

WIPPS: Research partners provide insight on unique challenges faced by Hmong caregivers

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WAUSAU, Wis. — [Northern Valley Industries](#) (NVI) recently partnered with [WIPPS Research Partners](#) to examine challenges faced by caregivers of Hmong individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Northern Valley Industries is an Employment Social Enterprise non-profit organization which provides employment and employment supports to individuals with disabilities. NVI also offers job development/job coaching services with a focus on career exploration, resume development, interviewing, guided job searches, as well as developing interpersonal and coping skills to enhance job retention. NVI noticed that their services were being not being utilized by underserved populations, such as the Hmong community.

Sherri Waid, executive director of Northern Valley Industries, explained, “While Northern Valley hires people with and without disabilities, we found that it was difficult to connect with Hmong people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities.”

To address this issue, NVI partnered with WIPPS Research Partners to gather first-hand information about the challenges faced by caregivers of Hmong individuals with IDD when accessing support services. NVI wanted to obtain a greater understanding of the caregiver’s perspective about IDD in the Hmong community and their experiences with public services such as education, health, and employment.

Interns with WIPPS Research Partners conducted seven private, confidential, one-

on-one discussions with caregivers from across the state of Wisconsin. Through the discussions with caregivers, information was collected to better understand cultural, educational, and healthcare challenges Hmong individuals with IDD face.

“The study confirms there is much to be done for the Hmong community to feel confident in the acceptance and support Northern Valley provides for many people,” Waid commented. “The WIPPS research gave us a starting point, providing a roadmap to employment for Hmong people and the families that support them.”

This project was designed and implemented by four WIPPS interns: Doua Chee Xiong, Maysee Lao, Olivia Rasmussen, and Long Xiong. By interning and working at WIPPS, students can receive hands on research experience, including designing and conducting qualitative studies. This project was supervised by Dr. Corrie Norrbom, WIPPS Health Policy Fellow, and Dr. Sharon Belton, Director of WIPPS Research Partners.

“While WIPPS Research Partners provided supervision and oversight, this project was carried-out by WIPPS interns and students,” said Dr. Norrbom. “It was a great opportunity for them to learn how to conduct and analyze key informant interviews, and more importantly, see the direct benefits of their work for an organization like Northern Valley Industries. We are so thankful to have such a great group of talented interns and students.”

AmeriCorps/WIPPS intern Doua Chee Xiong described this project as a great learning experience. She explained, “Once we were able to get the study going, it was eye-opening to talk with and hear the stories of the participants. It definitely highlighted the importance of including and amplifying voices in order to make services more equitable for everyone.”

When asked what she learned from those she interviewed, Xiong said, “As someone who is part of the Hmong community, I know IDD isn’t something we talk about openly and had a sense it was going to be hard gathering participants.” She continued, “It was eye-opening to hear them talk about the struggles they experience and realized within myself that this is something both cultures need to do to better. To create a safe space for Hmong families to talk about their experiences and actively participate in helping relieve the stress and hardships they encounter daily.”

Maysee Lao, an AmeriCorps/WIPPS intern, said it was rewarding to have a role in

sharing the experiences of caregivers of Hmong individuals with IDD. Lao said, “I plan on applying to medical school, and I’m confident that the knowledge and research skills I’ve obtained from this project and current projects will be used in my future education. There is still so much for me to learn, but this project was definitely a steppingstone.”

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