

# Addiction Research Foundation extending its hand to minorities

Enza Colavecchia, director of Community Services at the Columbus Centre, an Italian community organization, usually sees public service announcements in Italian that never quite work.

"It looks as though the people are speaking Italian, but the mouth and words don't match," she says, "or the message, even if it's in Italian, doesn't have anything to do with Italians so it just goes in one ear and out the other."

She was skeptical then, when health promotion experts at the Addiction Research Foundation asked her and several other representative of Toronto's Italian and Portuguese communities to help prepare a campaign about moderate alcohol use, including a public service announcement.

"But I have to say now that they deserve a round of applause because of the way they approached the project," says Colavecchia. "They really listened to us—about what was needed, about what the message should be and how it should be delivered."

The public service announcement, *To Your Health*, is being pilot-tested in Metro Toronto, and will be launched across Ontario later this spring. Workshops and other activities which promote a healthy lifestyle will follow.

Organized by community agencies, they will stimulate group discussion about health and social risks associated with alcohol use and provide a focus for community action.

Scientist Virginia McGowan of the ARF's Prevention and Health Promotion Research and Development Department, says the project is very much a partnership between ARF experts and community agencies.

"When you're preparing a message for a particular ethnic cultural group, it's crucial that the message and the medium be culturally appropriate," says McGowan. "And only the people in the community can tell you what that is."

Working with the Health Promotion Branch of Ministry of Health, the project began with meetings between representatives from the Italian and Portuguese communities and an ARF team to discuss issues of alcohol abuse with them and how to address them.

"In some communities, alcohol is more accepted, more a part of daily life than in others," says McGowan. "In fact, it may even be seen as having health benefits. We need to be sensitive to those perceptions if we are to be successful in dispelling some of the myths around alcohol."

The first stage of the project resulted in two 30 second public service announcements about drinking moderately, aimed largely at middle-aged men of Italian and Portuguese background.

**"Alcohol is the most abused drug in Ontario, and it's important to use it moderately before problems start."**

production meeting covered a range of details, from the accents of the actors ("you have to make sure you don't use accents that are too regional," says Colavecchia), to the types of glasses at the table (tumblers instead of goblets for the Portuguese spot.)

In both video a group of men and women are finishing dinner at a table in the backyard in Toronto's west end while children play soccer

nearby. The women and one of the men get up to clear the table, leaving two men at the table with a bottle of wine and another one of mineral water in front of them.

When the host makes a move to pour more wine into the other man's glass, his guest puts out his hand and asks for a pop or mineral water instead. As the spot concludes, the two men's voices are heard again. "It's okay to say no. It's okay to take no for an answer."

"Even though the message seems simple," says McGowan, "they're very important, and equally important, they're believable. Alcohol is the most abused drug in Ontario, and we need to get out the message that it's important to use it moderately—before the problems start"

Colavecchia agrees. "The messages have to be subtle. And it's not just the men who'll respond. It'll come from their families as well, because for the first time, we're putting the tool in their own hands."

Future plans include a workshop to introduce the project to community organizations. ARF program consultants are also receiving training to help them deal with culturally sensitive issues. This pilot project can be adapted for use by other communities in the province.

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