



EOHHS

Engaging a Workforce that Reflects the Communities We Serve

Facilitator:

Amila Merdzanovic, Director of Programs for the Office for Refugees and Immigrants

Presenters:

- Michelle Friedman-Yakobian, PhD, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- Joey Rodriguez, B.A., Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- Lisa Jeronimo, Open Sky Community Services
- Omolewa Fagboore, Open Sky Community Services
- Tashiani Forman, Seven Hills Foundation



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Enhancing Psychosis Care and Tomorrow's Workforce: Building Bridges toward Equity in Psychosis Intervention and Careers (2B-EPIC)

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Michelle Friedman-Yakoobian, Ph.D
Joey Rodriguez, B.A.



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Misdiagnosis of Psychosis in Black and Latine Individuals

Black individuals more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and less likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders compared to White individuals, even when presenting with similar symptoms.

Latine individuals experience underdiagnosis of psychotic disorders but higher rates of misattribution of symptoms to cultural beliefs or personality traits.

Misdiagnosis leads to inappropriate treatment, including overuse of antipsychotic medications and lack of access to mood stabilizers or therapy



Disparities in Pathways to Early Psychosis Care

Black and Latine individuals are more likely to enter care through **emergency departments, law enforcement, or involuntary hospitalization** rather than early intervention services.

They are **less likely to be referred to specialty care** programs (e.g., Coordinated Specialty Care) compared to White individuals.

African Americans/Black individuals **significantly underutilize mental health services**

Attrition (drop-out) from psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy is higher than Whites

What is 2B-EPIC?

Initiative at BIDMC Department of Psychiatry to **improve early psychosis care by increasing diversity** and representation of Black and Latine professionals in early psychosis care.

Paid internships for Black and Latine students to learn about research and clinical careers specializing in early psychosis and **create pathways for students to pursue careers in this field.**

Aims to **improve culturally competent care**, and **reduce disparities** in diagnosis and treatment by building a more racially, linguistically, and **culturally diverse early psychosis workforce**

Initially supported by the MA DMH and Department of Health and Human Services. Currently continuing with some support from Cambridge Community Center and Anonymous Donor.



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Melanie Maldonado
Northeastern University



Olivia Helfrich-Tapia
Williams College



Bella King-Harvey
Williams College

Meet our students!

College and Graduate students are in blue, high school are in brown!



Joey Rodriguez
Northeastern University



Takaya McFarland
Northeastern University



Jordyn Wingate
Northeastern University



Antachia Brown
UMass Dartmouth



Ella Carter-Fenster
Northeastern University



Isabela Peña
Northeastern University



Mychal Merritt
Boston Arts Academy



Zenaya Santos
Boston Arts Academy



Mia Gonzalez
The Winsor School



Paulina Gutierrez
The Winsor School



Adrian Santos
Boston Arts Academy



Kimora Santiago
Fenway High School

Joey Rodriguez

2B-EPIC Graduate

Research Coordinator Response to Risk



- Research Coordinator – BIDMC
- DMHI (MindLAMP) as adjunctive support in transdiagnostic therapy for early psychosis.
- Provide supervision for research assistants and interns within RTR and contribute to ongoing projects.
- Project Coordinator
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Non-Clinical Crisis Workforce in MA, focus on underserved and Spanish-speaking communities.
- Co-Director – SALUD
- Bilingual Advisory board part of the Massachusetts Psychosis Prevention Partnership promoting quality of care, satisfaction and engagement, resources for clinicians, and clinician feedback for Spanish-speaking services in EP care in MA.

Activities: Learning about Psychosis

Learning Objectives:

- Understand early psychosis, intervention, and prevention.
- Raise awareness of racial and cultural disparities in treatment.
- Promote empathy and normalize treatment-seeking.

Mission:

- Foster empathy and normalize psychosis.
- Spread awareness through impactful presentations with peers.
- Advise the MA Department of Mental Health on improving practices.
- Increase diversity of the DMH workforce

Activities: Community Trips

- Boston GLASS
- BAGLY
- Bridgewater State Hospital
- William James College
- Boston Medical Center Wellness Recovery and Action Program
- Community sites
- Freedom House
- Cambridge Community Center



Activities: Career Seminar

- Met with Black and Latine professionals across MA to learn about their career journeys and to develop connections for future.
 - Psychologists (PsyD, PhD)
 - Licensed social workers (one was a former intern from Response to Risk Program)
 - Licensed mental health counselors
 - Masters in Public Health
 - MD PHD neuroscience researcher
 - Graduate students (PsyD, MSW)



Activities: Outreach and Peer Outreach and Mentoring

- Recruitment and Outreach
 - Cambridge, Fenway, Chinatown, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan
- Educating Peers:
 - Cambridge Community Center, Freedom House, Northeastern University
- Mentorship
 - College interns mentor HS interns in college planning
 - College interns provide school/work coaching in ASPIRE FEP



Outcomes

3/1/23-2/28/25



15 interns
100% Black and Latine
6 high school, 8 college, 1 graduate



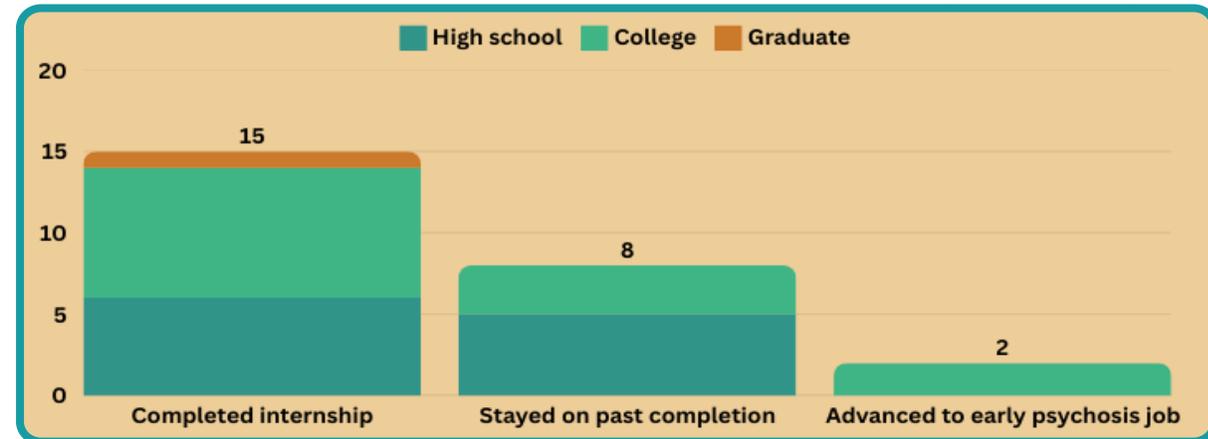
100%
completed the
internship



80% stayed on
after
completion



2 entered early
psychosis field



10 passion projects
presented to early
psychosis program
staff in Massachusetts



150+ community
peers reached in
Cambridge and
Boston

Building the Future of Mental Health Care with 2B-EPIC



2B-EPIC addresses gaps in mental health care by creating pathways for underrepresented students to build a diverse, skilled workforce for more effective care..



Empowering Students: 7-9 interns annually gain hands-on experience in psychosis treatment and research, preparing for mental health careers.



Raising Awareness: Over 100 teens per year learn about psychosis from peers, reducing stigma and fostering community understanding.



Shaping Policy: Interns advise the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health to promote equitable, accessible care.



Mentorship & Career Support: Students receive mentorship, career guidance, and development opportunities.

Thank you!

Want to learn more?

Check out our website and follow us on Instagram and LinkedIn



<https://linktr.ee/2bepicinternship>



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Central Mass Career Pipeline Program

Open Sky Community Services and
Seven Hills Foundation & Affiliates

**Omo Fagboore, Tashiani Forman, and
Lisa Jeronimo**



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Services
Part Program
Part 6
ation

Human Services
Career Support
Cohort
Graduation

Open Sky
COMMUNITY

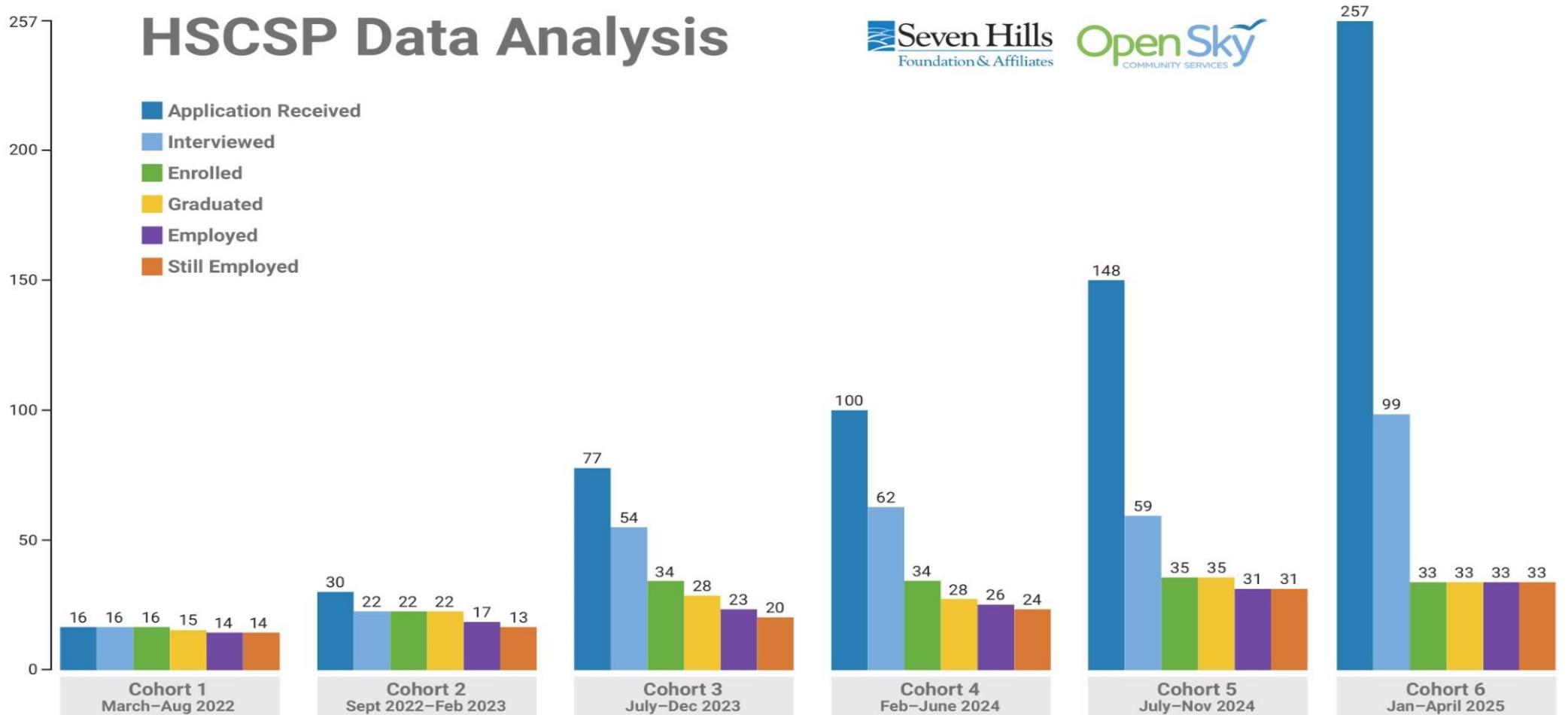
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Career Pathway



HSCSP Data Analysis

Retention rate from graduation is 84% (135/161)



Clinical & Leadership Pathways Project

Where are They Now?

Total number of graduates from Cohort 1-3 is 54
22 responded to the survey



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Success Story

Joseph Casseus

Work experience Prior to arriving in the US in 2022

- Special education from 1992 – 1998
 - Micro Finance bank 2001 – 2008
 - Created a business with a friend from 2011 – June 2022
-

- Joseph's Journey can be described in three words: **Resilience** through culture and language shock. Learning new culture, language and industry. Joseph now provides weekly transportation to his community through wraparound support provided.
- **Passion** to identify the incapacity of others and desire to care for them compassionately.
- **Consistent** through continuity (family referral) and acquisition of skills and certification (MAP & SOLVE) to serve the purpose.



Success through perseverance: Meet Elisa Giron-Aguilar

- **Meet Elisa: A Story of Grit, Growth, and Giving Back – The Power of Perseverance**
- **Resilient Beginnings**
- Immigrated from Honduras with hopes for safety and opportunity.
- Started her journey at Quinsigamond Community College, where she majored in Human Services.
- Entered the field through the Human Services Career Support Program (HSCSP).
- Overcame initial uncertainty about her path, shifting from nursing to social work with purpose.
- Turning barriers into strengths; learned english through immersion, training, and determination.



"Every step in human services brought me closer to my purpose—empowering people and creating real change."

Elisa Continued

Persevering through Change

- Took a full-time role at Seven Hills Foundation (NeuroCare) to support vulnerable individuals.
- Despite challenges and uncertainty, she enrolled in the Clinical & Leadership Program, deepening her passion.
- Changed her major to Human Services and set her sights on a Master's in Social Work.

Personal Triumphs

- Building a life of purpose for herself and her child; reunited her family by working to bring her child with autism to the U.S.
- Became a homeowner and landlord, purchasing a three-decker home for her and her family.
- Continues to rise in her career, now a Family Support Worker at the Worcester Family Resource Center.
- Legacy; passionate and driven to expand her impact.

Purpose In Action

- Provides critical support and resources to families in need.
- Leads with compassion, strength, and commitment every day.



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Thank you!