

COVID-19 STORIES

Project Resonance

REFLECTING ON OUR COVID-19 JOURNEY

Maya Angelou, American poet and civil rights activist, once said, "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you." A story shared is a relief to an emotional burden carried by the storyteller. Asian Media Access (AMA) and Pan Asian Arts Alliance (PAAM) came together to create a rich cultural dance show, [AMA: Project Resonance](#), to reflect and showcase the story of their unity and resiliency in fighting the pandemic. "Our project goes beyond telling a story, to evoking discussions and empowering communities impacted by the pandemic to explore solutions to sustain and improve the gains made in keeping them healthy," said Ange Hwang, AMA executive director.

AMA is a community media arts education agency that supports communities to overcome challenges through education, production, information technology, and community organizing. AMA partnered with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to tap into community cultures, wisdom, and knowledge in promoting equitable access to COVID-19 prevention and response resources.

Community achievements

AMA fosters several different programs and activities throughout the year. AMA intentionally engages communities to design programs that address some of the health disparities in accessing COVID-19 services. Through its community "cultural broker" video project, AMA successfully worked with Hmong and Somali youth networks to capture their anxieties and thoughts on different mental health topics such as bullying and relationship building. Community safe spaces were also used for dialogue with women and elders on social and mental health issues affecting them. In addition, the project encouraged youth to develop culturally appropriate health material designed to reduce hesitancy and increase community knowledge on the importance of COVID-19 vaccinations. "This empowered them to become community advocates and health educators, to connect with and lean on each other to navigate different mental health and social issues," said Hwang.

Project Resonance is also an artistic illustration of the importance of cultural understandings, collaborations, and other hard-won successes in the face of fear, anxieties, and frustrations that gripped the Asian community during the pandemic. Through culturally and artistically nuanced dance movements, the voice and pain of the community is heard and seen. "The dancing Phoenix embodies strength and power, light and infinite growth," said Jarrelle Barton, African American composer and guzheng musician. This signifies the important role played by community hope to overcome the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. In this piece, the African American and Asian American artists symbolically come together to create diverse music and dance pieces to reflect COVID-19 impacts on both communities.

Overcoming challenges

"[Project Resonance's] greatest success is its use of universal language of movement to overcome the linguistic barriers of communication in COVID-19 messaging," confirms Hwang. The project echoes community hesitations in accessing vaccines, key messages of social distancing, masking, and vaccination as the pandemic progressed. The project also has a piece (Ode to a wish), that also portrays the sacrifices made by communities to fight this pandemic and achieve noticeable milestones. "The work is about overcoming hardship and obstacles, with our only hope to focus on the light [and wish]," said Barton.

The rich interwoven artistic expression of choreographed multiple dances to music illustrates the intercultural harmony of communities in maneuvering the complexities of the pandemic.

The future

Although Project Resonance is a living mirror of the universal realities in health disparities across BIPOC communities, its reflection and celebration of community strengths and resilience in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overlooked. The harnessing of community and cultural power remains a key practice, message, and legacy in partnering with communities for improved community health outcomes. When working in communities, MDH strives to value the identities and lived experiences of these communities and to foster their trust through co-creating resources and solutions with them.

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stories/resonance.html>

https://youtu.be/7QEAKH_seBI