

Rolf: Welcome to the Health Disparities Podcast. A program of Movement Is Life. Movement Is Life is a not-for-profit coalition dedicated to eliminating musculoskeletal health disparities through a range of programs and by convening our annual Caucus. This year, the Caucus themed health equity beyond the headlines is in Washington DC from November 10th to 11th. And you can learn how community leaders are taking actionable steps to achieve health equity. To find out more, visit movementislife caucus.com and registration is free. This special episode was recorded on location at the Kroc Center in eastern San Diego at a town hall. Organized by Movement Is Life under the banner of our community intervention program Operation Change.

The event is similar to the Operation Change Town Hall in Chicago that was featured in our recent podcast episode, but with one important difference. The San Diego Operation Change Program is conducted mainly in Spanish, and although the social determinants of health impacting the Hispanic communities in and around San Diego have many things in common with those driving health disparities on the southside of Chicago, there are some important differences. So, in this episode, we'll hear about ways that factors such as language, culture, immigration status, and disproportionately high COVID infection rates have impacted the participants. So, join us as members of San Diego's Hispanic community share their stories and experiences. It's a warm Southern California morning. The room is filling up and there's plenty of laughter in the air with a mix of Spanish and English phrases. Before the town hall got started, I sat down with Alma to learn about her previous experiences with the Operation Change program and how participating in the program creates such strong bonds between the participants. She also tells me about the painful consequences that COVID has had on her and her family.

Alma: I loved the program and I decided to enroll, and it was a very good experience for me to be involved in the program, even though it was 18 weeks, but it didn't seem like it was that long. And then at the end of the program we didn't want it to end, but unfortunately it had to. But I did get to know a lot of people and the women in our group that we had, we still get together still. We get together every month sometimes every couple months. But when the pandemic happened, we didn't get together. We got together three weeks ago just to talk and see how everybody's doing. But I've bonded with these women that are in the group. We call them La Vecinas, which is the neighbors. And that's one of the things that I really liked about the program, was meeting people, bonding with other women,

supporting each other, and just listening to one another and giving advice. Some of us have the same experiences, and so that's one of the reasons why we bonded. And our coach was one of the reasons why we bonded. She was very heart centered and she would look into our heart while we were talking, and she knew when we would sit down for our group, who was in a good mood, who was in a bad mood. She just was the type of person that was really into us as people, as women, as Hispanic women. And she even spoke Spanish.

COVID came around. It really changed my family's life because we lost our brother. He got COVID and unfortunately, he didn't recover. And then, the other part of the family got COVID. They all recovered except for him. And when he was in the hospital, he was in ICU for about three months. And while being in the ICU, he had diabetic reactions. And we didn't know what they were because he never told us. And there's a lot of sadness. And you know, what if this, and what if that, and you know, why us? Why me? But I've always tried to keep a positive outlook. There's still good in the world and we just have to be more proactive with our health.

Rolf: Operation Change is more than a health and wellness program. It's a community intervention, and it highlights how social determinants of health have the strongest influence in our most vulnerable communities, where we see the greatest health disparities. It also helps participants make the connections between their overall health and their physical activity levels, their diet, and how they manage their stress. In other words, it emphasizes the importance of self-care. And these connections can radiate outwards from the program carried by participants to their families, friends in wider communities. So, Sylvia, a community health worker, is the first of several people that tell me how they take what they have learned and experienced at an Operation Change program and share it within their wider community. I started off by asking her what she liked about the program.

Sylvia: Well, I did like how they had the, a weekly presentation that gave us really valuable information, as in like, sometimes a psychologist was here, the orthopedic, like different specialties. And in a way, I liked it even though I can Google it, it's awesome that they're right in front of you. You can ask questions. And one of the things that I value the most is movement. And that's where you come Movement Is Life. It was motivating, encouraging, because we always need that little somebody to hold our hand. That's how I see it sometimes. And so right now I need to get back on track. So, it was motivating more than anything I think, besides getting knowledge and, you know, increasing our knowledge. Cause I am a community health worker, okay? So, I do promote health and so forth. They gave us the

Fitbit, that was awesome. That was like my motivation, big time. And what is valuable for me that what I learn here, I pass it on to others as since I am a community health worker, I'm a civic engagement person. I'm a member of the Advisory Council for the Aging and Independence. So, I'm very passionate for learning to and sharing what I learn.

Rolf: Operation Change San Diego program coordinator, Sonia Cervantes starts the town hall by welcoming attendees. And then Dr. Ramon Jimenez is the first speaker. He's a retired orthopedic surgeon based in San Jose, California and is a member of the Movement Is Life steering committee. He introduces himself and talks about how he works with his patients with osteoarthritis, and he reflects on his Mexican heritage. And then his daughter, Christina Jimenez, is also presenting, a college professor who's passionate about Hispanic culture, history and community health.

Sonia: Good afternoon, everybody. Hello. Hello. Buenos Tarde, Como Estan. Perfect. Perfect. Well, thank you everybody for showing up on a Saturday. I am sure you all have things to do, but I do appreciate you being here and listening to us share some of the great things that we have to share with you guys. And my name is Sonia Cervantes. I am the program coordinator of the Operations Change Program here at the Kroc Center. (Translates into Spanish) We're going to have a presentation. We're going to share with you guys the details of the program and how you guys can participate. We have some participants of the previous program that kicked in, in 2019. And unfortunately, as you know COVID happened, dot, dot, dot, right? So, we all know that, that those years were fuzzy. But here we are again. We are relaunching the program. We're really happy that movement is live, and operations change are here again. We have the pleasure of having Dr. Ramon Jimenez. He's an orthopedic surgeon and his daughter Christina Jimenez. And they are doing the programs on the West coast. So, I will have them introduce themselves.

Ramon: (Initially speaks in Spanish) I'm very happy to be here with you. Like Sonia says, you're going to restart the program. Why am I here? I was born and raised in San Jose, California. In a community like this one, our community, you are part of our community. I am part of this community in that sense. So, 65% of the population where I live now, Monterey, Salinas is Latino. And the reason I'm here, I want to speak to you as I would speak to my patients. (Spanish) So, that's the story. The story is how I speak to my patients regarding their knees, how to take care of their knees, what they need to do. And to go from there.

My grandfather, mi abuelo, Ramon Jimenez, at age 32, felt sick one day. He was in the mountains of Jalisco, Mexico, tending to his ranch, felt sick one day, got a cough the next day, dead the next day. And he had a son and a daughter died too. That was 100 years ago for the pandemic, for the pandemic of the world. That was in 1919/1920. So, never to forget. So, it is with much pride that I want to introduce my daughter, our middle daughter. My wife and I have been married 55 years. We have three beautiful women. And Christina, (Spanish) So, Christina.

Christina: Gracias. Bueno. Gracias, Papa. It's really a pleasure to be here with you to speak about Operation Change. And this larger organization Movement Is Life. That, well, no, it says it all in the title, right? The emphasis here is how we need to keep moving. (Spanish)

Rolf: Anna joined the Operation Change San Diego team and received training as a motivational interviewer. She told me about some of her experiences of leading discussions with the motivational interviewing method and shares with us some thoughts about what participants need and how the program supports them.

Anna: Well, I'm really involved in this community, the Kroc Center community. So, I have been member here since 2012. So, when someone from the front desk asked me for this, like, opportunity for me that they know that I speak Spanish, and they say, Operation Change is coming here. And it's a Latino community. And it can be their second language for some of them, but mostly the first language. So that was really, important to be a motivational interviewer, Spanish speaker. And in this particular part of the session, which we have our group session and is when I'm there for them, it's mostly like, just listen to them and just trying to help them to reach their particular goals by just understanding what they're want to work with. And from there we start just making those small changes. And this community so many times we don't feel like somebody else is going through the same things. And definitely this was a very, very, very, like a safe place for them to share things. And yeah, the mental topic was really, really a big like, breakdown for people. And from their start, making them aware of what they want to actually change.

In our community, in the Latino community, we are not allowed to show our feelings in the way that we have to be strong, even when we're going through like really a bad season, and for them to be aware of that, like, hey, it's okay not feeling okay, You know, you don't have to show that you are stronger just because you have to say, I'm tired when you're tired and just take the time for yourself. Self-care too. That was another great topic that we approached that it's a taboo sometimes that we don't talk about

certain topics and more in our community. Like a mental health is not a big deal because we don't talk about that, you know? But actually, it's a big deal because from there we have so many other issues and we have so many other lack of like, motivations. And again, it takes toll on the help. When we had our speakers, they were really, aware of like where they were lacking in some way. You know what I mean? I said, oh, that was like a, oh, I didn't know that. You know what I mean? So that was really good, really good like under covering those taboo topics.

It was a big transformation for those people. It was amazing because the way they talk from the beginning until the end of 18 weeks, it was like another person, they were feeling like really empowered by what they learned, what they shared and what they were willing to make changes. I remember one of our participants, she was like a, oh, I didn't know how important was drinking water. You know, because she was like a, I was always having a hard time drinking water and just making, again, aware of those little details in life that make huge changes. And other people were like saying like, constantly having headaches and just by drinking more water, during the day, she was feeling in a different, like way now. So, for these, this one woman particularly, I feel like they had access to information that they didn't have before too, and then makes them feel more aware and empower them too like, oh, I can do this too. Talking about like, illegal and legal people being resilient in this country. It's hard to, you know, because they can't trust easily. I will say to like, but what are you going to get from me if I go there? You know? Like no, this is a hundred percent free program for us just to share information, to gather together, to share experiences and move, you know, because we were always like, and we're going to move, like I say, as soon as we start the program, a lot of participants, they start talking about the program and they were like can we go, can we go? And of course, we were like a halfway, but that was a really good, like an incentive for us to like, oh my God, this is exactly what we need. Like, you know, for our community. I remember this is a Colombian person. She's actually turning 80 years old today. And I remember she came just to find a place to not feeling too lonely because she lives by herself, you know, like, and for her, she was here every single like Saturday and the day that she couldn't make it, she was sad. She was like calling me the day before, like, I'm so sad that I'm not going to be there tomorrow, you know? And I said, don't worry, I know you have this appointment, or you have this like, commitment and that's totally fine. And for me, just seeing her, like making progressions and just socializing with people from different ages and for actually making her

aware of small changes again, like, she's like a, oh, I walked today around my apartment area. And that's for me, like the most important thing. Like when they are here in a safe environment to share and to learn the impact of this program and this woman that they didn't even know how huge was going to be, you know? And now it's just amazing to see that it's coming back, this program here, and I can't wait to see all those happy faces again.

Rolf: The last person I talked with was Patty. She's one of San Diego's famous Kitchenistas, a network of mothers who are taking a leading role in helping Hispanic families access health information. She shared with me why she's so proud of being a Kitchenista and how the Operation Change program and the Kitchenista network works so well together.

Patty: Being a kitchenista means to be a mom that has been dedicated their life and that a woman that has been prioritized their family versus working. That's why kitchenista means professional in the kitchen. Yeah. And mom has all the professions. You are a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, you know, a psychologist. We know everything because that is in our blood. You know, we have everything. We know everything about everything. And that's why kitchenista for me means pride. Because we are not just professionals in the kitchen. We are professionals in the community because we volunteer at schools, our church, wherever we go, and we are creating best human beings for our community. And why we don't have those right when we are going to go back to work. So, that's why for me, kitchenistas means all these women that has been sacrificed their lives in order to grow and have a stronger family. The kitchenista are more than 350 and we gather every month. So, this program, the Operation Change will take 18 weeks. So, that means that we're going to have four kitchenista monthly meetings. And I will be updating the group with all this process. And kitchenista has the mission to go into the community and share what they learn with the people they love. So, that means that what we learn in Operation Change, we're going to share with the kitchenistas, and they are going to be like those bees that go and pollinate all the flowers and a crop, and they are going to go to the community and say, you know, there's a program that is worried and is taking part of that part that a lot of programs don't have the courage or has been considered that this is important. So, that's why for me, it's very motivating to be here.

Rolf: I asked Patty to share her impressions of the program so far.

Patty: Well, I thought that it would be successful because it has two companies that I love. The first one is that it talks about emotions. And I think that is very important that not a lot of programs talk about that, the emotional

support that the participants receive. And the second one is that the duration of the program is 18 weeks. And I strongly believe that in order to make deep changes in your behaviors, you need to constantly be supported and surrounded by a guide that will make you put in the track to strongly feel confident to start making the changes in your life. But this has three different components, and one of them is the emotional support. And just let me tell you that it caught my attention before the pandemic and after, right now, I thought that is more important after that happened, if I thought in those years that it was important, right now, I think that is crucial. I think that this country has been made for immigrants from all, all over the world. And the stress and the emotional support that people, the residents deal every day make them live with a daily stress that is different from people that actually live here. So, that's why I thought that it was very, very important how you are teaching that people that they need to eat fruits and veggies, but what about their emotions? There're emotions that push you to the salty. There're emotions that push you to the sweets or the salty. And if you are in your home, leaving the whole day and in front of the TV, what are your options? You know, there's people that has two, three jobs, one person or two go work. And what time you have for you or for your kids, if you can give them to, you can take them to practice sports because you know that you're going to be on risk if most of your salary will go direct to your rent in the services.

Yeah. And this is real. Sometimes we see a statistics, but when you just need to walk a couple of houses to your neighborhood and ask how many families live in a house, there's houses that have families living in the garage or have an extra house on the back in order to pay the mortgage. And there's no others resource to bring any other families to live in the same property in order to you know, have a little bit of freedom. But the peoples that are living there, they are the same as you surviving, but just working hard to pay the rent, the bills, and they don't have money to go outside and exercise and have oxygen into your body, to your cells, and, you know, all the things that we all know. But these people don't have access to that information. Everything that we talk about will be confidential and our work will be to be the, the ears and listen what the participants has to say through a series of creating an environment where they feel secure and create an atmosphere what they can feel that they can share. So, this will be completely confident and voluntary, and it will take it just few weeks. And by the fact that we all going to be all woman, it will be a safe place when they can open their heart. And we have been developed different techniques to start talking from the heart. Yeah. That

is this is like going back to our roots because, and nobody tell you to talk with the heart. Yeah. And we need to remind, to bring back that memory that we as women always gather and talk and have all these conversations since on the elder times when we sit around the fire and talk, you know, and after, right now in modern time in a circle, when we, where we can hold hands and start talking from the left side to the right side, if you are in a circle, why? Because on the left side you have your heart. So, if you start a circle from the left side, it will be very powerful. So, those are things that we are ancient things that we lose that connection and those, all those things that there were lost in the time that we need to recover, especially when we are on the woman, we are the creators of life. Yeah. So, we need to empower ourselves in order to make men happy. Every person has something deep in their heart that if you don't pay attention to that, it will convert into illness. So, we need to people open their heart to heal and to stop all this obesity, all this heart conditions, all the high blood pressure, all this sadness because stress and depression is the door to get a world of illnesses. And sometimes we think that we are dealing with something very simple. But once you open the conversation, you realize that a lot of people has dealing with the same problems. And the thing is that we never talk about that. We drink coffee, we do everything superficially, drink coffee, have gatherings parties. We go to the casino or to a concert, but we don't have time to go deep in our emotions. So, that's why we have all this problems because we are hurry, we are living, but we are not going, deep in ourselves. And this is a time and an opportunity to know you, who you are, how, where you came from, what is your story, who you are. By holding our hands saying be shoulder to shoulder, we're going to start building something new, a new person that will be not the same, that will start on week one that the same, that will end up on the week 18. That's why the name Operation Change. We all, we can change every time, every day that's an opportunity. It's a decision. It's something very, very personal decisions and we are here to support and to help and to guide.

Rolf: Sonia brings the town hall meeting to a close by describing what the participants can expect when they join the program for real.

Sonia: The first hour, we are going to have a guest speaker coming to talk to us about health and wellness topics or healthcare. So, for example, we tap into nutrition or mental wellness or social support or community. The second hour is going to be movement, physical movement. So, we have instructors that will, and that's from nine to 10 is the guest speaker from 10 to 11 is physical movement. We're going to do yoga classes and even

aerobics, if the weather permits and classes, the Zumba, salsa, belly dancing, you name it. We have to 18 weeks to get creative. I know. Now, I said salsa and Zumba, and all of a sudden, the room change. So, cha-cha-cha. Then the third hour is super important because that's from 11 to noon. We all meet in focus groups. Each group is going to meet with an MI with a motivational interviewer, which, you know, we are. And we're going to just sit down and chat about our challenges and how can we help each other. So, this is an ongoing thing every week. And basically, if you guys aren't obviously interested in enrolling, I would say jump on it. And no reason, like Susie already expressed, if you think, oh, I'm going to do physical movement I can't hardly move. That's just not an excuse because we are going to meet you where you're at and you're going to walk along with us till the end of the program.

Rolf: A big thank you to everyone in the San Diego Operation Change team and all the participants and motivational interviewers who shared their experiences with us for this episode of the Health Disparities podcast. And thanks for listening. Be safe, be well, and we'll see you next time.

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