



FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY STUDIES

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Concept Paper: Mission, Purpose & Rationale for FICS

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Discussion Only

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Overarching Concept

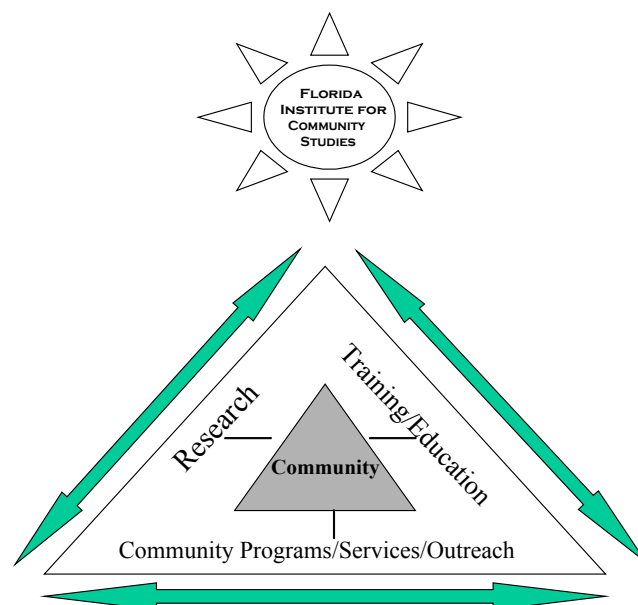
Florida Institute for Community Studies (FICS) is a not-for-profit (IRS approved 501-C-3) organization dedicated to utilizing research to inform program planning, service delivery, professional/paraprofessional training and community education. FICS takes a unique community-centered and holistic approach to research, service and education/training through public-private collaborations to respond to unmet needs in Florida.

Purpose

FICS will work with community, local, state, federal and other groups, agencies or universities to conduct research, training and education related to educational, social, cultural, health and legal concerns pertinent to the State of Florida as well as regions that interface with us. FICS will serve as a multilingual resource center for information and education on changing demographics and cultural effects of migration and immigration. The Corporation will serve as a think tank for issues, problems and cross-cultural communications, and will employ anthropological and epidemiological approaches in all endeavors

Model for Community Research, Education, Training

FICS proposes a model that envisions three core components as synergistic and complementary: 1. Research; 2. Community programs, services and outreach and 3. Training and Education. This model incorporates two on-going efforts which incorporate a commitment to research as the basis for program design: the Pocos Hijos Para Darles Más male responsibility program and cultural relativity training based on the BafaBafa model. Below is a visual representation of this model:



Rationale

Because it incorporates these three key components into its design, FICS can serve as a resource center to develop informed and targeted community-based research, training and programs. FICS strives to be a multilingual institute specifically focusing on the diversity of Florida's populations, with a special emphasis on gender, age and demographic considerations of the following underserved minority populations:

- Recent immigrants from Latin America, Haiti, Caribbean and/or other groups
- Farmworkers and farm laborers
- Rural populations and "pockets" of rural poor
- Teens and designated at-risk groups for HIV/AIDS, STD/STIs and other diseases

Despite many years of social and economic interventions, many minority groups actually fare **worse** than they did just ten years ago. The optimism of the civil rights era has slowly given way to a pervading sense of the importance in finding new ways to address old problems. While there are many contributing factors to these disappointing outcomes, academics and policy makers alike are calling for innovation. Some academics have pointed to the previously undervalued concept of "social space" in connection to empowerment and social movements to improve the quality of life for any group (Melucci 1994, Putnam 2000, Alvarez 1999, 1998). This space needs to be multidimensional and inclusive. Social movement literature points to the importance of human agency in building toward any kind of substantial change in the status quo. Melucci argues that new space is needed in order for new leadership and change to occur. This space is currently being created at grassroots levels by civic, social, and religious groups who have become actors exerting their agency to begin to address their own self-defined concerns. *FICS can assist these community initiatives by working with these groups in creating space that will allow for researchers, community members, educators and professionals in the field to interact and exchange information and knowledge.*

The idea is that this interaction will create synergy that will allow for community-centered research, programming and education/training that will not only increase the community-research bond but also lead to improved quality of life for these communities. FICS will respond to unmet needs by teaming up with community to conduct research, training and services, which could result in models which could be replicated elsewhere.

FICS Areas of Concentration

FICS will be divided into departments that correspond to the three areas of concentration listed above. FICS staff will work in all three areas so that there is

continuity across these areas, thus increasing the level of interaction and synergy.

Research

Research areas will reflect the interests of the community and of the board members. To date, board members and community have contributed to an initial list of research topics:

- immigrants' perceptions of health and reproductive health (including farmworkers)
- immigration law effects on health seeking
- comparative studies on service utilization
- special needs of children of immigrants, including Wimauma, FL
- health impact assessments
- local study of the Strawberry festival and perceptions of farmworkers in Plant City
- study cultural sensitivity at the hospitals and accessible language strategies
- tobacco prevention
- higher education and college education for undocumented children/financial aid
- rural studies

Community programs, services and outreach

As stated above, FICS will incorporate the five-year old research, social marketing and outreach program, ¡Pocos Hijos Para Darles Más!/Have Fewer Children So You Can Give Them More! (Pocos Hijos). Pocos Hijos began in 1996 at the request of farmworker women who asked that their husbands be targeted with family planning education in an effort to support women's goals to lower family sizes. A pilot research project was funded in 1996 by the University of South Florida Health Education and Training Centers, with the result that farmworker males echoed women's goals but expressed that they lacked information, support and, most importantly, confidence, in regard to family planning. Out of this initial research, four tested and professionally produced public service announcements were completed and aired. The evaluation of this phase of the program pointed to males' recommendation that a male health promotor be hired and trained in order to provide them with confidential assistance and education in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Pocos Hijos now serves upwards of 250 males and their families per year with direct one-on-one education and support and reaches thousands more through small group classes and public education through PSAs on local radio stations. Pocos Hijos won the 1997 Border Health Education and Training Centers Program of Excellence and Project Director Alayne Unterberger won the 1998 Sidney Lee Research Award for Migrant Health as well.

In 1998, Pocos Hijos advisory committee members suggested to the outreach worker and project director that the south Hillsborough County community, largely comprised of farmworkers, needed positive programming for their youth and suggested a youth

soccer program. These parents and Pocos Hijos staff worked for about one year to build a partnership between Pocos Hijos, Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) and Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation to bring soccer to the rural areas of our county. This soccer league is now going on it's third year, second season as an affiliated team of the Florida Youth Soccer Association/US Youth Soccer Association, the Rural Youth Soccer Association (RYSA) has now become a reality. RYSA includes a health education and fitness component and has become a vehicle for community mobilization. RYSA parents decided that soccer was the perfect vehicle for helping them better reach their children because it teaches "Healthy Body, Healthy Mind" or "Cuerpo Sano, Mente Sana," which is now the league's slogan.

Training and Education

Due to rapidly changing demographics in Florida, providers often face challenges in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps both within the organization and with patients and clients. Often referred to as cultural competence training, providers cite one of their main needs as some sort of "sensitivity training." The Executive Director has conducted cross-cultural communication workshops to nurses, medical students, medical faculty, social services professionals, public school educators, HIV/AIDS advocates and public health professionals for over five years.

This area consists of programming geared toward a wide variety of potential audiences. However, two main types of training and education will be conducted. First, professional/paraprofessional training would be focused on continuing education and cross-cultural communication types of workshops for providers. Under this framework, FICS has great potential to become a training center for culturally and gender-relevant outreach programs and could facilitate linkages with other national, regional and local groups who engage in outreach. Outreach workers have suggested that they would like to have a network, which could be coordinated by FICS.

Second, community education, such as that provided in collaboration with RYSA, would center on non-traditional and popular education strategies to communicate key educational programs to diverse community audiences. Third, hosting and organizing conferences and continuing education workshops would also be a component of FICS.

FICS would be a resource center for all sectors interested in better cross-cultural, cross-linguistic group communications. The Training and Education efforts of the institute would also serve to disseminate information from the other foci of FICS. In this way, FICS could share research findings and lessons learned from on-going community programming in a variety of formats. It is envisioned that FICS will utilize technology, most notably through an integrated internet web site, to better communicate information and make available primary resources, such as research reports, to other researchers, professionals, community members and the public at large.

Current Projects

FICS has received its first grant! "An Educational Training Component for Community Providers from Health Promoters to Physicians," is a grant funded by the University of South Florida Health Education and Training Centers. Research shows that programs using paraprofessionals, outreach workers and health promoters have great promise in reaching the hardest to reach populations. As the popularity of these programs has grown, we have begun to ask the question: how do outreach workers, family support workers and promoters continue to work in the community? Do they have special needs and if so, what can we do to support their important work?

Our approach follows the design and rationale of the organization. We will begin with three focus groups with health promoters, family support workers and outreach workers to learn about:

1. Motivators
2. Barriers/Needs: Training and support needs and Information needs
3. Suggestions and recommendations to support this kind of work
4. How to design a statewide network of outreach and promotion that responds to, and is proactive about, issues facing our clients and participants.

There will be a free one-day training and visioning session for all participants in the Fall of 2002.

Project Staff and Expertise

FICS brings together an impressive group of researchers, educators and community advocates through its volunteer board of directors, Executive Director and staff. We are interested in knowing who else is interested in working with us and welcome student interns and volunteers. For more information, please contact us at 813.985.2283.

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