

10th Conference on Health Care of the Chinese in North America

Working with Chinese Families with Disabled Children – The Asian Community Mental Health Services Experience



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Asian Community Mental Health Services (ACMHS) is a non profit organization located in the East Bay. Our developmental disabilities unit provides case management services to consumers/participants with diagnosis of developmental disabilities which mental retardation, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, epilepsy, autism and other neurological handicapping condition which requires the same care of the above diagnoses. Currently, we serve about 620 Asian consumers who are residing in either in Alameda or Contra Costa counties. This included 8 different ethnic groups and 12 different languages. Most of our consumers are monolingual and some of the family has very limited English skills.

Today, I am sharing with you some of the issues regarding the service delivery system and support for the Asian consumers. According to the 1998 data from the California Department of Developmental Services, there are approximately 150,000 persons with developmental disabilities. Among these 150,000 consumers, 9,200 are Asian. Among the 620 consumers that we served, about 240 of them are Chinese.

Like other systems e.g. education, social services systems in California, the developmental disabilities system is not equipped to serve our monolingual consumers. With about 10% of consumers who are Asian, there is only one part time program in the East Bay providing bilingual program to train and assist them to achieve their highest potential. And the program was set up by our agency. The system has very limited or even no awareness of the needs. If they have the awareness, they have made limited effort to outreach to the community and to develop bilingual program to meet the needs of our consumers. This is partially the result of the passiveness of Asian consumers and their families. They are not familiar with the laws governing the rights of the developmentally disabled. With inadequate knowledge, it is extremely difficult for the parents or other family members to advocate for the appropriate services.

My suggestions to improve the services and well being of the monolingual consumers are:

1. To educate consumers, parents, families members and other advocates about laws that protect the rights of the DD through bilingual education seminars, families support groups meeting.
2. Once acquired enough knowledge, parents can advocate and demand for bilingual services for the individuals with development disabilities.