

# FAMILY VOICES®

National Center for  
Family Professional Partnerships



## Promising Practices In Cultural Competence:



## OPEN DOORS FOR MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES

...dedicated to the needs of diverse families who have loved ones with developmental disabilities and special health care needs.

### OPEN DOORS FOR MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES

Since 2009, *Open Doors for Multicultural Families* has worked to ensure that diverse families who have family members with developmental disabilities and special health care needs have equal access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information, resources, and services. Current programs and services include the Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC), KCDDD Family Information and Education Program, OEO Special Education Legal Clinic, Systems Advocacy, Early Learning Program, Aging and Disability Services, Youth Leadership and Advocacy Training Program, and Youth Job Readiness Training Program. Served by staff and volunteer board members who speak 21 languages, more than 400 diverse families of children with disabilities were served in 2012; a 10-fold increase since 2009. In 2014, the number of families served grew to more than 700. The majority of the immigrant and refugee families served are low income, living in South Seattle and South King County where school districts report that their students' families speak over 100 different languages.

### WASHINGTON COMMUNITIES

According to the 2013 American Community Survey, the Hispanic population in Washington State is the largest immigrant group at 11.5%, and the Asian population follows at 7.3%. The percentage of people who speak English "less than very well" was 7.8% in 2013. While the growth in immigrant populations has not been as rapid within the state as a whole, the growth of immigrant populations in most of King County, including Seattle, the area served by *Open Doors*, has been significant. According to the county demographer, data presented in 2014 shows that between 2000 and 2010, King County grew by almost 200,000 people, and half of the growth was from foreign born populations.

### IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES IN SERVING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

In 2013, the Family Voices National Center for Family/Professional Partnerships held a series of focus groups with families of diverse cultures to identify essential elements of cultural competence that help organizations reach and serve families of diverse backgrounds. These diverse family leaders identified the elements they consider critical: 1) language access; 2) office environment reflective of diversity; 3) supportive staff; 4) strategies to connect diverse families with each other, and; 5) opportunities for diverse families to provide feedback. Family Voices sought applications from

groups that exemplified excellence in serving diverse families and *Open Doors* was selected based on the family-identified criteria. *Open Doors* provides multiple strategies for success in serving diverse communities.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS:**

### **Provision of language access:**

- Experience has shown that the most important language access for families is being able to talk to someone in their own language either directly on the phone or in person. Every Family Support staff at *Open Doors* is given a cell phone that families can call in order to reach someone (as often as possible) in their own language without the delay of communicating through interpreters. A total of 21 different languages are spoken by staff and Board Members. Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin & Taiwanese), Spanish, Somali, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Russian, German and English are spoken by staff, and Amharic, Tigrinya, Arabic, Kurdish, Urdu, Hindi, Cambodian, French, Italian, and Thai are spoken by Board Members.
- *Open Doors* has built extensive contacts in the refugee and immigrant communities to access other languages to serve families who speak languages other than the ones listed above.
- Announcements for parent training workshops and other events are developed in English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese and Somali.
- Interpretation at workshops is provided in at least 5 languages; parents in attendance sit with their own language group with a bilingual/bicultural staff, board member or interpreter.

### **Office environments reflect the diversity of families:**

- The *Open Doors* office is small and informal without pretense and when anyone enters they immediately see staff and families from several cultures and language groups.
- Visitors are always greeted warmly and enthusiastically even if no one is present who speaks the language of the visitor.
- Various translated resources & materials that are related to disabilities are displayed in the office and made available to the families and professionals who seek help.
- Wall photos display multicultural children, youth, and families who have attended *Open Doors*' events.

### **Supportive staff reflect diverse populations:**

- The board and the staff reflect the diversity in the families that they serve both ethnically and linguistically. *Open Doors* employs fifteen paid multilingual staff members who collectively, with Board members, speak a total of 21 different languages.
- Staff have developed strategies to learn from one another. During weekly meetings, each staff person takes time to share a success story from his or her work with a specific family. This communication allows staff to share strategies for working with families from different cultural backgrounds and to offer ideas about an approach to a given situation. Staff members develop a family-centered plan based on the desired outcome. This team planning approach allows flexibility – a quality required for successfully working within a diverse environment.
- Workshops are designed based on feedback from families and their specific needs.
- Staff members may attend disability services related appointments with families. This is arranged either by the provider reaching out to *Open Doors*, or through the family's established relationship with a particular *Open Doors* bilingual/bicultural Family Support Specialist.

### **Connecting families to other families with shared/similar experiences & backgrounds:**

- Parent support groups are held for Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Somali, and African American families. Each group plans activities according to the cultural preferences of the families in the group. Their meeting schedules and locations are based on the needs of the families. Because these families live across the larger metropolitan Seattle areas including suburban cities, very often the group might meet at different locations throughout the year. On average, each group meets every 4-6 weeks, except the Korean parent group, which meets weekly at their churches.
- Families also get to know each other when attending trainings. Trainings are provided in several languages. Parents who speak the same language usually sit together with a Family Support Specialist who can help to interpret the messages. Thus, families get to know each other and this increases conversation and sharing among them.
- Recreational events are held such as Winter Family Snow Tubing, Trampoline Jumping, Adaptive Kayaking and Cycling, Family Picnics, Fall Pumpkin Carving, and Family Pictures. These events have an average attendance of 150 diverse family members. *Open Doors* keeps the cost of admission for large seasonal events low. While their operating budget is not large, they ensure that most activities have funding available to support transportation, childcare (when necessary), and interpretation. Need-based scholarships for special seasonal events are provided to ensure that many low income families have the chance to participate.
- Under the sponsorship of *Open Doors*, diverse family groups have developed their own ways of connecting, either virtually

or at locations of their choosing. For example, the Latino families have an active Facebook page; Korean families gather either at church or at family homes; Chinese families meet at the library; Japanese families gather informally at the school; and Somali families come together in a restaurant.

- *Open Doors* has learned the importance of establishing strong relationships with individual families, which results in word-of-mouth connections to other families. Family Support Specialists work diligently to earn the trust and confidence of families. This often results in those who do not speak English well will coming to *Open Doors* as a result of a referral from another family.

### **Providing opportunities for diverse families to share their opinions and feedback:**

- *Open Doors* helps to facilitate family input into systems advocacy. Staff often guide parents in opportunities to share their experiences, needs, ideas, and suggestions. For many families this is a new experience and can be confusing as expectations may not be met directly. However, the value of being listened to and taken seriously can have significant impact. For example, a staff member took a group of Chinese parents to an open meeting put on by the local Parks and Recreation Department. The families were welcomed by the leaders of the Department who stated they had not had not heard from this group of Chinese parents before. The response to our parents' feedback was almost immediate and \$100,000 was added to increase services for people with disabilities. Most actions as a result of advocacy efforts do not occur as swiftly but do start to make changes in small ways.
- Internal services and programs are driven by families' needs. *Open Doors* conducts surveys, focus groups, and evaluations regularly to gather families' feedback. Evaluation forms are accessible in up to 11 languages.
- In addition, staff members track their interactions with families in a database, recording feedback from families.
- *Open Doors* expands the programs and services they provide based on the expressed needs of families. For example, a parent of a child with autism described his family's financial challenges of home repair due to their child's challenging behaviors at home. With this family's needs in mind, *Open Doors* submitted a grant application for an Equal Autism Access Project to help families obtain financial assistance for home modifications. With this grant, *Open Doors* hosted a parent training to share resources on home environment modification. Today this program has grown to a year round parent education training program, 4 fun family events that draw over 200 people at each event, a youth leadership/advocacy/employment readiness program, 0-6 early learning family education and support, and Autism specialty family support & training programs.

*Open Doors* describes lessons learned as a result of their work in helping families of diverse backgrounds.

### **LESSONS LEARNED:**

Services for families of diverse culture and backgrounds must be driven by their needs, not the service organization's capacities. To fully understand the needs of diverse families, there must be investment in a reciprocal relationship with families.

It is critical to take a whole-family perspective. Organizations must recognize the challenges that families face on a daily basis in raising their children with disabilities, particular those who are low income. Services to help families must address all the needs of families, not only by providing quality assistance focused on the child, but in providing that assistance in ways that encourage family participation, such as providing guidance and support by trusted bilingual family specialists, free onsite childcare, transportation assistance, and meals.

*Open Doors* identifies concrete steps to ensure the success of programs serving families of diverse backgrounds.

### **STEPS TO SUCCESS:**

Keep families at the center of everything you do.

Hire bilingual and bicultural staff.

Establish relationships with providers and establish a protocol so that they can make referrals. While providers are knowledgeable of *Open Doors* and often tell the family to call, most families will not cold call. Providers obtain permission from families to make a referral, allowing the appropriate staff member to call a family directly to offer help.

Expand the pool of knowledgeable interpreters in communities by providing training for them around CSHCN.

Encourage families to share their experiences with policy makers and provide guidance and support for those activities.

Establish an organizational culture of teamwork. It is often challenging for staff from different cultural backgrounds. Provide ongoing staff training and other opportunities to share ideas and information. Encourage staff to think creatively. Ask staff to

consider: “These are the outcomes. How can we do things to achieve these outcomes?”

It is critical for staff to learn from one another and from families. Make sure multiple staff participate in family events. That helps staff become more culturally aware

Host multicultural events. Families can learn from other families of different cultures. They can see that there are many ways parents of children with SHCN do things—and many ways they are similar.



### FEEDBACK FROM A PROFESSIONAL SERVED BY OPEN DOORS:

*“I wanted to email you and let you know that we have had great success with having contacted your agency to support our families in our wraparound program. I have at this time only worked with [staff person], but I think that it is important to recognize people who go above and beyond in the work they do in the community and she is one of those people. She is very knowledgeable in regards to special education law and the rights of families. She is also passionate and a great advocate for the families that we share. I have told many other agencies and schools about the success I have had working with her. The amount of cultural competency she can bring to a team is something that cannot be measured in words.”*

*- Celeste Taylor, Valley Cities, Community Behavioral Health Center*



### FEEDBACK FROM A FAMILY SERVED BY OPEN DOORS:

*“Open Doors for Multicultural Families has many language focus groups to link families together. There is a Chinese focus group that I always like to go to. I can meet other families who have the same situation and same interests. I was isolated because of cultural and language barriers until I was connected with Open Doors for Multicultural Families.”*

*– Yu Yun Cai, Parent*

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