

How do we do 'cultural safety' in the time of COVID-19?



Victorian Transcultural Mental Health
(VTMH)

Webinar series, 2020

Session: Community Voices
Wednesday, 16th September 2020
(Abridged Transcript) [1 hour]

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[SHEHANI: Webinar opens, Acknowledgment of country]

2:12

SHEHANI: The focus of today's session is community voices. This session we are hoping to explore living in the time of COVID-19, and especially what this means for people's mental health and wellbeing. I'm thrilled that joining us today we have Summayyah Sadiq-Ojibara – psychotherapist and counsellor, welcome Summayyah, Tigist Kebede, culturally-inclusive counsellor, also known as "The Coloured Therapist", welcome Tigist, Abdiqafar Ururshe, spokesperson for the Australia Muslim Social Services Agency (AMSSA) and board member of AMSSA Youth Connect, welcome Abdiqafar, and last but not least of course Ahmed Dini, who was named local hero, Australia Day in 2013, and is currently co-founder

of the Ubuntu Project which is a community-led service provider in advocacy and cultural service delivery. So, welcome all of you and thank you for all being with us today. We will hear from our speakers, talking about ongoing issues of inequity that have been magnified during COVID-19, especially for communities living in public housing in inner city Melbourne. They will share their understandings of the situations facing communities and discuss their views on its impact on mental and wellbeing. We will also hear about the roles, they are playing right now with communities as their friends, allies and advocates.

Cultural safety is one of the guiding principles that informs VTMH's work with services and communities. Practising cultural safety in mental health care demands that we critique and transform how power is embedded within different knowledge paradigms, different professional practices, organisational structures, policy directives and also funding priorities. So, today's session has been developed with the panellist with this perspective in mind. And we hope today's reflection will deepen our understanding of how to engage with communities in ways that are culturally safe. I believe it is also an opportunity to learn about how communities are supporting themselves and what action needs to be taken by us as services and government, on many levels with communities as partners.

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6:35

[Webinar commences]

SHEHANI: Let's start, I can see some questions have already come up, before we have started so let's get on with it. And maybe I can start with you Ahmed. We know that the situation in the past months, and in particular during the time of the lockdown, in some ways only highlighted a bigger story for people living with long standing barriers, including those living in the inner-city towers. Can we talk to the situation facing your communities, right now, as far as you know it?

7:20

AHMED: Well good morning and thank you Shehani, and good morning to my fellow panellists and everyone else who has come and wants to know about what has taken place and what it means to live in this pandemic as a community member or as someone working in the sector. Well yes, I for us as a community it has been really quite challenging, and the reason I say that is because, you know, it's a very diverse community. That has its challenges but nonetheless also has richness in how we engage and how we come together to fight pandemics like this.

And I think a lot of people know that in terms of information sharing about the seriousness of corona virus, wasn't something that was coming into this community so quickly, and hence, why, especially when we had the second wave, it was able to get into the towers that I live in. And basically, go through community. But in saying that the challenges for our community have always been there, challenges of unemployment, challenges of housing, challenges around education, challenges around mental health itself. But now, because of COVID-19, those challenges have been more exacerbated and brought to the surface, so everyone can basically see. But these are things we have been advocating for on many levels. And also – it's not an issue that we face, but it's something that we always advocate for as a community – is the cultural appropriateness of everything that's done within these communities. Language. Respect of heritage. But now because of COVID-19 we saw the important role of what culture and what values and morals, can play during the hard lockdown.

9:21

Because for us as a community, as you all understand, when the nine towers went through the hard lockdown, as residents, as members of society, we just expected some sort of a consultation to take place, and say, guys, this is what's happening in the towers, but that wasn't forthcoming. And also, instead of receiving health care workers, professionals, and cultural information, we received 500

police officers. And that also showed to us as Australians that we are second class citizens, we are in our own niche.

10:06

But the fact of the matter is, the amazing work that was undertaken by community, by residents and also by very close members of our community who don't live in the towers but who came to our aid at the moment we needed them, and then the wider Australian community also came and supported our communities. But the thing that I want to learn from that is that the one thing the government, and the one thing that the people who made this decision, expected, and what we were able to showcase, was in contrast, was the complete opposite. Because at the end of the day, any human being, regardless of colour, creed, or wherever they come from, wants to fight this disease. And we want to fight it together to ensure, that we make sure, you know that COVID-19 is no longer within our society. But that wasn't obviously taken into consideration when you have 500 police officers, it was like - oh well we lock them up, we tell them don't come out of your house, because the houses are susceptible to COVID and they're all going to come out - we were never going to do that.

11:10

But for me, to be honest with you Shehani, I think community, at this stage, right now, probably the overwhelming challenge that we face is mental health. And I say this because a lot of members of these communities went through so much that the rest of society didn't. And when we came out of the hard lockdown, we went into Stage 4 [restrictions] straight away. I don't want people to forget that we still live in the same environment, you know, we still have large families living in small cubicles.

And for us as a community we expected to have a thorough and a responsive mental health support system put in place to support members of this community in their own languages, in their own understanding of what mental health is. But that hasn't been forthcoming. And now we're dealing with year 11, year 12 students who because they live in these towers, and lost family members, they are not logging into ZOOM, for the right reasons, who are being told by school teachers – oh, if you don't attend the next class setting that you might repeat year 11 or year 12 next year, or you know, you might have to move on from school – well you know, you need to, like, this is a year in every 100 years we get a pandemic like this.

So, the understanding and the empathy from outside, anyone who is going to do something with these communities, has to change that. But when we have huge

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numbers of young people saying, I'm in danger of repeating, or leaving school, or being dropped out of school after I went through all of these issues, it's something that we needed to work on. And that could have been avoided if we had a responsive support system in place. Ah thank you.

12:52

SHEHANI: Ah. Great. I completely agree, and I'm learning as I'm hearing from you. I'm just wondering if we can go to Summayyah. To see what your thoughts are Summayyah, and maybe build on what Ahmed was talking about.

13:13

SUMMAYYAH: Yes, welcome everyone, and thank you for being here... an important thing we talk about in the community is that either we are speaking and not being heard, or we are being told what we are saying should be said in a different way. I'm really glad that we have this opportunity...

When we've brought it to the point of mental health, it really helps us to highlight the fact that when people say that "we are all in this together" we are not actually knowing what that means because if we did, we would allow ourselves to start to know "what are we in together".

When it comes to mental health and we talk about the towers and the communities, there are some things that cut across the fact that we care about our own health and safety that there is need for dignity and respect, that the people that are engaged with have the intelligence that can be engaged with and there is a lot of capacity from within. If one comes from a position of being a benefactor, who is just going to tell the people what needs to happen without them being part of that process, then that more, than ever before, takes away any sense of power whatsoever and if you talk about mental health, that is very central to it.

[The lockdowns] were very traumatic, the whole experience in itself, and what trauma does is it changes the dimensions of your reality, where you feel like you have no control whatsoever and that was very rife in this time. In addition to what was already being experienced in terms of fear, in terms of uncertainty, just not knowing what we were equipped to deal with, and then there is the traumatic experience of the presence of authority – and this could mean only one thing – that we had done something wrong and we need to be punished. If that is what people are feeling, this can exacerbate any kind of present or knew mental health issues around anxiety and depression...

16:06

SHEHANI: Tigist would you like to add to that?

16:15

TIGIST: First, I would also like to also acknowledge that I am also meeting you on Wurundjeri land and that this land is unceded and I pay respect to any elders both past present and extend that to any Indigenous Australians who might be in the chatroom and any elders here and also to acknowledge that community responses to pandemics to incarceration have always been at the forefront of Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and that we take a lot of our understandings and approaches from First Nation communities...

Currently what community is facing, is systemic issues that continuously are unaddressed, and what's happening is community is being applauded for surviving. And this survival is seen as their strength and when you see a trauma response as a strength you start to disconnect from their humanity, and you start placing them on a platform of – you know – you guys have got this, we'll just leave this with you...

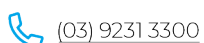
Nothing exists in a silo and if we are having a survival response, it's because it is the only thing we can do e.g. how AMSSA, volunteers responded, and the way they continually respond is a survival response. However, as humans we cannot be living in survival states all the time.

It is detrimental to our health and wellbeing and if we are constantly looking at communities from a deficit approach and pathologies and put them in these boxes that shouldn't be there and as a response, we don't solve the problem. I think that's what's happening for community right now. Everyone has identified issues, but there is a scramble – what do we do?... people don't action anything and because we don't action anything, we just put everyone on pedestals. That's what I think is happening.

18:34

SHEHANI: That is a great way to go on to my next question. This is something we have been thinking of... How we got to know you all is because each of you had particular roles to play during the lockdown, especially in relation to the inner-city towers. My question is about can you let us know what your role was in supporting and advocating for communities and I would like to start the questions with Abdiqafar because we heard and read about how AMSSA mobilised immediately to put a lot of supports together at the time. Would you mind letting us know what your role was?

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19:37

ABDIQAFAR: Thank you Shehani and welcome everyone... As Shehani said, I was heavily involved in the crisis relief effort of AMSSA, Leading Operations Manager, whereby pretty much handled everything with donations that were coming in... how they were going to be sent, to how many numbers of residents in the towers, what kind of food was culturally appropriate..., putting them on to trucks and vans, having them sent to each tower, one-by-one... managing a lot of people...

Everyone was so willing to help. Once we set up our Instagram for this and we received a lot of support from different ethnicities and regions in regional Victoria as well... A lot of business got involved. For me it was an amazing experience in the midst of a very bad time, a traumatic time, it was beautiful to see so many people come together to help the people in need. It goes to show that the wider Australian community was for us when maybe the government wasn't. What made is difficult was that the people living in the towers were not your ordinary people. They were people who come from different backgrounds. They needed certain kinds of food, meeting that was another task in itself. My role was predominantly managing the efforts throughout the two weeks. Til today I'm still involved as we still have special orders going out on a daily basis. So, my work here is still not done.

21:58

SHEHANI: ...At the end of today's session we might put the link... if people are wanting to get more information from you in terms of how they can help AMSSA. Let's continue to talk, I was certainly taken up by the immediate response... Tigist you were another person that I came across via media, on social media and ABC to talk about the issues that people were going through. Could you talk to us about what you saw your role as and what your role was during that time?

23:04

TIGIST: Initially I was in a hospital [working] when I first heard the news and I have family that live in the towers. I actually ended up driving past that Saturday night and I saw police everywhere.... I didn't become involved until the Monday when I attempted to go to work I was so distressed from the news, I was hearing form the community, not necessarily from the media. It was... the lack of information, lack of knowing what the future was going to happen and, one back, the lack of food! Being told you can't leave the house! Not everyone has the privilege to have food, have supplies and all those things. I think I broke down crying...It was during the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and they didn't

have bread to eat their food with. There were all these kinds of dietary requirements that were not being met. I hopped on Instagram... got to see AMSSA Youth Connect... I took leave and immediately started responding in that way [in] a volunteer capacity... an immediate crisis response, and we all slowly, gradually, naturally found where our strengths lay. My strengths lay in advocacy.... making sure that the information that was getting around was accurate information based on what was going on, on the ground, not on media perception. Secondly, it ended up that there were so many mental health concerns from things such as... someone couldn't get Panadol, when I literally had it in my hand and that was causing people significant distress, all the way up to getting an ambulance for someone... responding to medical and mental health needs.... Eventually we started doing crisis response to the volunteers, ensuring that their vicarious trauma had a space where it could be held and that they weren't going to be burnt out... That was kind of all the different roles that I played.

25:42

SHEHANI: In some ways, I am thinking of your roles of about five services, between the two of you or more! We have still spoken to Ahmed or Summayyah about what their roles were.... Ahmed, we talked about how you are a cofounder of the Ubuntu project... we will put the link for that as well. I know you all did a lot but anything specific that stood out to you from the Ubuntu project in terms of your role at this time.

26:17

AHMED: Depending on how you look, fortunately or unfortunately, I was also among the 3000 residents who were lock up in the towers. For me, I can remember like it was yesterday, I just heard the premier saying, you know, that the towers in north Melbourne and Flemington would be placed in lockdown effective immediately. To be honest with you, I just looked out of my window, oh well I'm not leaving my house so basically, I stayed home and that allowed me to jump on instagram where I know a lot of young people ...and started engaging... we used to have daily live sessions, where my colleague [names] and Abdiqafar... we would come alive at night time and basically, we could give another perspective on what was happening downstairs outside of the towers, about what it felt like being in the towers I couldn't do anything.... It was five days, and waiting for my food to arrive. The thing for us is we were able to help... and direct people from Ubuntu...

28:03 ...as a community we came together immediately ...

28:16 we were able to fill the void of the confusion that ensued from the hard lockdown.

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28:38

SHEHANI: Summayyah if you can hold on till the next question, there are a few questions that are coming up.... Summayyah if we can start ... with you, these issues are not something that started six months ago and having seen the way the community rallied together.... I am just wondering if we can go on to talk about changes we want to see. What are your ideas and what are the ideas coming from communities about meaningful and creative ways to support individuals and families going forward?

29:50

SUMMAYYAH: Thank you. I know there is never enough time to even begin to unpack most of things we need to be talking about here, but it's good that we have started, so I am glad for that. I was invited to think about how we can respond to what was happening by an organisation.... I set up a program called Shiffa which means healing. Shiffa is a space where we invite some of the residents to come into that space where they feel safe enough to talk about what is happening. And I refer to this in order to then go forward with regards to what can happen. Because, without really going into details about what Shiffa is about – which is still on, by the way – it gave space, a safe space for people to come and talk about what was happening in terms of their mental health, in terms of how they felt. And it is not the regular thing around, yes, I'm distressed, yes this is very hard, it really touched on key things, such as sense of safety, identity, agency, security and belonging.

So, if we are talking about possible things, I am talking about six ways of having an approach which are the 6 R's. The first is Reflective (we need to have a very clear way of documenting truthfully some of the things that have happened and use that to create a reflective program and practice moving forward). The next part is to be Responsive... (being responsive is not something that you are just doing according to the books or what some expert opinions say, but really knowing what is needed like an example of still wondering what a halal pack might look like, or whether it's appropriate to use certain language [about] distress).

The other one is to actually be Responsible in the Response (for people to take responsibility for different things in a very clear manner and just to also be accountable, so that you can then reflect on what is working and what is not working). One of the most important things is the Relational aspect, that's central. So, if I go back to Shiffa and the way I work, it has to be relational, it can't be in a clinical sense where we say we are responding to people, but people are just names

and numbers, and their humanity is missing from the conversation. The final one is Resources, not just about throwing resources at a problem, it's about actually looking at what is being provided and what is actually available, what people are going to be able to access.

33:15

SHEHANI: Thank you.... I am looking at some of the comments and there are lots of good wishes and wishes of solidarity from participants.

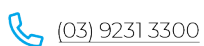
Abdiqafar many people are sharing your concerns about issues for young people. Can you talk to us, and your thoughts, about what can change? What could be a meaningful connection between services (we have a lot of representatives of services today) and communities?

34:14

ABDIQAFAR: ... How things can improve is by involving and engaging the right people.... If you are able to engage the right people and having then in the right conversations in the right spaces, then of course you will see the exact change that is needed for that specific community and that specific group of people. A lot of that is not really done. It's more like people from certain areas are speaking to government and what happens is that they are not well represented. This pandemic was a perfect example of the governments lack of knowledge of anything that actually happens in the nine towers or areas of cultural diversity and people of ethnic backgrounds. There's not much knowledge there. They don't really know about different types of food they eat, about different type of religions, environments, the holidays..., There are so many cultural days that we practice.

In saying that, things can change, one, by involving the right people and two, with the resources, putting them in the right areas. For example, employment. A lot of young kids, right now, that I know have graduated and finished university, particularly from these communities, and have struggled to find work and are working in areas that are completely different to what they have studied. And it goes to show the lack of representation. They really need to put ourselves, as young people, in positions where we can make a difference. A lot of people like myself are very ambitious and want to see a lot of change in our community, we want to better our people, especially us being second-generation Australians. We grew up here, we're educated and the general public doesn't see us like that. Instead we are seen as criminals, people who do crime, which explains the heavy police presence. I think it's creating a new image for young African Australians, and giving them a platform to make a difference. That's how things can change in the future

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37:11

SHEHANI: thank you for that....and maybe if we can finish the questions with you Tigist. What are your thoughts about what changes you want to see and what communities feel are the changes they want to see?

37:26

TIGIST: Thank you. Look I will be as blunt and honest as possible... My honest belief of what is happening in the towers, as a case study or an example, of what's happening everywhere in the country, with various communities is the approaches that have in our systems, and the systems that we have in Australia or Victoria, there are reasons why we do not have affordable housing, we don't have secure employment, a living wage. The racism and the police violence that exists and the way it exists. It is because that we are not existing in a silo and the principles and practices that we have in our systems which filter down to our people are Eurocentric views and practices and by that I mean they are essentially upholding white supremacist views whereby our intersectionality, our differences, our belief, and our systems that existed elsewhere are not upheld, to a point that Indigenous voices and beliefs are not upheld here. So, belief in how this can be solved in the future- I'm not sure if I'll be here for that future – would begin by decolonising these beliefs, by de-centring the Eurocentric views, or the white supremacist views and centring the views of people within that culture, different gender and queer identities and looking at what their needs are and how to work with them from both a bottom up and top down approach. Because right now what we have had is a bottom up approach where the burden of responsibility exists solely on the community and not within the systems they exist with and with the practices they exist with. So, what that looks like is the Shiffa program, the Ubuntu project, AMSSA Youth Connect. These are all great approaches and responses but if we are going from a top down approach as well we need to really be looking at organisations when they are applying for funding...When applying for funding for a project to work with African communities, is there a community lens on that? Is secondary consultation occurring? Is this a co-design approach? These should be a part of the fundamentals of these programs. And through that you will get such amazing voices from the community but if we are only included at the end or when – Oh my God, 'African gangs' are an issue right now, let's be retrospective – ... we are continuously going to be having band-aid responses. I would be saying to service providers and people in academia right now, is to be including people within the creation and the foundations of the work you are doing... but various voices as well in the

bedrock of what you are doing... What we might need is not a pathologised response – where you're telling us, you have PTSD in a clinical setting where it is a hospital – but what might end up happening is a healing circle where women unite and talk.... which may look quite superficial on the outside, however, what we are creating are relational responses, we are creating community, we are creating safety, we are creating healing. And through that you are able to create systemic change. But that doesn't happen. It only happens reactively... in such a short time and it is reliant on that bottom up approach. So, please look at the top down and include these voices from the very top so that it can trickle down and trickle up simultaneously.

42:20

SHEHANI: ... Let's move on to the questions. And a message to the panel from 'Friends out there. Great to see you all.' A question... How can we work together in the next little while to build a partnership that is diverse accessible, culturally safe mental health care for inner west communities?

42:32

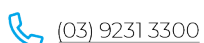
AHMED: Thank you Shehani and I think it is a response that is required... and I think it's an emergency... We have passed the emergency response in terms of the buildings. I think there are zero cases. But the pandemic and the hard lockdowns and the virus have left us reeling, to be honest, and at this stage we have an overwhelming need for support that we require around mental health. We are talking about it but for me every day we talk about it is an opportunity lost to help and support and heal someone in these towers. As we said earlier, there are multiple languages in this community, so anything that is going to be rolled out has to be done in so many different languages...

About unemployment. Statistics just released, pre-covid, out of the nine towers, there was 50% unemployment... now we are just imagining, about members of the community and how this has climbed up. If you couple that with mental health, trauma and what members of the community went through basically it is a cesspool for disaster...

Personally, I joined the Shiffa program, I went in there because I know what I went through, and I am an individual very much engaged in the sector and I friends I can talk to.

But I know young people, mothers who have large families, at this moment, require supports that need to be put in place that are guided and led by communities. If there is an organisation out, you know we have the right people, like Tigist, like Sister Summayyah, and people in the community to link into. So yeah, we are happy to engage because we

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know that any program around mental health that we put in place right now, will be saving lives, to be honest with you.

44:52

SHEHANI: I want to read a comment that has come through. It says, 'The way the community, particularly these panellists, responded to the crisis, has given me more hope for the future more than anything I have seen in the last twenty years.'...

45:35

TIGIST: ... that was from Dr Chris Lemoh who played a real pivotal role in providing, medical advocacy, health advocacy and ensuring that a lot of voices, was heard all the way up to Brett Sutton. So, thank you Dr Chris and you have been a life saver for this community and you are just as important in this journey and part our community that we really look up to.

46:14

SHEHANI: Another question... Do we know if government is providing mental health funding for primary and secondary school students, through schools? Have you heard of anything from communities or the youth that you are working with that there is special funding or not?
To Abdiqafar.

46:35

ABDIQAFAR: No, absolutely not. There has been talks but there have been no signs of support or any government funding at all. Given that year 12s are sitting their exams in about a month's time, there's little they can do, even if they wanted to help. What we try to do on behalf of AMSSA and people like Tigist, and Dini, as community advocates, is to speak to the Department of Education and get a special consideration, for particularly for these students who in VCE and sitting their final exams who had to experience that in the midst of this whole lockdown, which was a beyond hostile environment. Let alone to live, to be physically healthy was in question. I can't imagine. To sit down and try to process and study. A lot of students fell behind. Their teachers and principals are very been considerate... giving them leeway but that's the most I have heard.... But no funding whatsoever.

48:24

SHEHANI: Question for Summayyah. I am interested in what Summayyah said that Seeing authorities mean one thing, that you have done something wrong and will be punished. Is that a shared experience to having authority present? I am interested in what would help authorities, who to support community, to appear less threatening?

48:43

SUMMAYYAH: That's a great question actually. If there is one thing everyone is experiencing at the moment, it is a sense of uncertainty about a lot of things, employment, health and personal safety. And we know that by association when you see the police people's response tends to be from a place that there is a punitive reason why they are there. There is crime that is associated. And we know the history in our communities, with regards to this, and how it has been perceived... Some of the young people I have worked with became very traumatised, from the towers, because they saw the police. You have children hiding under the beds, unable to sleep, having experienced everything that presents as PTSD, in that sense. There are so much anxiety around it. When it comes to how to make it less threatening, I know this has to be long term work. Part of what Tigist was saying as well. We know that the history, particularly in this environment with the police has not been the best. Even though I know the police are making efforts in different ways, and organisations are doing many different things, this is trust that has to be earned back. So, if we are talking about creating that space where people start to trust, ... the response should not be that as soon as you have a perception that these towers are... not safe... that you take the police and just throw it at them? There is no other way to think about it except that I have done something wrong and we need to be treated this way. So, to earn the trust, spaces need to be created where there is some sense of equality in terms of the power difference, in terms of the power dynamic that is going on. Where we see the work of the police and other authorities as complementary and not as something where the community has to always explain themselves, to justify themselves, needs to continuously have to negotiate their sense of dignity and respect and all the things that matter to them. So, I do not know the answer to this. I do know that when I talk about having relational programs or opportunities, then we know what being relational means. It doesn't mean you have to take off your uniform in order to be authentic to the other person. It means you have to behave as human beings in every sense of the word, so that the person can see that about you. So that the uniform or any kind of signs or symbols of authority is not seen as a threat but as a means of safety and help. That's all I can say right now but there is a big conversation around that.

52:10

SHEHANI: Thank you Summayyah. There is this a question that seems to have come up a few times. Any thoughts about community experiences about trying to get help from services at this time and specifically mental health? Tigist, I can see you are nodding your head.

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52:33

TIGIST: Just to wrap around what Sister Summayyah said so eloquently... When talking about authority, power is always going to be there and power is a privilege and when we address how we access and distribute power that is when we talk about the different ways in which we can marginalise others. So if you can't have an authority figure that doesn't address power, that doesn't acknowledge limitations and the impacts of its power, and for something such as police or something such as politics or education systems, if they are inherently saturated in disenfranchisement and marginalisation, then the authority figure has all the power and we need to deconstruct that. This is to add on to what you were saying.

In terms of mental health responses, currently and ongoingly..., so far, my understandings are that mental health services, surprise surprise, found it really difficult to engage people. As someone who was there for majority of the time, I didn't see a lot of those services, I am sure Ahmed can attest to the times he was there as well. There was a lack of visibility. Some of the hospitals responded saying they didn't have anyone checking in. However, our community responses have shown that not only have the mental health distress increased but their lack of accessing services, or the gap between themselves and the services have increased because the betrayal and trust does not occur there. Services are now speaking around how to engage community, how to respond to community... and this is 2-3 months after what has happened. So, when Ahmed is saying this is too slow, it is too slow. People are waiting for things such as funding... meanwhile people can't wait for that. So, you do have healing circles, you have Individual responses [from practitioners] ... Services now have to actually pick up the pace and realise this is a cohort of people, people who live in housing estates are within themselves their own group of people who need to be treated differently and responded to differently because of their living circumstances. And then we can look at it from a wider community as to why people are not accessing services and you will see that it is result of the top down approach. Who is sitting as your CEO? Who is on your board? Who is on your executive? How are you applying for funding? Who was your staff? Have you just got diverse staff and not actually supporting them through policies? I know

some organisations who has no staff of colour at all for the whole community and they are wondering why they don't have diversity in the people that coming in through the door. So, it does need to be a top down approach from the very top, from government... funding all the way down to the person who is walking through the door. We need to decolonise our approach and start pulling it a part. We need the right people in the right spaces and ensure that the right voices are heard and that we actually change things ... so that we don't just keep continuing until we have another crisis.

56:38

SUMMAYYAH: I would like to add... The thing is that even with those spaces, the healing circles, there is so much increase n where I'm being called to these days. There are organisaitons that are making efforts now, providing services for some of the people I am working with, in the community. It is not just about the wider community, I am also having groups and organisations who are inviting some of us who are in the mental health space to come and engage with people, to first of all explain what this whole idea of what mental health is. And then to start engaging with people in a way that speaks to their sense of reality, what's real to them. One more quick thing... the fact that at the end of the day, who can I trust with my story? Who can I feel safe with with my story? Who will hear me and hold space for me and treat my story with respect that I need? Because one of the most important factors necessary for any kind of therapeutic outcome from any engagement has a lot to do with how I am held. And If on a larger scale, I am told, or I am described, or I am named in a certain way, and then I come to your space to come and see you and talk about the most disturbing, distressing things to me and you are either dismissive or you minimise, or you maximise the things that I don't even understand yet, I am certainly not going to come back to you. And I am going to tell everyone that that's not a safe space.


59:00

SHEHANI ...thanks everyone involved.

- End transcript -

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