



“Navigating Children Services and Prevention”



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On November 15, 2013, Asian Health and Social Services Council (AHSSC) held its monthly meeting at University Settlement’s Houston Street Center (273 Bowery Street) to provide health and social service professionals a refresher on children services. AHSSC’s President Ms Teresa Lin welcomed guests and members at the start of meeting and thanked our very special guest speakers: Ms Narcisa Loza, Program Director of Preventive Services at Chinatown YMCA’s Family Support Program, Mr. Michael Arsham, Director of Advocacy at the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Ms. Colleen Duffy, Esq., Immigration Services Coordinator at ACS, and panelist Ms. Flora Huang, Coordinator of the LES Community Partnership.

On Oct 18, 2003, many major Chinese newspapers published a story about an immigrant mother who had her three young children removed by ACS from her home a year prior. According to the articles, this family was separated because of the misunderstanding and miscommunication caused by discrepancies in cultural practices and mother’s limited English proficiency. This story stirred up a lot of emotions in the community and highlighted the need for community members and providers to be equipped with knowledge of how to navigate children services. In a fact sheet developed by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) on “Understanding the Issues of Abuse and Neglect and Asian American Families”, it was noted that even though child welfare has not traditionally been considered a primary concern in the Asian American communities, these families are not “immune to the problems surrounding child abuse and neglect”. The fact sheet also noted that “among all reported child welfare cases, 92% are ones of neglect rather than abuse”. Our speakers agreed that this ratio still holds true in general.

Ms Narcisa Loza introduced her program and the valuable and important services they provide to support families, many of whom are immigrants. The Family Support Program empowers families with information of the New York State law of child abuse/neglect. Their bilingual and biculturally sensitive professional staff advocate on the families' behalf with various systems such as Family Court, Board of education and so forth. Their services include Parent Support Groups, School Monitoring, At-risk Teen Groups, Counseling, Case Aide and Advocacy for Entitlement. Ms Loza helped our attendees to understand how families are strengthened and preserved through the expertise, sensitivity and dedication of her team. She reminded attendees that many families especially immigrant families are vulnerable because they may not be accustomed to American cultural practices and expectations, in turn they may be misunderstood or misjudged by others. As service providers who work with families, we all must start with meeting families where they are at, to provide a safe and supportive environment so that they can come to advocate for themselves.

Mr. Michael Arsham, Executive Director of Advocacy in the Division of Communications and Community Affairs at ACS took the time to share with us his rich professional experiences. With over 35 years of child welfare, policy and advocacy experiences, Mr. Arsham inspired attendees to reflect on our own family and cultural traditions so that we can better relate with, empathize and serve immigrant families. He emphasized that many of us as providers will pass through the lives of these families, but the parents themselves are the ones who can really protect their children. Furthermore, he stated that "we cannot do their job (as parents) or take that power from them". Our role is to uplift and equip parents to care for their families. As the Director of Advocacy, Mr. Arsham impressed the audience with his openness and genuine commitment to work with providers to advocate for families in the ACS system. He provided us with his contact information and invited providers to reach him directly when faced with concerns while working with ACS-involved families. He recommended the following resource: THE SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE NYC CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM: A WORKBOOK FOR PARENTS BY PARENTS which was created as the result of a collaboration among parents, social workers, and lawyers <http://cwop.org/resources/how-the-system-really-works/the-survival-guide-to-the-nyc-child-welfare-system/>. Mr. Arsham can be reached by phone at (917) 551-7967 and via email: michael.arsham@dfa.state.ny.us.

Ms Colleen Duffy, Esq. joined ACS as the Immigrant Services and Language Access Coordinator and manages ACS programs related to immigration legal services for youth in foster care. She assists with other ACS initiatives seeking to ensure that immigrant and limited English proficient families receive culturally and linguistically appropriate child welfare services. The topic of language access generated a lot of energy in the room of providers working with immigrant families from many different parts of the world. Ms. Duffy shared information about the services of Immigration Assistance for Children and Families and that they are free of charge to all eligible families regardless of their immigration status. She stated that the purpose of the language access policy and implementation plan of ACS is to ensure that children and families in New York City with limited proficiency in English have meaningful access to all programs and services provided by the Administration for Children's Services.

Currently this service is provided in nine printed languages. The language access policy and implementation plan demonstrates ACS' commitment to provide meaningful access to all individuals seeking benefits and services, including individuals with limited English proficiency. Ms Duffy shared that Child Protective Specialists are trained to identify the home language of the families they work with. Our attendees upon hearing this expressed that some of their clients had shared concerns about the quality of translation provided by some specialists. Ms Duffy encouraged our attendees to elevate concerns about language access and support families to advocate. Ms Flora Huang agreed with this sentiment expressed by providers and also noted that ACS-involved families may seek help from Cultural Brokers at follow-up meetings as these brokers have the cultural competence to support them. Ms. Duffy also shared her contact information so that providers may reach her directly with questions or concerns. She can be reached by phone at (917) 551-7961 and email colleen.duffy@dfa.state.ny.us

After a lively and engaged question and answer session, four agency representatives shared about their program services as a resource. Represented were Ms. Yi-Jen Chang, Esq from the New York Legal Assistance Group who spoke on their innovative services for Domestic Violence affected individuals, Ms. Prinnie Seto from CMP who spoke on their new training program, Ms. Ann Hsu from YAI's Seeing Beyond Disability program and Ms. Annie Chiu from University Settlement's Healthy Families program. Below are brief summaries from two of the programs. YAI Seeing Beyond Disabilities has a full range of home and community-based services for children and adults with developmental and learning disabilities and their families. These services include evaluations, therapy, preschool, family support, respite, recreation, employment training, and residential services. Residency status is not required to access services. Currently, YAI offers programs in Mandarin and Cantonese. For more information, please call the Mandarin YAI LINK line at 212-273-6100 x2706 or the English YAI LINK line at 212-273-6182.

University Settlement Healthy Families (HF) program is a comprehensive prevention home visiting program that focuses on the safety of children while at the same time supporting families. HF provides regular home visits with families starting from pregnancy up until the child enters Head Start or school. Services include educating the families on parenting and child development; connecting family's medical providers to ensure a medical home; assessing children from developmental delays; and helping family's access community referrals resources and services. What makes Healthy Families a unique home visiting program is that HF has been designated as a "proven program" and evidence-based by the RAND Corporation and US development of Health and Human Services. University Settlement's Healthy Families Program offers free and voluntary home visiting services in English, Spanish, and soon Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) to families living in Community Board 3 (zip codes: 10002, 10003, 10009, 10038). Families are eligible to enroll if they are currently pregnant or have a child under 3 months old and live within Community Board 3. Please feel free to contact Annie Chiu, Program Director at 212-453-4538 with any questions or for more information.