

FEATURED

Hispanic cultural competency, interpretation programs offered

By CONNIE CONNOLLY cconnolly@chespub.com Oct 13, 2017

EASTON — The Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center (CMRC) in Easton is launching a series of initiatives to help Talbot Countians better understand their Hispanic neighbors.

Dr. Lorelly Solano, the new Hispanic outreach coordinator at CMRC, is working with the Talbot Language and Cultural Competence Committee, which was formed last year, to design an upcoming workshop for bilingual interpreters as well as cultural competence training for local businesses, organizations and agencies.

The local bilingual community can explore an interpretation career in Talbot County at a one-day Community Interpretation Workshop on Oct. 24. International interpreter trainer Marjory Bancroft of Cross Cultural Communications will introduce participants to community interpreting as a profession to help enhance access to community services for limited English-proficient residents.

The target audience for the 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. workshop at the Talbot County Department of Social Services is the current bilingual workforce, bilingual volunteers, and other individuals with demonstrated proficiency in English and Spanish who may be interested in pursuing an interpretation career in Talbot County. The workshop will be limited to 25 attendees who are asked to register by Friday, Oct. 20.

The workshop will also explore topics such as language access laws, a national code of ethics for interpreters, standards of practice and basic interpreting requirements, protocols and skills, and opportunities for professional development. Participants will also learn how to facilitate meaningful communication across language and cultural differences.

"It would be delightful if we could increase the number of professional interpreters on call," Solano said. "It's my personal mission to empower people who have limitations by virtue of their language and give them the tools to help people achieve their maximum potential. Most people (in the Hispanic community) have a burning desire to connect to the community by learning English."

As Hispanic Outreach Coordinator in charge of CMRC's Cultural Competency and Interpreter Program (CCIP), Solano coordinates, develops and cultivates the program throughout the Mid-Shore area. Originally from Costa Rica and fluent in both English and Spanish, Solano earned a Ph.D. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy from the University of Delaware School of Public Policy and Administration. She joined CMRC on Sept. 4.

The CCIP was created to insure the non-English speaking (NED) Hispanic community of Talbot County has access to trusted, professional interpreters and cultural competency services across all agencies of Talbot County. Solano is responsible for establishing and coordinating various focus groups, cultural competency training programs and training programs for local interpreters.

Last year, representatives of local Talbot County agencies formed a steering committee to implement a Language and Cultural Competence program. This initiative recognizes the unique challenges that non-English speakers experience in accessing resources, as well as local agencies' opportunities to ensure the provision of high quality services to all residents, including those who face language and cultural barriers.

The steering committee, known as the Talbot County Language and Cultural Competence Committee is comprised of representatives from county agencies, including social services, health, public schools, emergency services and the sheriff's office; Choptank Community Health System; University of Maryland Shore Regional Health; Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center and Chesapeake College. The committee's mission is to increase the agencies' cultural competence and capacity for bilingual communication with the Hispanic community.

Other organizations that provide bilingual services in the community are also contributing to the work of the steering committee. Bilingual professionals from organizations such as For All Seasons, Upper Eastern Shore Office of Maryland Legal Aid, Mid Shore Pro Bono, Mid Shore Council on Family Violence, Schaubert-Van Schaik Insurance Group and staff members from the leading local agencies have "generously shared their valuable experience and guidance," Solano said.

"Altogether, the steering and advisory committees for this project are shaping a vision for the non-English speaking Hispanic members of our community to have access to trusted, professional translators and culturally competent services across all agencies of Talbot County," Solano said.

"It is the hope of the Talbot County Language and Cultural Competence Committee that, one day, the gap for bilingual interpretation will be filled with an organized and self-sustaining network of trusted and qualified interpreters," Solano said.

"With no doubt, the fluent knowledge of the English and Spanish languages is becoming an important asset that will result in increased professional opportunities in the future," Solano said. "The recent adoption of the Seal of Bilingual Program by Talbot County Public Schools demonstrates today's relevance of bilingual skills."

Since March, the Talbot Language and Cultural Competence Committee has sponsored eight cultural competence presentations at diverse agencies and organizations, bringing awareness to more than one hundred individuals who interact (or would be likely to interact) with Hispanic clients on a daily basis.

"For organizations and providers, cultural competence is the ability to effectively deliver services that meet the social, cultural and linguistic needs of clients," Solano said. "At the individual level, cultural competence refers to the knowledge and awareness of one's cultural identity and the ability to appreciate, respect and interact effectively with people from different cultures."



During the presentations, CMRC Director Matthew Peters has shared his personal perspective of living thirteen years in rural Guatemala and serving the Hispanic community in Easton since 2012. "For many participants, learning about the heart-breaking reality of some Central American countries is an eye-opening experience that leaves them with a thirst for more knowledge and the desire to make a difference," Solano said.

"Once you get to know about the experiences they have come through, it's not possible to remain indifferent morally or spiritually," Solano said. She added that to be culturally competent means, for example, recognizing that members of the non-English speaking community "love being called by their names and hearing them pronounced correctly, making eye contact and being made to feel welcomed and dignified."

Following the presentations, "more than half of the participants expressed a strong willingness to adapt their methods and approaches when working with Hispanic clients," Solano said. "The impact of the Cultural Competence trainings is growing as more presentations continue to be requested. All Talbot County agencies, organizations, and businesses wishing to learn more about Cultural Competence are welcome to request a free training session for their staff."

To learn more about the work of the Talbot County Language and Cultural Competence Committee, to request free Cultural Competence training, or to obtain more information about the Oct. 24 Community Interpretation workshop, please contact Solano, at lorely@chesmrc.org or call her at 443-786-1120.

Founded in November, 2012, The Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center empowers people from different cultures to become successful and engaged members of our community by coordinating educational and informational programs.

Since its inception, CMRC has provided services to more than 3,000 non-English speakers in Talbot and surrounding counties, involving over 6,000 separate requests for information and referral. For more information, please visit the center's website at www.chesmrc.org.

The Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center, Inc. is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3), and a public charity under Section 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Follow me on Twitter [@connie_stardem](https://twitter.com/connie_stardem).

