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The Foundation of Mental Well Being among Immigrants in the community: Towards a New Model of Mental Health

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Workshop: Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health: New Approaches to Service Delivery in Canada

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Presentation objectives

- Challenges when responding to mental health needs of refugees and immigrants
- Strategies to address challenges
- Areas and questions for future exploration.

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2010: 3000 clients

151 Government Assisted Refugees

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Nova Scotia

2424 immigrant landings in 2009: 8.5% decline

Immigrants country of origin in the last 5 years:

UK, China, Iran, USA, UAE, Israel, Germany, Philippines, Egypt, Korea, India and Saudi Arabia.

GAR country of origin in the last 5 years:

Afghanistan, Nepal (Bhutanese origin), mixed families from Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Russia and Kazakhstan, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Colombia.

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Refugee challenges in Halifax

- Multiple pre-migration challenges as a result of war and extended periods in refugee camps
- Small ethno communities
- Racism and discrimination

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Challenges to respond to refugees' mental health

Settlement staff challenges

- Lack of knowledge and skills
- Settlement service model
- Mental Health : Mental illness
- Difficulties identifying signals of mental illness:
  - "Behaviour problems"
  - "Uncooperative clients"
- Impact of clients' trauma in staff mental health

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Clients' challenges to access mental health services

- Gender differences
- Mental health stigma
- Language and cultural barriers

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Mental health care system challenges

Service providers:

- Mental Health assessment: Cultural shock
- Emphasis on pharmaceutical treatment
- Lack of understanding and knowledge of refugees mental health
- Lack of cultural competency
- Interpretation

Systemic barriers:

- Referral system
- Medical approach to psychological problems
- Underestimation of social stressors such as lack of employment, racism, family separation and poverty.

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Addressing challenges: breaking barriers

Internal process

- Staff professionalization
- Reflection on and evaluation of service provision within the settlement sector
- Evidence based research
- Learning about local ethnic communities
- Bringing awareness to staff personal and professional life

External process

- 2003 Health Task Force
- Nova Scotia Department of Health: Cultural Competence Guidelines for the Delivery of Primary Health Care in Nova Scotia

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Addressing internal process challenges

The case management approach

"The principles of a 'customized case management plan' are that individualized services are provided and coordinated by one person, based on a comprehensive needs assessment, from which a 'suitable and achievable' service plan is developed. The plan is developed in collaboration with the client and realistic goals and steps are taken to achieve success." (Edna Sutherland, Refugee Children and Families, a Model for Successful Integration, Calgary, 2008)

Principles of collaborative approach and strength base approach

Client = Partner

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A new perspective: Prevention and promotion of mental wellbeing

1. Prevention and well being promotion.

Settlement services contribution to mental wellbeing

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2. Early intervention, tailoring our services to address mental health issues

- Emotional support
- Active Listening
- Early intervention: Family violence, discrimination, forced family separation
- Transition Learning Program

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3. Provision of mental health care.

- Overcoming stigma
- Education
- Connection with services
- Alternatives of treatment
- Early identification of mental illness

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Addressing external challenges

Connection and cooperation with mental health care system

Direct connections with clinicians

- Case conferences
- Mutual learning
- Supporting individual change

Working with interpreters

Interagency Cooperation

- Ongoing dialogue with the management of the Capital District Health Authority (Halifax Regional Municipality provider of health services)
- Wellness Group
- Refugee Clinic

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Areas to consider for further improvement and engagement:

- Connections between trauma, learning and memory.
- Reaching out men, women, seniors and children.
- Community based healing initiatives. Resilience and stigma
- Program evaluation and measurement of wellbeing outcomes of immigrants and refugees.