

Lower Hudson Regional Multicultural Advisory Committee of

The New York State Office of Mental Health's Bureau of Cultural Competence

Annual Report for 2014

Statement of Purpose: The purpose of the Lower Hudson Multicultural Advisory Committee is to serve as a voice for individuals in Westchester County who are experiencing disparities in receiving services. Information gathered on identifying gaps in delivering culturally sensitive services will be communicated to the Field Office and to New York State Office of Mental Health/Bureau of Cultural Competence. Lower Hudson Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) will make efforts to recommend solutions that will respond to the needs of its population in a culturally sensitive manner.

Beginnings: In early 2012, the Lower Hudson MAC was implemented. Jean Williams attended an early meeting in Albany which was facilitated by Frances Priester. Jean saw the need of having MAC in Westchester to respond specifically to the culturally specific needs of the county. Frances was instrumental in sending out and facilitating the first few Town Hall meetings which took place in a local Mount Vernon Church. From that time on Jean Williams chaired the meetings along with Christina Cortez, Helene Fisher, and Damon Bacote. Today Jean and Damon continue to serve as co-chairs along with new co-chair Christina Eisenberg (member since MAC inception).

• **Issues Covered since 2012 include:**

- Affordable and decent housing shortage in Westchester County
- On top of usual housing problems, persons living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) have additional problems of finding housing.
- Seniors who want to move into senior housing have adult children (55+) who do not have resources sufficient to live independently, and make it difficult for their elderly parents to move into senior housing.
- MAC created a Consumer Survey with input from Nathan Kline Institute (NKI) and the Bureau of Cultural Competence.
- MAC's goal is to assess ability/need to integrate survey into the Department's consumer mental health assessment tools.
- MAC chairs: Jean Williams, Christina Eisenberg; and long-term MAC member, Adam Black, presented its Consumer Survey instrument to May Lum and her staff in the Field Office in December 2014.
- December 2014 was first meeting with Field Office. Plan is to maintain regular contact, and to respond to Field Office's request for input, and/or recommendations.
- On June 19th Frances Priester, facilitated two of the Spirituality Workshops in Mount Vernon, New York. One of the workshops convened in the a.m. and the second in the afternoon. A total of 42 participants attended the workshops.

- In November Frances Preister presented Spirituality Workshop to group at the Yonkers Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for the African American Advisory Board (AAAB).
- Dialogue has begun with YMCA Chief Executive Officer, Shawn Patterson, to facilitate linking Frances Priester to the faith based community , and especially to the Black Clergy of Westchester to do workshops for church groups.
- Concern about absences and excessive out of school suspensions in communities of color led to invitation of Student Advocacy to present "Solutions not Suspensions." Presentation to MAC attendees took place in its meeting of September 24, 2014.