

**CLIENTS**

Spring Lake Park District 16's Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative was recently featured in the Star Tribune (April 27, 2005). The article described their efforts towards preventing violence, drug and alcohol use, sexual promiscuity and other "risk" behaviors. The article can be found on-line at: <http://www.startribune.com/stories/142/5368004.html>.

**STAFF**

The Improve Group recently won an award from the Minnesota chapter of the National



The Improve Group celebrates at the NAWBO awards luncheon. Front row: Kifah Abdi, Kari Schuch, Leah Goldstein Moses, and Sharon Roe Anderson (of Aurora Consulting). Back row: Linda Garrett-Johnson (The Word Applied Consulting), Jules Goldstein, Deborah Goldstein, Marian Kimball Eichinger, and Nancy Weiss (Training and Organizational Development consultant).

Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) for Young Business Woman of the Year. We celebrated at the NAWBO awards banquet on April 28, 2005, where all the award winners were serenaded with a song:

(sung to the tune of "All My Loving" by the Beatles)  
*The Improve Group is expert in facilitation and research Delving deep to assess their clients' needs Serving government agencies and non-profit communities Wowing them with high-caliber strategies*

Staff participated in interesting learning opportunities lately:

- Recently, Kifah Abdi and Kari Schuch attended the MESI conference (See article on page 2).
- Deborah Goldstein attended the Beyond Arts Integration conference, sponsored by Arts Connection in New York City, where the topic was evaluation of arts education programs (more information available at [www.artsconnection.org](http://www.artsconnection.org)).

- Leah Goldstein Moses attended the Success Strategies for Businesswomen conference in February where she got to hear Maya Angelou, Barbara Walters, and Kathy Ireland give wonderful speeches (all speeches are on-line at: [http://media.corporate-ir.net/media\\_files/Webcast/2005/feb/officedepot/agenda.htm](http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/Webcast/2005/feb/officedepot/agenda.htm)).

- Kari Schuch is taking Spanish classes at the Resource Center of the Americas. She likes the conversational style of the classes.

**OTHER NEWS**

- Becky Stewart welcomed a new nephew, Evan, in March.
- Deborah Goldstein bought her first home in February. She is just the latest of our staff to move recently (both Marian and Marsha bought new homes last August).
- The Improve Group is starting a corporate giving program. Although we will be starting fairly small, we'd like to hear about your needs and suggestions. We hope to support local, state, and national organizations. Please feel free to contact us!

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The Improve Group Quarterly Newsletter

## Effects of Interpretation on Service Delivery & Program Effectiveness

By Deborah Goldstein and Kifah Abdi

### Why have cultural competency that includes interpretation?

For any service-oriented organization, it is important to build awareness and competency in dealing with other cultures in the service community. Services that are based in western theories and value systems may be contradictory to the value structures and worldviews of other cultures. Assumptions of what it is to be healthy, safe, happy or successful may be different.

In dealing with cultural differences, it is important for organizations to be proactive, and not reactive, with cultural competency. Building an organizational culture that can deal with cultural issues as they arise by continually working on cultural sensitivity, critical thinking, and flexibility in communication styles will help in service delivery.

Communications across cultures in service delivery can be especially challenging. Differing cultural assumptions can influence how people communicate verbally, as in appropriateness of speech, and physically, through body language. One way to solve communication problems is by conducting cross-cultural training to service staff as well as to leaders of different cultural communities. This kind of training can educate service staff on the needs of the community, and educate community members on the services available to them.

Cross-cultural communication problems are made more complex when different languages are introduced. Awareness of special needs of different cultures can leave staff frustrated without the availability of interpreters. While having bilingual or multi-lingual staff or on-site interpreters alleviates such problems, defining organizational roles and avoiding pitfalls are issues that need to be addressed.

One problem in interpretation occurs when interpreters take the matter into their own hands by acting as the client's advocate or directing the client in what to say or how to answer a question and thus not effectively delivering and clarifying messages between the client and service provider. In this way, the interpreter does not equip clients to take responsibility for their own needs.

For example, one evening Kifah received a phone call from an old client saying that her mother had been committed to the psychiatric ward at a local hospital after going for a regular doctor's appointment. When she asked for more explanation as to why her mother was committed against her will, the answer (through an interpreter) was that her mother told the doctors that she had horses in her head and can not sleep at night. It turns out that what she actually said was that she is dizzy all of the time, like being on a running horse. Simple miscommunications like that come at great cost to both the provider and the client. Therefore, it is important to let your staff and interpreters know it is okay to ask both the client and the service provider to repeat what they said if they were not understood the first time or if something seems wrong.

Professionalism is also an issue with interpretation; it can be difficult to identify boundaries when there is a conflict of interest to interpret or when clients ask interpreters for advice. However, it is the provider's responsibility to make sure that their staff and interpreters are receiving ongoing professional training on the issue of interpreter neutralism. Each provider should include a code of conduct in their employee handbook, require that their interpreters read it and make sure that they are aware of related policies.

Moreover, providers should follow up with clients to determine if they were satisfied with the service they received and if the interpretation was adequate. They should also check in during subsequent visits to determine if different interpreters are having varying results.

For more information about cultural competency and interpretation in service delivery, see the following articles:

Dunn, David, Ed. "Delivering Health Care to Refugees: Cross-Cultural Training to Enhance the Delivery of Quality Health Care to Culturally Diverse Persons." Spring Institute for International Studies. Denver, Co. 1992.

Fox, W. and Hanson J. "Communicating Across Cultures." Training and Development. v49 n1 p56-58 Jan 1995

Running Wolf, P., et al. "Cultural Competence Approaches to Evaluation in Tribal Communities." Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Rockville, MD. Apr. 2002.

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- Leah Goldstein Moses
- Kifah Abdi
- Brooke Alquist
- Deborah Goldstein
- Jules Goldstein
- Marian Kimball Eichinger
- Marsha Milgrom
- Kari Schuch
- Becky Stewart

## GIS Capability and Utility

By Deborah Goldstein and Becky Stewart

The Improve Group will soon be offering GIS services to our clients. GIS, or Geographic Information Systems, can help public agencies and non-profit organizations understand where their services are going, and where they are needed. Through our GIS technology, the Improve Group can create easy-to-read maps of any area size, from one census tract to the entire United States, displaying one to four variables in such areas as demographic data, jurisdiction, service need and service availability. Maps are great tools for communicating information to multiple groups of people. They can convey a great deal of information in an easy-to-digest format, without overwhelming an audience with a sea of numbers. Using colors and symbols, maps have a powerful visual effect, particularly in showing relationships and trends in data. In these ways, maps are useful for evaluation, planning, communications or fundraising purposes.

A few notes of caution are also in order. It can be expensive to maintain capacity in software, training and time to tailor maps for the on-going and changing needs of communities or organizations. In addition, while maps can show trends by overlapping services offered and indicators, they cannot prove causality unless the data has been gathered to prove that the services offered resulted in the indicator trends. Given the visual power of maps, this can pose a risk for potential misunderstanding.

For one interested client, The Improve Group proposed several options for displaying the results of grant activities:

1. One option is to map an index that captures a number of indicators that all contribute to a similar goal. For instance, such a map could show an index called "community resiliency" which is derived from data gathered about levels of resource availability, social networks, leadership capacity and optimistic attitudes about the future. Communities with different levels of community resiliency could then be assigned different values of the same hue to show level of improvement in this index over a grant period.
2. Another option is to relate service capacity to geographic areas and population to see if areas are underserved or if gaps exist in service availability.
3. The most sophisticated of map options would combine mapping an index with service areas to compare service needs to service availability.

The Improve Group derived these options from the needs that particular clients identified and focused them on the issues raised in the grant evaluation. GIS is such a flexible tool that the opportunities for mapping could be very different with a different client on a different project.

For more information on how GIS can benefit your organization, please contact Deborah Goldstein, project coordinator and office manager, at 612.722.0228, ext.1, or by email at Deborah@theimprovegroup.com.

## staff notes

### MESI Conference 2005

By Kifah Abdi

The 10th annual Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute (MESI) conference took place earlier this spring. The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity for evaluators from diverse backgrounds to network with each other, while learning about evaluation approaches, techniques, and methods. Participants are able to connect with evaluators in different fields and share strategies and best practices. The pre-session, on March 7th and 8th, was designed to familiarize participants with evaluation. During the pre-session, I attended the presentation "Finding Value in Evaluation" given by Stacey Stockdill that focused on the history of evaluation.

The regular conference, from March 9th-11th, included breakout sessions on a variety of topics and presentations from experts in the field, such as Jean King, Richard Krueger, Michael Quinn Patton, and Michael S. Scriven. These workshops and presentations enhanced my knowledge evaluation, its history, as well as how theory becomes practice. Since most of my previous evaluation experience is with the United Nations and with projects that focus on quantitative elements, it helped me understand how to work with qualitative standards and guidelines that are not as integral to projects at the international level. As with any conference, I enjoyed some presenters more than others; and found some pieces of information more useful than others. Overall, I enjoyed the conference, found it to be useful, and recommend it to others hoping to learn more about evaluation.

## Considering Collaborative Advantage

By Marsha Milgrom and Kari Schuch

What are the short and long-term advantages and disadvantages of collaboration among schools, law enforcement, mental health and community groups? The Improve Group will explore this question and the related concept of "collaborative advantage" over the next year and a half, in the Minnesota Safe Schools/Healthy Students Research Consortium project.

In January, the Improve Group was awarded one of two national contracts to conduct research related to Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS), a federal initiative developed to prevent school violence. The SS/HS initiative is sponsored by the U.S. departments

of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. Together, they have jointly awarded grants to hundreds of urban, suburban and rural school districts across the nation since 1999. For the research phase of the project, the Improve Group will work with the participating Minnesota sites and their local evaluators. These sites include the public school districts of Cloquet, Fertile-Beltrami, Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Spring Lake Park, and Stephen-Argyle.

The Consortium will work to define collaborative advantage, and to understand how it can be applied to the goals of building strong relationships, improving client outcomes, increasing

local social capital, increasing public policy influence, and improving overall quality-of-life in local communities.

This will be accomplished by examining the following:

- Which outcomes have been achieved
- How these outcomes are achieved
- Where overlap exists between sites
- What some unexpected outcomes have been

Once the research phase of the project is completed, the Improve Group plans to share its findings in a published technical report and articles to other SS/HS sites and interested parties nationwide. Results should be available in the spring of 2006.



### Recent Events

The Improve Group was a sponsor of the 79th annual Minneapolis Urban League Dinner on Thursday, April 7th. Kari and Leah of the Improve Group are pictured here with the event's Keynote Speaker Reverend Al Sharpton.

## community spotlight

Tom Daniel, AICP, was recently promoted to Manager of Economic Development for the City of Minneapolis' Planning and Economic Development Department (CPED). He oversees the work of 17 staff in five specific development teams. Tom began working at CPED five years ago, as a Project Coordinator for the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, which merged with the City's planning department in early 2002. We decided to ask him a few questions.

Q: How do you characterize the nature of your work?

A: We help increase the number of living wage jobs for citizens of Minneapolis, increase the tax base and strengthen commercial corridors.

Q: That sounds interesting. What challenges and rewards you in your work?

A: I get great satisfaction in helping people make the city a better place for those who live, work and play here. The most challenging aspect of my work is the volume of activity – which is not uncommon in city planning.

Q: What special perspective do you bring to your work?

A: I come from a community organizing background. I care about the welfare of individuals in the city.

Q: For those unfamiliar with the industry, what does the acronym AICP stand for?

A: American Institute of Certified Planners

The Improve Group extends its congratulations to Tom Daniel and Community and Economic Development and Planning.