



April 26, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

I have read the proposal for the project *Visual Narratives to Facilitate Immigrant/Refugee Family Mental Health Literacy, Support, and Resilience*, and would like to express my enthusiastic support the goals and strategies it puts forward. It is both forward thinking and grounded in solid evidence-based practices, and it addresses issues that can be linked to key challenges faced by our community and the nation. Taking visual storytelling as a means of approaching these concerns is an exciting and promising format for connecting with the cultural experiences of those being served, many of whom face language and literacy skills necessary to access currently available services. I have seen photography used as an effective tool to support young refugee residents express their feelings and challenges as they adapt to a new country and culture, and see graphic story-telling as having similar potential to support social and emotional health in immigrant populations. I also believe that the plan to embed these stories in a mobile media app will allow for replication on a larger scale and with other populations. The project designers have organized a multi-talented team of community leaders, clinical specialists, and advocates of public health literacy and education. Together, they have a strong track record of collaborating closely with members of the community on a range of concerns related to health, education, and nutrition.

As Program Manager for The California Endowment in San Diego, I have worked closely with the applicants and many other community partners to promote the health and well-being of all children and families in San Diego. Over the past six years we have concentrated our efforts in the City Heights neighborhoods through the *Building Healthy Communities* strategy to empower residents in driving community health improvements through policy, systemic, and environmental change. This diverse neighborhood, with 42% foreign-born population, is an ideal place to explore and advance improvements in addressing the mental health needs of refugee and immigrant families.

I have worked closely with the project's key partners - Sahra Abdi in her role as Executive Director of UWEAST, and Amina Sheik Mohamad as Director, Youth and Community Mobilization Programs for the Department of Pediatrics at UC San Diego. Our collaborations include a photovoice project with Somali women and

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their teenage daughters on generational changes in diet and nutrition as a result of displacement and migration from East Africa to the United States, which was one of the primary impetuses for the creation of UWEAST. Subsequent efforts include advocacy for improved access to healthcare services, culturally appropriate healthy school meals, and safe spaces for recreation and physical activity for Muslim girls and women. The proposed project is clearly in line with our organization's mission and principles, and we look forward to having the opportunity to aid or contribute to their efforts as this project develops.

I have also reviewed the CV of co-leader of the project, Dr. Brian Goldfarb (UCSD Department of Communication), and am impressed with the range of innovative education and health initiatives that he has been involved with and written about. His expertise in cross-cultural communication and media technology are important assets for the type of work that this collaboration is undertaking.

In summary, I feel strongly that *Visual Narratives to Facilitate Immigrant/Refugee Family Mental Health Literacy, Support, and Resilience* is a project of significant value that can contribute in important ways to local health and education needs. Moreover, it has the potential to develop an influential model for programs in other cities throughout the country that are increasingly faced with serving the needs of diverse immigrant populations. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to further discuss my support of this project.

Sincerely,



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