Health Equity Alliance of Long Island Monthly Meeting

March 16th, 2022

Guest Speakers: Melissa Wettengel, Aviva Cohen, Kris Bly, and James Ford from Hands Across Long Island

**Updates**

* New York State Department of Health (DOH) released a new 1115 Waiver concept paper last year.
  + The new concept paper focuses on health equity, recognizes the impact of COVID-19 and gives a strong opportunity for a coalition like HEALI to address the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH).
  + The concept paper will likely be put in an application form for public comment after the budget period (April 1st).
* HEALI continues to do a Community Health Worker (CHW) assessment.
  + Dr. Martine Hackett and students from Hofstra University are developing a survey tool to assess what different types of CHW programs are currently on Long Island.
* The HEALI team is working with Unite Us to ensure that we are prepared to engage the coalition once their system is running.
* HEALI will be contracting with Public Health Solutions to help with Value-Based Payment reimbursement.

**Hands Across Long Island**

Melissa Wettengel and Aviva Cohen

* Hands Across Long Island (HALI) is a grassroots, peer community organization founded in 1988.
  + They are the only peer-run organization on Long Island.
  + Within the CHW and Community Health Advocate umbrella, Hands Across Long Island’s peer specialist program sits within that umbrella.
* HALI provides non-clinical support and advocacy to address the SDOH for people who struggle with significant mental health challenges.
  + Those who suffer from severe mental health challenges are disproportionally affected by poverty, homelessness, incarceration, etc.
* Every HALI employee has previously experienced some of the challenges stated above.
  + They utilize their lived experience to support others going through similar situations.
  + They give individuals a safe space to help them feel empowered to build their recovery.
  + These individuals have walked the path of healing/recovery and serve as role models for their peers
* Many Peer Specialists can offer valuable knowledge and real-life experiences that other mental health professionals are unable to provide. They can reach those going through the most challenging situations because they may have been down a similar road.
* HALI also supports other organizations build peer capacity through training and internships.
* State-based certification:
  + Family and Youth Peers, OASIS (drug addiction), and certified peer specialists all require accreditation from the state.

Kris Bly

* Kris is the Senior Wellness Specialist for the My Body Program.
  + They focus on physical wellness, ranging from physical sports, shopping and cooking.
  + They seek to build comfort and trust within the community.
  + Once they build trust within the community, it helps HALI better engage with the community members.

James Ford

* James works with incarcerated individuals to help them prepare for the transition back into society.
  + 85-90% of the individuals James works with are in prison for a drug-related offense.
    - The recidivism rate among those James worked with dropped by around 60/65%.
  + HALI helps connect these individuals with other services offered.
    - Food pantries, legal services, mental health care, etc.
  + The shared lived experience James has helped the incarcerated individuals trust him more.
    - When released, most individuals do not trust “establishment” organizations which are why peer specialist can be more effective than alternatives.