Hello, my name is Michelle Beth Toledo-Cainas, and I live in Cumming, Georgia, which is north of Atlanta. I am an independent consultant in the field of advocacy against family violence. I help other local agencies and safehouse programs with their trainings, when it comes to the matter of domestic violence, sexual assault, and the Latinx community. I also serve as an expert witness in criminal and civil cases.

Today, I will be talking about how to effectively approach the Latinx community when it comes to sharing resources about victim services. First, let me explain why I'm saying Latinx, and not Latina or Latino.

We use Latinx because we want to be gender-neutral. In the Spanish language, the o and the a are used to define masculine and feminine. This term is being widely used among bilingual advocates and especially those agencies who are culturally specific. When Latinx are victims or witnesses, of a crime, they're not fully aware of all of the available support and assistance that may exist in a community.

As an advocate, I have seen the misinformation and gaps when it has come to providing adequate services to the specific population. The Latinx are a very diverse group with very different characteristics. There is a difference between the first, second, and third generations. Furthermore, we need to realize Latinx themselves come from different backgrounds, with different historical trauma around their governments, and even have their own dialects. Therefore, when providing services, it is definitely not a one size fits all approach.

Nonetheless, there are some values that tend to be consistent among the different groups. This includes respect, personalism, and trust. When working with the Latinx population, providers need to be developing culturally appropriate service. One can begin by asking two simple questions: one, do you know the different populations that exist in your community? By this, I mean can you specifically identify the backgrounds of the rest of us? Are they from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Guatemala? It’s important to recognize the differences. These Latinx may speak Spanish. Or for example, Mexico has 63 dialects. So, Spanish may not be their primary tongue. While many Puerto Ricans can speak and understand English and are United States citizens.

The second question to be asked is, are you considered a trusted source in the community? We must remember the cultural barriers Latinx face in seeking services, such as language access, immigration status, not understanding the laws of the United States, and even the fear of law enforcement.

Therefore, if you are a service provider who can help the community, how are you establishing yourself? When working with the Latinx community, it’s important to realize that they go to those they trust, and they seek the referral from those in the community.

So, if you want to help through the process of overcoming being a victim, or witness of a crime, you must establish a strong partnership and work with other agencies who may be culturally specific.
For instance, if you’re an advocate who works for the district attorney’s office, and the staff lacks minority personnel, seek a social service agency that already works with the community, and become partners.

Conduct outreach in places where the residents naturally congregate. For Latinx, religion is a very important aspect of the culture, so attending church events is a good safe place to bring education and awareness.

Finally, become part of the community fabric by participating in community and cultural events. For instance, I created a Day of the Dead event that represented also the Remember My Name for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I wanted to make a connection between culture and what was happening in our society and community. For further suggestions and resources on how to engage the Latinx community, I recommend visiting the following agency’s website: whom are culturally specific: CASA Esperanza, Comindad Latino and El Tasana.

Thank you for listening to the podcast. Let us empower the Latinx community by letting them know they have a voice and support.