

## Cambridge Community Engagement Team

- Promoting culturally relevant practice
- Welcoming a diverse population
- Facilitating inter-agency communication
- Developing student leadership
- Developing career ladders

The Community Engagement Team (CET) was created in January 2006, under the auspices of a federal grant, with the mission of promoting culturally competent outreach and practice with all segments of an increasingly diverse, multilingual, and multicultural community. Its original focus was on parents and early childhood services. In December 2007, the CET merged with the ABE Community Planning Group, recognizing that the two groups had overlapping missions and memberships.

The CET meets every 6 weeks and includes representation from City departments, the School Department, the Cambridge Health Alliance, the Cambridge Housing Authority, nonprofits, and a local foundation. The areas of early childhood, ABE, health, housing, employment, and counseling are included. Community outreach workers are also members. This broad representation means that information and input are exchanged readily.

In addition to the general meetings, there are five working groups that carry out specific tasks including organizing citywide networking events; coordinating supervision of outreach workers; partnering with the African American community; and developing training, certification, and career ladders for outreach workers.

Networking events held three times a year bring together as many as 75 people from a variety of Cambridge agencies to learn about different cultural communities, strategies for outreach, and agency planning processes for cultural competence.

The outreach workers are an integral part of the strategy for reaching underserved communities. Believing that people are best reached by members of their own communities, and seeing the value of leadership development in those communities, Cambridge has committed to an innovative outreach program. By hiring and deploying immigrant and minority outreach workers to provide information about community events and services to members of their communities, many more people have been reached than would have been through more conventional outreach. Many of these outreach workers are Community Learning Center ESOL students. We have had representation from the Bengali, Haitian, Somali, Ethiopian, and African American communities. Outreach workers receive extensive and ongoing training and supervision. They provide outreach for a number of community programs and activities.

Following are quotes from two of the outreach workers:

*I am enjoying this job because Cambridge has different kinds of resources but most Ethiopian people don't know about them. When I tell parents about resources they say this country has different opportunities but how can we get the information?. I give flyers to parents when I see them in stores, in schools, on the train, and bus while I am waiting. Sometimes I call parents on the telephone. (CET Outreach Worker to Ethiopian Families)*

*I've helped families by talking while I distributed outreach flyers. If they can't read, I read for them, explain to them what will happen depending on what kind of activities we are holding. I give them flyers or I make a phone call to invite them, or to remind them that I don't like to miss them. I encourage them to come....I hope to contribute to the program by doing the work well and reaching more parents, serving the Haitian community of Cambridge, being a liaison between them and programs. In this way my work will minimize the cultural gap. Haitian families won't fear anything like losing culture and identity. (CET Outreach Worker for the Haitian Community)*

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