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Raising Easton's "cultural competence"

By KAYLA RIVAS krivas@stardem.com Jun 14, 2018



Matthew R. Peters and Lorelly Solano, Ph.D. pose outside of Easton Library after hosting the town's first "Cultural Competer discussion, lead through the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center.

By KAYLA RIVAS/krivas@stardem.com

EASTON — The Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center held its first community discussion on June 8 with hopes of growing Easton's cultural competence.

As the Hispanic community grows on the Eastern shore, director Matthew Peters and Hispanic Outreach Coordinator Lorelly Solano, Ph.D., felt it was important to have an open conversation about cultural differences in the community.

"We've come a long way to connect with so many people. Our success builds more trust," said Peters.

The Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center, created in September of 2012, provides a wide range of services for recent immigrants on the Eastern shore, from filling out citizenship forms to helping make calls for dentist appointments, according to Peters.

These services help immigrants better integrate into the community, Solano said. Of the current 2,800-person company client list from the Eastern shore, 55 percent of clients are from Guatemala, according to data from ChesMRC. The following largest sectors were Mexico with 15 percent, Honduras with 11 percent and Haiti with 7 percent.

Peters said, of the Talbot county specifically, the Guatemalan population is between 60-65 percent of the client base. After having lived and worked in Guatemala for 13 years, Peters knows all too well of the country's extreme hardships.

"The chronic malnutrition rate for children right now in Guatemala is at 50 percent," Peters said. "60 percent of the population now in Guatemala lives in poverty. Poverty there means less than \$3.20 a day."

Peters also explained that 23 percent of Guatemalans currently live in extreme poverty.

"The one percent we have here? In Guatemala it's more like the 0.0001 percent," Peters said. "260 individuals own 56 percent of the wealth right now in Guatemala."

Peters further explained how the Guatemalan government does not give anything out for free.

"No free school, no free medicine," Peters said. "If you have money, you're fine. If you don't, you die. That's the reality."

In March and April of this year, Guatemalan children were entering the Eastern shore at a rate of four percent per week, according to Peters. The current estimate is one new incoming child per week.

"Why the Eastern shore of all places?" Peters asked. "It's a shared culture, but not necessarily shared family."

There are 21 different spoken languages in Guatemala, and not one language can understand another, Peters explained.

While current residing Guatemalans on the Eastern shore may not personally know the incomers, they figure that they sound a like and look a like, and thus extend their arms.

The community discussion also worked to differentiate between terms like Hispanic and Latino, refugee and asylee, immigrant and migrant, and Muslim and Islam. Participants were further asked what culture means to them.



To further assist these newcomers to Easton, The Talbot Language and Cultural Competence Committee is hosting *The Community Interpreter* next week from June 11-15 from 8:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m at Chesapeake College. The program is in partnership with Cross Cultural Communications (CCC) and Chesapeake College.

The Community Interpreter is a comprehensive 40-hour certificate program that meets the minimum requirements for professional community interpreting.

The program costs \$750 per participant, which includes five days of instruction from nationally renowned CCC trainer, Ms. Carola E. Green, instruction materials, certificate, complimentary breakfasts and free parking.

To be recognized as an interpreter, you need to demonstrate an advanced proficiency level in your non-native language (including Sign Language), according to the program's requirements.

“Just because you are bilingual does not mean you are an interpreter,” Peters said. “You need training and professional development.”

"The training next week will be a huge economic development piece here in Talbot County," Peters said. "Social services spends tens of thousands of dollars using translation services from the Western Shore. Why can't that money stay here?" he asked.

There are currently 31 interpreters enrolled in next week's training.

"Our goal is to try to facilitate the integration through cultural education and also building language capacity throughout the agencies and the community," Solano said.

According to Peters, Caroline County is very interested in all of this and Queen Anne's is the Center's next target.

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