



# Institute for Community Health

Building sustainable community health, together

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners HealthCare

Winter 2012/2013

## Bridging Cultural Divides in Malden: The *East Meets West* Program

For immigrants, the process of settling in a new country can be an isolating experience. New immigrants typically face many challenges related to acculturation, including difficulty accessing local resources, changing family dynamics, and other stresses associated with navigating how to weave together different cultural ideals while adopting local cultural practices.

These challenges are among those faced by the growing Asian immigrant population in Malden, Massachusetts, a diverse and rapidly changing urban community north of Boston. To help bridge cultural gaps and ease the stress of acculturation for immigrant families, the [Chinese Culture Connection \(CCC\)](#) in Malden has created *East Meets West*, a program to support Malden's Asian immigrant community in gaining the skills and cultural understanding needed to adapt to their new environments and create positive bi-cultural identities. The program consists of workshops for immigrant families and a newer mentoring program for youth in the [Malden Public Schools](#).

*East Meets West* has been funded by the Adelaide Breed Bayrd Foundation for nearly half a decade. ICH provides [evaluative expertise](#) to this project, helping to track program progress and learn about effects on participants.

"The program provides workshops on how to learn about life in America: how do you get your child into

college, how do you pay for college, how do you buy a house in the United States," says ICH Manager of Evaluation and Data Services [Emily Chiasson, MSW, MPH](#). Some workshops feature flower arranging, song, dance, or story telling, designed to build trust and foster open communication in the community through use of traditional cultural practices. Chiasson adds that one of the major benefits has been that the workshops provide participants with an opportunity to exchange ideas and promote discussion. The workshops also help teach immigrant parents about how to bridge the gap with their Americanized children, potentially improving family functioning, communication, and relationships.

*East Meets West* also includes a youth component in which high school students mentor youth from two of Malden's elementary schools – an initiative featured in a [Boston Globe article](#) earlier this year. Although open to all youth who wish to be involved, the emphasis is on helping newer immigrant youth adjust to their new school and new way of life. The program gives new immigrant youth peers from whom they can learn by observation and interaction, as well provides a venue for the mentors – many of whom are immigrants themselves – to interact with their peers.

"At home, parents see their children as American, and outside those kids are seen as Asian," said CCC Director Mei Hung. "So, the children don't feel as if they are either Chinese or American. [We] must explain to them [youth] why cultural heritage is important and what are the cultural aspects you are expected to learn and retain to pass down to your next generation."

[Institute for Community Health](#) | 163 Gore Street | Cambridge | MA | 02141  
<http://www.icommunityhealth.org> | [ich@challiance.org](mailto:ich@challiance.org) | (617) 499-6677