



CMAA partners with MHA of Greater Lowell to bring services to Lowell's Cambodian Community

Thanks to a grant from the Greater Lowell Health Alliance, visitors to the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association will now have an opportunity to meet Tooch Van, one of MHA of Greater Lowell's newest employees. Van is working as an outreach manager based at CMAA to provide education, support, counseling and referrals to other services, including those available at MHA. He will be available to individuals who are interested in learning more about how to deal with the emotions like anger or depression, work through personal issues related to family, marriage, stress or addiction, and cope with life changes such as divorce, death, or job loss. In particular, for those whose lives have been impacted by trauma, Van will help them to identify how that history is playing out in their everyday lives. As a bicultural and bilingual member of the Cambodian community himself, it is hoped that he will be particularly effective in establishing a relationship with those that CMAA serves, and with that relationship, bridging the gap that often keeps individuals from approaching MHA for support.

The partnership between MHA and CMAA has been a priority for Executive Director Daniel Nakamoto since he joined MHA in late 2014. "Cambodians represent the largest minority population in Lowell, and I feel it is our responsibility to find ways to offer services that are sensitive to their unique needs, language and culture," said Nakamoto. For his part, CMAA Executive Director Sovanna Pouy values the the partnership because he recognizes the unmet needs among his fellow Cambodians, particularly among survivors of the Pol Pot regime . "It has been estimated that 60% of individuals who lived through the atrocities of Khmer Rouge, the difficulties of immigration, and often the hardship of poverty in a strange new land are struggling with mental health issues," said Pouy. Left untreated, those struggles can reach across generations, impacting children and grandchildren as well. "Our partnership with MHA signals our commitment to identifying these needs and connecting people to resources that will improve their everyday lives," concluded Pouy.

Van is excited about this new opportunity to serve his community. "It is heartening to know that we can help others through this program, and I'm particularly proud to be in a position to reach out to our community members with information about how they can learn how to deal with the anger, fear, anxiety, and other negative emotions that are impacting their ability to learn, work and love." Van is available at the CMAA. He plans to start up some groups around relaxation and mindfulness in the new year. For more information, please call CMAA at 978 454-6200 or email Tvan@mhallowell.org or Tvan@cmaalowell.org.

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