

Transcript for Cultural Competency Manual Podcast

LR: Hello. My name is Dr. Lisa Razzano. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the manual called *Cultural Competency in Mental Health Peer-Run Programs and Self-Help Groups*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

LR: Thanks for joining me today, Judith. Before we talk about the manual, could you tell our listeners what cultural competency is?

JC: Sure Lisa. Cultural competency is the ability to interact effectively and comfortably with people from other cultures. It involves four aspects. The first is becoming aware of your own beliefs, prejudices, and behaviors. Second is changing your beliefs and attitudes about people who differ from you in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and other characteristics. Third is gaining knowledge and understanding of beliefs and practices in different cultures. The fourth is developing communication skills to interact sensitively and effectively with diverse individuals.

LR: We hear a lot about the importance of providing culturally competent mental health services. Why is it important for peer-run programs and support groups to address this issue?

JC: Peer-run programs are based on the principle of mutual understanding among people who've had mental health problems. However, we all have more to learn about cultures and lifestyles that differ from our own. There's a myth that being culturally sensitive means treating everyone "the same" when, in fact, this is only part of what's needed. Cultural competency involves embracing and acting on different cultural viewpoints, rather than setting them aside in order to treat everyone equally. This manual was created with peer providers from diverse cultures to help programs identify the ways in which their activities are already responsive to culturally diverse individuals, and areas where they need improvement. The manual also guides readers who want to create specific action plans to enhance cultural competency in five organizational areas.

LR: Please tell us about these five areas and how the manual works.

JC: The manual directs attention to five areas for organizations to address when trying to enhance their cultural competency. The first is administration, program policies, and guidelines. The second is staffing, which refers to peer providers and, in the case of support groups, the group leaders. The third is the services and supports offered by the program. Fourth is the program or group environment including both physical space and emotional context. Fifth is the organization's communication style and its ability to interact with people who speak different languages.

JC: For each of these five areas, users start by reviewing why the area is an important part of cultural competency in mental health. Next, they learn where to look when conducting an assessment in that area. Then they rate their organization or support group on how well it meets the competency criteria in that area. Finally, they develop an Action Plan to build their program's competency. The manual also includes successful strategies and tips that other mental health programs have used to enhance their cultural competency.

LR: Can you tell us more about who the manual is designed for?

JC: The manual was created for peer-run and self-help mental health recovery programs. It also has been used by psychiatric rehabilitation programs, community mental health centers, drop-in centers, and community clinics. It's useful for any behavioral health organization that wants practical suggestions on how to set organizational goals for cultural competency that can be reached in a reasonable timeframe on a limited budget.

LR: What are some other aspects of the manual that users might find helpful?

JC: One important step described in the manual is the formation of a Diversity Committee. The Diversity Committee is made up of program staff and members who conduct the organizational assessment. They then work within the organization to develop goals and action-steps to build cultural competency. Also, before setting any goals, we recommend that people conduct a Diversity Survey of their membership and staff. This lets you hear from the people you serve, your employees, and volunteers, about how you're doing in terms of diversity, before making plans. We provide a sample survey in the manual that you can adapt for your program's use. The manual also introduces readers to the common challenges organizations face when introducing change, and helps prepare them to address these barriers so they don't derail progress. Finally, suggestions for evaluating your program's success also are offered.

LR: It sounds like a great tool for any community-based program. Would you give us an example of how it's been used by a peer program?

JC: We worked with a peer program that was doing a good job of supporting white and African American peers. But, one day, someone brought a new friend to the program. This person had come to the U.S. from Korea, and lived in a nearby neighborhood with many other Korean families. The program director realized that there was a whole community of people they hadn't reached or welcomed into their program. So, they began using the manual to determine what could be done to help Korean peers feel welcome and supported in their program.

LR: Thank you for sharing this valuable information, Judith. And thank you to our audience for listening today. We are pleased to offer *Cultural Competency in Mental Health Peer-Run Programs and Self-Help Groups* as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness and self-direction for people in recovery from mental health conditions.