

# Proposal for Culture Conversations

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## **Concept:**

Culture Conversations are public meetings where people from the host culture and immigrants get together to know each other better.

Lack of cultural understanding on the part of immigrants can lead to mental health issues, including depression, with all the negative connotations involved. Through Culture Conversations, members of the immigrant community can learn to reach out to their new host community and become full participants. By becoming acquainted with the positive values of the host community, immigrants can become more fully engaged.

Through the history of the United States, new immigrant communities have had very low standing in the community. In many cases this is because of a poor understanding of the cultural values that the immigrant community brings. Also, each culture views “cultural adjustment” as adherence to the host culture code of behavior. If this code of behavior is not understood by the immigrant, there will be very many misunderstandings. By learning something about the customs that the immigrants grew up with and lived with before coming to their new host community, the host community is enriched and may even adopt some new customs.

## **Participants:**

Immigrants

Members of the host community

Both of these groups of participants need to be present in order to have a true Culture Conversation.

## **Format:**

In a Culture Conversation, the Facilitator gives a 15 minute overview of a topic that is of particular interest to the immigrant community. This presentation is given in the language of the immigrants, and simultaneously interpreted into the language of the host community.

After the presentation, members of both communities engage in a conversation based on the topic, with a consecutive interpreter to engage the interaction between the two groups. This conversation can get very lively, and this is where the true benefit of the Culture Conversation is found.

## Topics that could be addressed:

As I have presented these topics in Woodburn, Oregon, over the last year, we have covered a broad variety of topics. Following is a list of issues that our Woodburn participants have appreciated or would like us to address in the next year. I have marked the best topics for an introductory meeting in bold.

They liked:

Holidays (we gave a presentation on the way Americans celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas)

Safety (Precautions for children to be safe in a child care center)

Children with difficulties (Including the possibility of consulting a specialist on developmental issues)

Money (How to avoid needing to use predatory loans)

Health (How to avoid needing to use the ER, but also when to call the doctor)

**Punctuality (Mexican vs. US time, viewed as being considerate with the person we are dealing with at the moment vs. being considerate with the person who is expecting us at a certain time)**

**Last names: How to deal with double last names and why they are used in Hispanic cultures.**

They want:

Parent involvement with school work - how to handle the difference between the schooling children receive with the schooling the parents had access to

How to trust hospitals after hospitals made mistake in daughter's treatment. How soon to react with children's illnesses.

Children's self-esteem – balancing the need for encouragement with the need for discipline

Volunteering in schools

Nutrition

Communication with adolescents - challenge of differences between parents and children in cultural understanding

Depression – this can be caused, at least in part, by the isolation that they suffer because they do not know how to connect with the host culture

Police, judicial system – The judicial system in the United States is significantly different from the system of their country of origin, and having some guiding principles will help them navigate it.

## About Helen Eby, Owner of Gaucha Translations

Helen Eby grew up in a totally bicultural setting. She was born in Newtown, Pennsylvania. Her father's family has roots in the American War of Independence. Her mother's family has deep roots in Argentina, having been involved in the establishment of a political party.

In this context, Helen Eby moved to Argentina when she was eight years old. She lived in Argentina until she was 28. During that time, she went to college and also traveled around Latin America on a missionary ship, visiting almost every Spanish speaking country on the continent. On this 15 month trip, she interacted with people at all levels of society and was responsible for handling customs and immigration matters for a ship with 140 people from 40 countries on board besides acting as translator of materials given to the public and interpreter at public events.

Helen Eby has been leading Cultural Conversations in Woodburn, Oregon, since March of 2012. This series started as she interpreted at a conference for healthcare outreach workers and the presenter stated that many mental health problems of the immigrant community are due to the lack of cultural adaptation and training. After researching the topic for a month, she launched it as an experiment and it has been very well received. These conversations happen monthly in Woodburn, Oregon.