



Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) – Innovation (INN) Project Brief

Project: Music Therapy for Asians/Asian Americans

Proposed by: San Mateo County Behavioral Health & Recovery Services Office of Diversity & Equity's Chinese Health Initiative and Filipino Mental Health Initiative, and Creative Vibe Therapy

Total Amount Requested: \$940,000 (\$755K services, \$110K admin, \$75K eval)

Duration of Project: 4 years (3 years of services, 6 mths start-up, 6 mths post eval)

Background

San Mateo County's MHSA Three-Year Plan prioritized strategies to increase culturally-focused community engagement and create culturally responsive and trauma-informed systems. The proposed project was identified as a priority to address the need.

The Challenge

Asian Americans experience systemic and cultural stressors that negatively impact their mental health, but they often do not seek behavioral health services.¹ In San Mateo County, Asians and Asian Americans make up 1 in 3 residents (31.8%), but only 2.6% of Asian/Pacific Islander adults used specialty behavioral health services and just 1.6% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth used specialty mental health services in fiscal year 2019-2020 – one of the lowest penetration rates by race/ethnicity in the county.² Many Asians and Asian Americans do not seek behavioral health services until they are in a crisis. In San Mateo County, the percent of suicide deaths by race/ethnicity showed an increase for Asians from 15% in 2019 for to 25% in 2020.³ The low likelihood of seeking services may be due to factors including stigma, limited English proficiency, lack of linguistically and culturally responsive providers and services, systemic barriers and more.⁴ For example, in the 2020 San Mateo County Stigma Baseline Survey, Asian adults scored lower on the domains of "affirming mental health beliefs" and "mental health inclusive behavior" compared to White and Latino/a/x adults.⁵ There is a need for innovative ways to outreach to and support the behavioral health of Asian and Asian Americans.

The Proposed Project

The proposed project will provide music therapy for Asian/Asian Americans as a culturally responsive approach to reducing stigma, increasing behavioral health literacy, promoting linkage to behavioral health services, and building protective factors for behavioral health. Music therapy provides an avenue for expression in a population where there is often discomfort talking directly about behavioral health. Because music is highly valued in Asian cultures, music therapy may be more accepted than traditional psychotherapy⁶ and can serve as an entry point to learning about behavioral health and getting connected to other behavioral health services as needed. Additionally, music therapy will enhance interpersonal skills and foster connectedness and unity across Asian/Asian American communities, thereby building protective factors that can prevent behavioral health challenges and crises.

¹ [Disparities in Mental Health Care Utilization and Perceived Need Among Asian Americans](#): 2012–2016. Kelly Guanhua Yang, Caryn R. R. Rodgers, Esther Lee, and Benjamin Lê Cook. *Psychiatric Services* 2020 71:1, 21-27. Retrieved from:

² [San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Cultural Competence Plan](#) 2020-2021.

³ [San Mateo County Suicide Prevention Roadmap 2021-2026](#).

⁴ Office of the Surgeon General (US); Center for Mental Health Services (US); National Institute of Mental Health (US). [Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity: A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General](#). Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2001 Aug. Chapter 5 Mental Health Care for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

⁵ [Community Stigma Baseline Survey: Mental Health & Substance Misuse Knowledge, Beliefs & Behavior](#). September 2, 2020.

⁶ Athena Music & Wellness Therapy. [Music Therapy: A New Avenue for Asian-American Mental Health](#). January 4, 2021.





Services

Trained music therapists, in partnership with peer workers and in consultation with behavioral health therapists, will provide goal-directed programming in the areas of social, emotional, cognitive, communication, spiritual, physical wellness. Music therapists will offer opportunities for playing, creating, and discussing music using a variety of accessible instruments including percussion, melodic instruments, and instruments from Asian countries. Services will integrate therapeutic and educational material and include:

- Music therapy group classes for youth, adults, and older adults
- Ongoing support groups for youth, adults, and older adults
- Intergenerational events/performances

Target Population

The music therapy classes and support groups will annually serve 250 Asian/Asian American residents of San Mateo County, inclusive of East Asian, South Asian, and West Asian community members, and all age groups across the lifespan. Additionally, 100+ community members will be reached through the intergenerational events. Candidates for the program may have an interest in music; respond well to highly motivating, creative, or multi-sensory experiences; and have identified areas of growth in the goal areas supported by music therapy. Services will be geared toward individuals who could benefit from social emotional skills as a preventive measure, as well as individuals living with mild to moderate mental health and/or substance use conditions in an effort to prevent further behavioral health challenges or crises.

The Innovation

- **MHSA Innovative Project Category:** Makes a change to an existing behavioral health practice
- **MHSA Primary Purpose:** Increases access to behavioral health services to underserved groups

Music therapy is an established modality that is offered in behavioral health and non-behavioral health settings. In Asian communities, music therapy has shown promising results for specific sub-ethnic groups; the proposed project is innovative in that it applies music therapy in a behavioral health setting for the Asian/Asian American community across ethnic groups and language. In addition, the project combines standard music therapy with a focus on behavioral health literacy and integrates behavioral health therapists and peer workers with trained music therapists. A somewhat similar approach has been used by a hip hop therapy program for youth in Oakland,⁷ and this project seeks to create and evaluate culturally responsive methods to use music therapy to build connection, behavioral health literacy, and protective factors in the Asian/Asian American community across all age groups.

Learning Goals

Through an independent evaluation, this project seeks to learn:

1. To what extent does music therapy promote **behavioral health literacy** and reduce behavioral health **stigma** among Asian/Asian Americans?
2. To what extent does music therapy increase **linkages to behavioral health services** for Asian/Asian Americans?
3. To what extent is music therapy effective in promoting **protective factors** among Asian/Asian Americans?

⁷ Beats Rhymes and Life, Youth Services. https://brl-inc.org/youth_services/

