



*"I alone cannot change the world,
but I can cast a stone across the
water to create many ripples."
- Mother Teresa*

Healthy Families First: Community Leaders in Action

Special Edition Newsletter



In honour of International Women's Day, Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre would like to recognize the efforts of exceptional Community Action Leaders who have been working to improve the health and well-being of women and families in the Chinese community. Community Action Leaders participated in Hamilton Urban Core's *Neighbours, Friends, and Families (NFF) Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign* in Hamilton this past year.

Through the NFF Campaign, Community Action Leaders gained the knowledge and skills needed to recognize what healthy and unhealthy families look like. When talking about what makes a family unhealthy, all communities generally agree that these relationships involve distrust, hiding important things from one another, feeling uncomfortable consulting with each other before making big decisions, fear of the other partner, and control by one partner over what the other partner

does, where they go, and who they see. Healthy families, on the other hand, generally involve mutual respect and honesty, strong communication, commitment, and equality.

Keeping these issues and other factors in mind, Community Action Leaders, with the support of the Hamilton Urban Core, planned and ran activities that promoted healthy family relationships within their own communities. Here is what these leaders had to say about their experience with the NFF Campaign, and how they have applied what they learned to make a continued impact in their community.



Sara Mok, a native Cantonese speaker, has been in Canada since 2014. Like many people within her community, Sara first visited Hamilton Urban Core with a friend who recommended that she check out the wide variety of health-related programs and services available. She later joined the *NFF Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign in Hamilton* as a Community Action Leader, because she saw it as a learning opportunity that could assist her in interacting with

and helping her own “neighbours, friends, and family.”

The workshops involved with the NFF Campaign taught her how to identify problems in all types of relationships, and how to approach and solve these issues. Now having completed her training, Sara feels more confident and knowledgeable talking to individuals about addressing the challenges they are having with their families and others in their community. In other words, Sara has taken her love of helping others and combined it with her newfound knowledge to become a support that those around her can access when in need.



Yulan Ai, a former university professor from China, immigrated to Canada 15 years ago. Recalling her first experiences in Canada, Ai remembers feeling like she did not know how to navigate her new life here. However, after

hearing about Hamilton Urban Core from a friend, she started to attend its various programs and access the many services it offered. Through these experiences, Ai feels that she learned many things that helped her adapt to life in Canada, and move forward. Years after her first interaction with the Hamilton Urban Core, Ai is still actively involved with the Centre, including in her role as a Community Action Leader with the NFF Campaign.

Ai was particularly drawn to the NFF Campaign because she wanted to further enhance her leadership role within her community, and learn how to better support the various relationships in her life. Through the workshop trainings, Ai feels that she has greatly improved her conflict resolution skills, allowing her to work effectively in

groups she is a part of. Ai specifically mentions her newfound ability to help groups make united decisions when addressing problems. To build healthy families within her community, Ai has been working with fellow Community Action Leader Chan Yuan Li. Together they have been using the messaging and calling application *WeChat* to share information about healthy family relationships, Canadian laws, educating children, spousal relationships and much more. They did this by joining three different chat groups and using their freshly honed leadership skills and knowledge on healthy families to engage the Chinese community, and transform these forums into positive spaces for dialogue, knowledge exchange, learning, and action.



Chan Yuan Li, known to many as Charlie, moved to Canada in 2014. Like Sara and Ai, he came to Hamilton Urban Core at the advice of a friend, with the hopes of learning about various health topics, accessing services, and



participating in the activities offered. Charlie laughs as he explains that his wife encouraged him to join the NFF Campaign in Hamilton as a way to learn and grow as a person, and help the community. Through the training, Charlie gained important interpersonal skills that would allow him to better deal with the different relationships in his community. From this experience, he came to the realization that in order to build healthy relationships and initiate meaningful change, the work needs to be done with others as a team. He applied this lesson as a Community Action Leader by collaborating with Ai on the previously mentioned *WeChat* project. He further demonstrated this message through his

Community Action Project, which encourages members of the *WeChat* groups to become teachers by sharing their own thoughts and knowledge, and learners that take into consideration what is being shared by others.



YuQui Shen arrived in Canada just four years ago. To the above discussion around what makes healthy and unhealthy families, she adds some insight into how immigrating to a new country can lead to conflict within families,

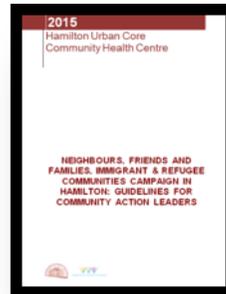
resulting in unhealthy situations. She specifically points out that when people first come to Canada from China, they experience many changes and obstacles such as: differences in culture and language, worries about acclimating to their new environment, finding jobs, and being a burden to their children, among other issues. These factors, in addition to generational gaps among younger and older members of a family, create environments where conflict can thrive.

As an immigrant herself, YuQui Shen experienced the obstacles faced by many newcomers. For instance, when she first came to Canada she lacked a car, did not know many people, and had limited English skills. This all contributed to feelings of isolation. However, after discovering that many people in her community attended Hamilton Urban Core, she decided to tag along and learn more about the Centre. What she ultimately discovered was a place with friendly people and lots of programs, services and activities she could use to help her as she adjusted to life in Canada. As YuQui Shen puts it, the Centre and its people have become like a second family to her.

It was her friend and fellow Community Action Leader Ai, who encouraged her to participate in the Centre's NFF Campaign. Through this experience, YuQui Shen has discovered that she cares a lot for people and feels a sense of responsibility towards her community. It changed her life, she says. YuQui Shen also learned how to work and interact with others in a way that leads to positive change and outcomes, and has developed skills which she now uses to help others. Like Sara, Ai and Charlie, YuQui Shen has built her capacity as a leader by supporting people in her community.

Resources

Hamilton Urban Core has developed tools to aid community members in promoting healthy family relationships in their immigrant and refugee communities. If you are interested in becoming a Community Action Leader, please check out the following resources on our website



www.hucchc.com:

-  *NFF Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign in Hamilton: Guidelines for Community Action Leaders*
-  *NFF Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign in Hamilton: Design Looms for Community Action Leader Training*

NFF Campaign in Hamilton & AOHC Model of Health and Well-being

Hamilton Urban Core's healthy families approach to address violence against women in immigrant and refugee communities is aligned with the Association

of Ontario Health Centres' (AOHC) Model of Health and Well-being. The AOHC represents 108 community-governed primary health care organizations, and its Model represents a commitment to a shared vision of the best possible health and well-being for everyone in Ontario.

The Model of Health and Well-being's values and principles are reflected in the NFF Campaign in Hamilton. These include:

- ✚ Being **people and community centered** by offering relevant and accessible services
- ✚ Providing the **highest quality** of violence against women (VAW) supports to meet the needs of diverse communities
- ✚ Enhancing **community vitality and belonging** by working with leaders to increase community accountability
- ✚ Working towards **health equity and social justice** by overcoming the various barriers to accessing mainstream services

The Model of Health and Well-beings' key attributes reflected in the NFF Campaign in Hamilton include:

- ✚ Identifying relevant **social determinants of health** through conversations about healthy and unhealthy families
- ✚ Using language and approaches that are **accessible** for diverse communities
- ✚ Being **community governed** by empowering leaders and community members to organize and create change
- ✚ Being **population and needs based** by addressing relevant issues and providing supports to marginalized communities
- ✚ Taking a **community development** approach by building community capacity
- ✚ Ensuring activities are rooted in **anti-oppression and cultural safety**

Healthy Families: A Best Practice to Address VAW Issues

VAW is a by-product of many factors including unhealthy family relationships. We know that unhealthy families exist in every community. However, many of the approaches used by service providers to address the issue are not structured or delivered in ways that are accessible to all. Immigrant and refugee communities, in particular, have demonstrated a need for culturally safe and relevant programming when tackling VAW.

Hamilton Urban Core found that utilizing a community development approach that promotes health family relationships is an effective way of disseminating knowledge about violence against women or family violence, and for driving action that creates positive change within diverse communities. This approach was implemented during the *NFF Immigrant and Refugee Communities Campaign in Hamilton* and was determined to be a best practice approach for immigrant serving organizations addressing VAW. Adopting and employing a healthy families approach to VAW boasts many benefits, the main three being that it:

- ✚ Enables immigrant and refugee women to engage in conversations about unhealthy families and social factors affecting them
- ✚ Utilizes language that is culturally safe and supports women in making considerations they may not have if approached otherwise
- ✚ Meets women and communities where they are currently positioned in terms of addressing issues, taking action, and affecting positive change related to VAW

Thank you to everyone who supported this special edition newsletter!