



Understanding Cultural Competence and Developing Culturally Competent Services for Victim-Survivors of Human Trafficking



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Understanding Cultural Competence

To understand cultural competence, it helps to start with the definition of *culture*. In their seminal work *Cultural Issues and Responses: Defining Cultural Competence in Child Welfare* (1989), Cross et al write that culture involves the “integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.”

Cultural competence, they write, involves having the capacity to function proficiently within the context of a particular culture. Competence is based on a set of harmonious actions, approaches, and policies that come together and enable the people working with the system of care to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Culturally competent services, then, refers “to systems, agencies and practitioners who have the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called dominant or mainstream American.”¹

Increasing Cultural Competence

According to Cross et al, creating a culturally competent organization requires the presence of five key components:

1. Valuing diversity.
2. Being capable of honest self-assessment.
3. Being conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures intersect.
4. Having institutionalized cultural knowledge.
5. Having developed approaches and treatment modalities that are adapted to diversity.

Having these five components in place at one level of an organization is not enough, though. In a culturally competent organization, there is commitment and involvement from every part of the organization.

The three major factors impacting cultural competence are **attitudes, policies and practice**. Organizations become more culturally competent as their **attitudes** become less ethnocentric and prejudiced, their **policies** become more flexible and culturally objective and their **practices** become more harmonious with the culture of youth and families.²

Understanding Your Community

Adopting the five-component framework for creating a culturally competent organization is one step in building competence. The other is to understand your community: What are the demographics of your community? What community resources are in place to serve people of diverse backgrounds? What resources are needed?

For information about the demographics of your service area, go to www.census.gov/2010census/popmap. Next, learn about the resources in your community by creating a community map, sometimes called an “asset map.” The map will help you achieve several important goals:

- Identifying locations where runaway, homeless and street youth are known to congregate. This will enable you to conduct outreach in a strategic manner and help you connect with youth eligible for Family and Youth Services Bureau-funded runaway and homeless youth services.
- Identifying other community assets that can benefit youth as well as specific assets used by minority populations.
- Identifying resource issues such as: overlaps, gaps, bottlenecks, “hidden” resources and barriers that can impact the implementation of programs and services.
- Identifying opportunities for coordination and collaboration with existing service providers and community-based organizations that are known and trusted by minority populations.
- Developing or enhancing partnerships with other service organizations. This will enable all parties involved in the mapping process to get to know the community as well as each other’s organizations.
- Setting the stage for lasting working relationships based on trust which will ultimately increase your organization’s ability to serve minority populations.

Engage other service providers, youth and families, and community stakeholders in your mapping process. For example, host focus group discussions to gather input about existing resources and identify gaps that need to be addressed. Get more information about community mapping at <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/maps/map-my-community>.

¹ Cross, Terry L., (1989). *Cultural Issues and Responses: Defining Cultural Competence in Child Welfare*.

² *Ibid*.

Resources

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