Journey to Empowerment:

Building Bridges to Wellness for Pacific Islanders in the Bay Area

Asian American Recovery Services, A Program of HealthRIGHT 360

CDEP PURPOSE & GOALS

Essence of MANA is a culturally grounded prevention and early intervention program designed to reduce stigma, increase mental wellness and expand access to services for Pacific Islander communitiy in the Bay Area.

Essence of MANA builds awareness, reduces stigma, and equips Samoan and Tongan families with culturally-rooted tools to strengthen communication, empower voices and break cycles of generational trauma

DESCRIPTION

Established in 2017, Essence of MANA is funded by the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP), created to address mental health disparities in Pacific Islander communities.

Rooted in culture
Driven by community.
Guided by our village.

At Essence of MANA, we believe ***"it takes a village"*** to nurture children and foster positive change so that every family member can embark on a journey towards healing.

> ***This course is a new approach to child rearing.*** *Learning how to show love and how to speak without becoming angry. Culturally, we do what we know, but now I know different.*
>
> -Samoan Great Grand Mother

RESULTS

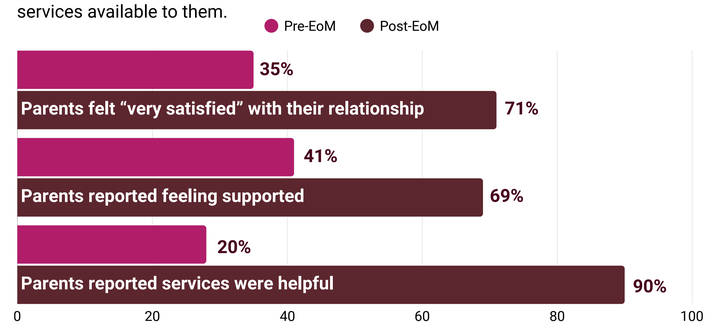
Over the Phase II Extension, Essence of MANA

Held 7 Parent Project® Cohorts with **110** Participants and **2,775** referrals made

Reached and engaged **157,095** individuals through Talanoa Tuesday

Collected **681** Pacific Islander needs assessment surveys through J2E & Outreach

Through the Essence of MANA Parent Project®, families experienced meaningful growth such as **feeling more connected, more supported, and more confident** in the services available to them.



*All differences from pre to post were statistically significant

As a result of Essence of MANA programming, there was a **10% average increase** of greater confidence and comfort discussing mental health topics

My level of comfort talking about: *(Very comfortable)*	Pre-EoM	Post-EoM
Domestic Violence	59%	67%
Child Abuse	59%	71%
Alcoholism	67%	80%
Substance Use Disorder	65%	71%
Mental Health Conditions	67%	80%

SUSTAINABILITY, SCALABILITY & SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

- Led advocacy to sustain CRDP funding & prevention infrastructure through CPSSC Subcommittee
- Culturally grounded model expanded through CURRENTS, Soalaupule Collective, and community capacity building.
- Policy & language advocacy advanced inclusive TAY, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ representation in behavioral health systems

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Increased knowledge and awareness

Stronger family unit

Improved access to care

Growth in community reach

Uplifted voices

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Pursue long-term funding through county, state, and equity-focused investments to sustain CDEP programming and provide support for Pacific Islanders
- Expand cohorts and outreach while strengthening core components: J2E, Talanoa Tuesdays, and outreach to serve more families and deepen impact.

EVALUATION DESIGN

- Evaluation design was a non-experimental, pre/post intervention, single-group design
- Pre/Post SWE and local evaluation
- Weekly cohort surveys
- Focus groups

METHODS AND STRATEGIES

- Storytelling
  - Empowering voices
  - Sharing lived experiences
- Culturally Focused
  - Concept of Vā
  - Pacific Islander lens
- Community Grounded
  - Representation
  - Relationship building
  - Nurturing established connections

IMPLEMENTATION

The Essence of MANA consists of **4 MAIN** components:

Journey to Empowerment (J2E): Monthly space aiming to break stigma and raise awareness on taboo topics

Parent Project®: 13 week program to strengthen communication and familial relationships

Talanoa Tuesday: Weekly podcast to share resources and uplift Pacific Islander voices through talanoa

Community Outreach Events: Engaging through events to connect families to culturally responsive support

> *It means a lot having someone who looks like me, who knows my culture... it's deeper when it's from your own people, people of the same color and background.*
>
> ***I felt braver. I felt like I was safer.***
>
> -Tongan/Samoan Father

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Essence of MANA would also like to thank our Village of community partners and participants.

Lastly, Māuru'uru Roa to our Heartwork Queen

"We are the navigators and orators of our lived experiences... Only we can tell our stories"

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