

SCRA Community Psychology Practice Council

Promoting Community Practice

The Goals of This Project and Why We Are Contacting You

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Please describe your primary work, including the setting and primary focus of your work:

I do not currently engage in any "primary" community work. Over the years my community work has been focused in different areas, and often these areas intersected in some unexpected ways!

I have found that one of the interesting aspects of community work, whether it's volunteer, paid, or a vocation, is that it seems to ebb and flow. What I mean by this, is that over the past 18 years (I began my community psychology involvement at UMass/Lowell in the master's program in January, 1993) I have, at times, actively pursued specific involvement, and at other times, have been pushed, called, encouraged, intrigued, unexpectedly found, dumped into and challenged... to show up and make a difference. This, for me, illustrates some of my values associated with community psychology ... that if something needs to change in order to promote a healthier community, it is up to me to at least try – whether it's as a catalyst for change, a cheerleader, or an actual change agent!

An example of this is before beginning my post-graduate work, I was involved with HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention volunteer work (mostly with high-risk groups). After beginning my community psychology coursework, (specifically Women in the Community, Intro to Community Psychology, and Helping Skills), I was presented with relevant psychosocial concepts and some very practical tools which enabled me to “see” more of the issues related to HIV/AIDS and to engage in different aspects of prevention, intervention, treatment. and (a new term) post-vention!

This also led to my community work involving raising awareness, education, raising funds, and getting people together (from the individual level to the institutional level) to address the multi-faceted and devastating impact of this virus on our community. My passion for those affected by HIV also led me to volunteer as a hospice caregiver. For many years, I was honored to be a part of carrying out someone's end of life transition. Some were friends, some were strangers I only met at the end of their lives. All were assured they would not die alone, nor would they be forgotten. Community Psychology? Without a doubt.

Please describe any other work or projects that you do as a community psychologist (paid or volunteer):

1. Greater Lowell Critical Incident Stress Management (GLCISM) - Team Clinician

Our team is part of an international organization (ICISF). We all respond to and provide services to public safety workers (police, fire, EMTs, emergency room staff, etc.) We also have chaplains and mental health clinicians who are members of the team, to help provide a holistic approach to healing and trauma response – and often grief and loss support for suicide, and line of duty death.

The team also provides "pre-incident education" (another community psychology concept) which serves a dual purpose: we offer education around stress management and tools for dealing with PTSD and trauma AND we “plant the seed” to let these workers know that our team is here for them when, and if, the need arises. We have been deployed to NYC after 9/11, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Haiti, etc.; but for the most part, we are called to conduct emergency debriefings for local units and emergency responders as a result of their day-to-day trauma experiences.

2. Greater Lowell Equality Alliance (GLEA)

Sometime around 2001, while discussing the (then) whispers about a class action lawsuit that might change the face of marriage in Massachusetts, a friend and I decided that we could not just sit around and “hope for the best.” After examining our community, we acknowledged that we lacked LGBT resources...there was no place to get information, support, or even have any visibility. Emile and I decided that we needed to provide some leadership, cohesion, and a place for accurate information within the Greater Lowell community. So he and I co-founded the Greater Lowell Equality Alliance! It was a bit risky (he and I definitely were “out” at that point). We had no funding, no office, and absolutely no resources to speak of. But we had a desire to help others, to make a difference, and to improve the overall health of our community (which included LGBTs and allies!).

Over the years, we were able to engage, educate, support, and validate many individuals, primarily around marriage equality. Looking back, I can honestly say that we were able to change hearts and minds (including those of a few of our legislators who ultimately changed their votes which helped ensure same-sex marriage rights in Massachusetts!) mostly by “putting a face to the issue” – the same way I got involved with, and tried to make a difference, regarding HIV/AIDS! We often had religious, education, and civic leaders look to us for guidance and intervention. For example, we had a hate crime in Lowell a few years ago. I knew we had to respond to this tragic event. Within 24 hours, we had organized a candlelight vigil at a church downtown. We had a state senator speak, local religious groups and business leaders, as well as family

members...all expressing the fact that our community was not a place where hate or violence would be tolerated. Channel 7 and local media covered the event, and the message was clear...the greater Lowell community cares about ALL of its members!

3. MassEquality

I became a volunteer for MassEquality in response to the marriage equality movement in Massachusetts (and then later, in other New England states). All of my work with this wonderful organization reflects concepts within community psychology – and I truly feel that I was able to “hit the ground running” when I got involved with MassEquality, because they are an organization that responds to issues using community practice! They focused on consensus building, getting stakeholders to the table and then “buying in” on the issues at hand. They also provided education, both to workers, volunteers, community members, religious and business leaders, as well as to legislators. MassEquality truly is a grassroots organization – effective and egalitarian!!

4. Also:

- * Member of BSSV (APA Behavioral Social Scientist Volunteer Program)
- * Organizer of first local World AIDS Day observance
- * Core group member of annual Lowell Women’s Week

What training do you have in community psychology? What helped prepare you for this career?

- * UMass-Lowell Community Social Psychology - Masters program
- * Additional training (CISM, hospice, addictions, HIV/AIDS, etc.)

How has my training helped me?

For many years, I wore many hats within the organization I worked at. I was an Addictions Counselor, Director of HR, and Associate Executive Director of a non-profit agency. Again, and again I was able to pull out tools from my “community psychology toolbox” (from grant writing, to HR and diversity issues, to organizational development, etc.). I was able to develop various HIV/AIDS and substance abuse programs, evaluation methodology, quality control initiatives, community needs assessment tools, and public education forums, etc. Again, community psychology tools such as consensus building, program development, and evaluation strategies were utilized.

And for the past seven or eight years, as an Adjunct Faculty member in the Psychology Department at UMass-Lowell, I have been able to teach various courses: Introduction to Community Social Psychology, General Psychology, and Psychology and Women. I have learned over the years that, given the chance to speak, the students have

tremendous insight and wisdom. I now realize that my approach to teaching – the basis for all of my teaching skills and methodology – stems from my experience as a community psychology practitioner. So does my approach to volunteer work and all other personal and civic engagements. It is part of who I am. Community psychology fits me like a glove – I teach and I interact with students and colleagues from the perspective of community practice!

Please list any professional affiliations:

- * ICISF (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation)
- * Massachusetts Licensed Addictions Counselor (LADC I)

Other comments or other information relevant to your work as a community practitioner:

When I was in the Community Psychology Program (and after), I truly felt that we actually COULD "be the change you want to see in the world"* (at least in some small way)! (*Gandhi)

I was also encouraged, guided, (and expected) to pursue one of my primary interests (HIV/AIDS, especially among women in our community). To be able to do research, design prevention and intervention programs, evaluation strategies, etc. helped me in so many ways after graduation.

Some things I continue to use or value from my community psychology and community practice experiences:

- AWARENESS!!!
- Appreciation for being part of the greater good!
- How important a sense of community is.
- The importance of "pay it forward"
- Appreciation for what my students at UML continue to teach me...
- Critical thinking skills!
- Relationships and contacts (especially in the Greater Lowell community)!
- Confidence and courage!
- Organizational development skills!
- Psychology and Women.....academic and actual!!

What other experiences or training have contributed to or enhanced your ability to work as a community psychologist?

Being able to **recognize** the individuals who actually live and work as community psychologists, and then **learn** from them – this began while I was in graduate school at UML (professors such as Bill Berkowitz, Anne Mulvey and Meg Bond who, by their example, demonstrated that community psychology is the realistic lens through which we can view our community, analyze

it, and then actually make changes that truly make a difference. Some people (such as these 3 community and academic leaders) are able to apply the principles of community psychology because the work is a reflection of core values involving respect, equality, positive growth for humanity. Over the years, in my various professional and volunteer roles involving community psychology practices, I have often been able to recognize other individuals who may not actually have the degree in community psychology, but they clearly 'get it'.

The ability to look at social change through a systemic perspective, to address issues on multiple levels, whether in research, prevention or intervention requires grounded energy and a deep understanding of protective factors and restraining forces. Those of us who are committed to the practice of community psychology have that ability and even better, are willing and able to share our skills and insights with others.

Are there other ways you use your community psychology background and training, either unpaid or in paid roles other than your primary work?

This may be repetitive, but my background and training enhances my ability to be an effective board member (eg. Girls Inc., SuitAbility) and volunteer mental health clinician for the Greater Lowell Critical Incident Stress Management team (GLCISM). I frequently find myself involved in community organizing and other special projects that 'pop up' for families and community groups. Community psychology skills relating to evaluating programs, grantwriting, multiculturalism, as well as prevention/intervention/postvention are just some of the areas of my training that I continue to use!