

CHAPTER 4 -- RECRUITING AND HIRING MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL STAFF

Chapter Highlights

This chapter offers suggestions to domestic violence programs on how to increase the cultural and linguistic diversity of agency staff. This process includes the following suggested steps:

❑ **RECRUITING DIVERSE STAFF**

- ✓ Advertising strategically through local resources and state-wide/national groups.
- ✓ Requesting the assistance of local mainstream and immigration-based service providers and coalitions with advertising.
- ✓ Increasing the hiring time frame of your program to build a large applicant pool.

❑ **HIRING AND RETENTION OF DIVERSE STAFF**

- ✓ Seeking out candidates with relevant skills, qualifications, work history, life experiences, and language abilities.
- ✓ Fully integrating new hires into the agency by:
 - Establishing a clear job description for the new hire that accounts for any interpreting duties that s/he will be expected to complete.
 - Hiring new multicultural staff as existing staff leave the agency or are promoted.
 - Requiring all staff to complete cultural competency training and support the agency's goal of providing culturally sensitive services.

❑ **CREATE INTERNSHIP AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS**

- ✓ Recruiting interns from local and state universities through relevant academic departments, student groups, career development offices, and the internet.
- ✓ Recruiting volunteers through advertisements, presentations to interested community and religious organizations, and national volunteer programs.
- ✓ Creating morale building programs for interns and hiring a volunteer coordinator.

CHAPTER 4

RECRUITING AND HIRING MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL STAFF¹

by Leslye E. Orloff, Rachel Little, and Magdalena Spiewla

INTRODUCTION

While cultural competency training and cross-cultural communication skills can minimize potential barriers between advocates and immigrant clients, it is often the case that battered immigrants feel most comfortable working with persons who share their language and/or culture. It is for this reason that shelters and domestic service providers are encouraged to include the recruitment of multicultural and multilingual staff members in their accessibility plan.² It is not always financially possible for an agency to accommodate the specific language and cultural needs of every immigrant woman. Nonetheless, diversifying staff as vacancies become available and funds are raised for new positions informs the immigrant community that your agency is committed to providing culturally appropriate services. Furthermore, multilingual staff reduce the dependency of agencies on outside interpreters, bring important expertise with them that can strengthen training programs, enhance a program's ability to meet the needs of battered immigrant women, and make excellent community educators in outreach programs.

This chapter will discuss how to recruit culturally diverse staff, retain these newly-hired staff members, and develop volunteer and intern programs to attract current and future multicultural/multilingual staff. It will address strategies geared toward agencies in communities with significant populations of immigrants and those communities where immigrants represent a smaller proportion of the population.

RECRUITING DIVERSE STAFF MEMBERS

The process of successfully recruiting and hiring multilingual/multicultural staff can be daunting if never previously attempted by a shelter or domestic violence service provider. The first key to recruitment is to advertise strategically. In addition to running job announcements in the classified sections of local newspapers:

¹ Adapted from *Improving Accessibility of Your Program's Services to Battered Immigrant Women*. Ayuda, Inc. (1998)

² See Leti Volpp and Leni Marin. *Working With Battered Immigrant Women: A Handbook to Make Services Accessible*. Family Violence Prevention Fund. 10 (no date).

Develop a list of ethnic language minority newspapers, newsletters, and magazines read by members of the local immigrant community.

Print ads in these publications in English and other languages spoken in your area that clearly state that your agency seeks applicants with language capabilities.³

Post multilingual advertisements at churches, stores, and community centers.

Send announcements to local nonprofit agencies that serve the immigrant community. Notify community leaders that you are expanding your services to the immigrant community and are seeking applicants with language and cultural expertise. Ask these service providers and leaders to assist with the preparation and translation of job announcements.⁴

Mail advertisements to local women's and cultural associations.

Notify the social work, international/regional studies, women's studies, foreign language departments, and minority student associations at local colleges and universities of job opportunities with your agency.

Advertise with professional minority associations.

Increase your program's hiring time frame so that an applicant pool is created that contains a significant number of candidates from diverse backgrounds.

If the immigrant community in your area is small and resources for advertising are less available:

Post announcements at more mainstream social service agencies. For example, if your shelter is near a military base where immigrant women live, advertise at the Family Support Centers located on the base.

Look beyond the borders of your county and direct your efforts to cities with a larger pool of qualified multilingual applicants.

³Bilingual persons often read newspapers printed both in English and in other languages they may speak. Thus, ads should not only be placed in English language newspapers or newsletters.

⁴Rohini Anand, Ph.D. and Laura K. Shipler. *Cultural Considerations in Assisting Victims of Crime*. National Multicultural Institute. (no date).

Contact the state domestic violence coalition in your area to connect with other domestic violence programs so that they can post announcements in their communities.

Contact state immigration coalitions as well to tap into neighboring immigrant communities and develop a mailing list for reaching community leaders, journalists, and service providers across the state.

Send job announcements to the social work, foreign language, women's studies, and international/regional studies departments in larger state universities where the diversity of students may be greater.

Post ads in larger national newspapers and magazines in numerous languages.

Contact organizations working on domestic violence issues nationally that do mailings or have newsletters who could advertise the availability of your position to persons who might be willing to move to your community and work for your program.

Expand the hiring time frame even further to accommodate the longer time schedule that is involved in statewide or national candidate searches.

Finally, programs working in communities with larger immigrant populations should also consider advertising job openings through national and statewide domestic violence and immigrant rights organizations, networks, and newsletters. Volunteers working at similar organizations in other states may wish to apply for your job openings.

HIRING AND RETAINING MULTILINGUAL/MULTICULTURAL EMPLOYEES

Once your recruiting strategy is in place, it is important to consider how you will choose qualified and diverse candidates from the applicant pool. During the interview process, it is important to:

Scrutinize candidates for qualifications and skills (including relevant life experiences, language ability, and flexibility, not only college degrees).

Find out how the candidate deals with situations of stress or conflict.
Explore the candidate's employment history for possible problems.

Look at the demands and the work philosophies of the candidate's previous places of employment and assess how compatible they are with

those of your organization.

Conduct a panel interview that includes diverse employees who have much experience working for your organization.

Identify any special adjustment or training needs of the candidate and determine whether they can be met by your organization.

Inform the candidate of your agency's philosophy, mission, and record so that the candidate may learn if his/her own work style and expectations are compatible.

Once qualified candidates have been identified and hired, a strategy for retaining these staff members and introducing them to the agency needs to be developed. For shelters and programs that may have previously been homogeneous, the presence of new multilingual and multicultural personnel can be an adjustment. The following suggestions are intended to ease this adjustment while creating a welcoming work environment for new staff.

When the new employee starts work:

Introduce him/her to all the staff.

Inform him/her about the procedures of the agency.

Treat the employee with respect and make him/her feel at home.

Validate his/her concerns, questions, and opinions.

Schedule weekly or monthly meetings to discuss any issues or problems that surface.

Provide a clear job description that lists the employee's duties and obligations to the agency.

Generally, multilingual and multicultural staff are expected to act as translators for clients and educate fellow staff members on cultural issues pertinent to the client population. These activities must be explicitly included in the employee's job description and must not be considered additional responsibilities that the employee is to carry out in addition to other work responsibilities. Multilingual/multicultural employees' work performance must be measured by taking into account their translating and training responsibilities.

This prevents managers from losing sight of these duties and penalizing multilingual staff because they are perceived to be accomplishing less work than other staff. In actuality, they are enhancing the work of all staff and these activities need to be recognized and valued. In fact, additional recompense for translation and education services should be considered. Furthermore, employees should not be expected to

remain in the position where they started because their translation services are utilized there. The agency must be willing to replace multilingual staff who leave or are promoted with new multilingual/multicultural employees.

Agency-wide policies should be created so that all existing staff and multicultural hires:

Receive training on cultural issues, domestic violence, immigration law, and public benefits that are relevant to helping battered immigrant women.⁵

Support the program's commitment to provide culturally sensitive services and understand their individual roles in this process.

Learn and practice culturally appropriate communication techniques (including language classes if possible).

Know that they can ask questions, offer suggestions, and have access to information about cultural diversity if needed.

Are fully integrated into the agency's workforce.

Have the same chances for advancement.

Are willing to listen and be flexible in order to foster an atmosphere of understanding and cooperation.

Have a voice in the agency's decision-making processes.

Finally, as social service agencies often work under tight financial constraints, rewards and incentives can be a powerful tool in retaining employees who may seek opportunities elsewhere. To promote morale, emphasize any non-financial benefits that the staff receive and remind them of the value that their work contributes to the agency and to society. Offer social activities and staff retreats that enable employees to interact in a relaxed setting. Opportunities such as these allow employees to become better acquainted, develop camaraderie, and break down stereotypes and other preconceived notions that they may have about each other.

CREATING INTERNSHIP AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Another effective strategy for diversifying agency staff is to develop internship and volunteer programs targeted toward multilingual and multicultural students, immigrant domestic violence survivors, and community members. This strategy works especially well for shelters or agencies that may not have the funding to create new staff positions. Interns will often work for free or for a small stipend if they are compensated through credit for their work from their universities. Furthermore, former

⁵ While multicultural advocates may be connected to local immigrant communities, there may be barriers between advocates and clients due to differences in education level, particular country or region of origin, sexual orientation, age, or gender. As a result, these new employees can benefit from cultural sensitivity training just as is the case with all staff members.

interns make excellent future hires due to their training and experience. You can significantly reduce the time you will need to devote to hiring multilingual and multicultural staff if you have a core group of interns you have remained in contact with and from which you can recruit future staff members.

You will also find that these students are often inspired by their service with your organization to continue working with battered immigrants through other local, state, or national agencies across the country. Forming networks with agencies where your previous interns now work is an excellent strategy for strengthening services, outreach programs, and the recruitment of new multilingual/multicultural staff.⁶

To recruit interns:

Contact the internship or career development offices of the universities, law schools, colleges, and community colleges in your area (or across the state) and inform them of your plans. Consult with them on the demographics of their student populations to see if there is an available pool of multilingual/multicultural students. Ask for their expertise on how to advertise your program on campus and meet the requirements for college credit.

Contact relevant academic departments directly as well. These could include women's studies, ethnic studies, international studies, foreign language, and social work programs.

Advertise internships and volunteer opportunities with foreign student offices and housing programs, minority student associations, language clubs, women's groups, and public interest associations at local law schools and universities.

Develop fliers in several languages to attract the attention of multilingual students and have these posted at the schools.

There are also several databases on the internet that list internship opportunities and this may be particularly helpful for shelters in more rural areas. You may wish to develop your own web site or consult with your local university's internship placement office to learn how to tap into national databases and web pages.

To recruit community volunteers, utilize the same strategy that would be followed for recruiting staff. Recognize that a strong volunteer program depends on the

⁶*Improving Accessibility Of Your Program's Services To Battered Immigrant Women*. AYUDA, Inc. (1998).

commitment of the community to domestic violence and the rights of immigrant women. This may need to be cultivated during your outreach efforts. To create a pool of volunteers, advertise and hold community education forums at places of worship, community centers, social service fairs, the United Way, agencies, and hospitals. Contact national volunteer programs such as Americorps, Vista, or private faith-based programs (such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps or the Lutheran Volunteer Corps) to learn more about opportunities to recruit these volunteers for your agency. This is especially effective for programs in rural areas with limited resources.

Even if you only seek volunteer interpreters, make sure that these volunteers are interested in receiving training on domestic violence issues. This will ensure that volunteers are sensitive to the needs of victims while providing support in the victim's native language. While these volunteers may not be professionally trained to provide interpreter services for legal proceedings, they can assist your program by being able to translate information in client interviews and client interactions during day-to-day activities.

To keep volunteer retention and morale high, recognize them for their unpaid efforts. Hold social events for the volunteers and plan an annual recognition dinner. Local businesses may also be willing to offer nonprofit agencies gift certificates to give to volunteers in exchange for publicity. As your volunteer and internship programs grow, you may consider hiring a volunteer coordinator to plan social events, handle recruitment, and keep volunteers and interns apprised of job openings.

CONCLUSION

Recruiting multicultural and multilingual staff, interns, and volunteers are challenging processes, but the benefits of doing so are numerous. Diverse staff and volunteers offer important perspectives on the issue of domestic violence that strengthen, broaden, and legitimize your agency's services. Moreover, they serve as an important link to the immigrant women in your city or region. Recruiting and hiring these staff members is a clear asset and an important step toward improving agency visibility and cultural accessibility.

Once you have begun to or are considering expanding your services to diverse populations in your community, consider joining the National Network on Behalf of Battered Immigrant Women. The Network can keep your agency apprised of ongoing changes in the laws affecting battered immigrants. It can locate educational materials on issues affecting battered immigrant women and assist your agency with training programs. Finally, Network members are able to provide technical assistance for agency staff working with individual cases for battered immigrant women.⁷ Technical

⁷For information on how to join the Network and for technical assistance, contact Leslye E. Orloff at Immigrant Women Program, Legal Momentum at (202) 326-0040.

assistance is available on immigration, family law, welfare and social services, and health care accessibility issues.

This page is left blank.