did not know why. Once again schools need to understand that these children will not eat pork and in general, do not even like "alternative" hot dogs of any kind. Perhaps cultural information could be woven into overall school lunch nutrition improvement programs. They were also suspicious of food that was new to them – especially peanut butter.

Hygiene

The children understood that hand washing is important, but they did not know the concept of germs. Children younger than 8 or 10 in America are often familiar with this concept, as "germ" and hand washing curriculums for children as young as kindergarten have been identified.

Safety

The children had just had a visit by the local fire department but had difficulty expressing any fire safety concepts. Whether this is due to age, English comprehension, shyness, or a combination of factors is unclear. However, some basic, age appropriate safety education is needed.

Dental Health

The children knew it was necessary to brush their teeth. However, they attribute this mostly to the consequence of bad breath, in their own words, "your mouth will stink", if

you don't brush your teeth. They, just like the older children, were unfamiliar with the concept of cavities. Basic dental education is required and there is an apparent need to increase preventative dental care visits as well.

Conclusions

Based on the above outcomes, we concluded that immediate health teaching needs include: nutrition, hygiene, dental care, immunization, safety and health screening education. Other needs include school programs regarding cultural diversity and anti-bullying, and practical English classes, offered at convenient times and in accessible locations. Transportation, language barriers and the availability of childcare are barriers to overcome.