



## Somali Group in Minnesota Tackles Tough Issues

What surprised Mukhtaar Gaadasaar the most was how many people from the Somali community showed up for a meeting at 9 a.m. on a weekday to discuss their health concerns.

Some 75 Somalians crowded into a room to help partners in *Egal Shidad: Stories of Somali Health* learn where to focus their radio and television work. *Egal Shidad* was one of eight projects in *New Routes to Community Health*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that sought to improve immigrant health through immigrant-created media. For more information on the program, read the [Program Results Report](#).

“The presence at the meeting of people from different backgrounds and different occupations was very strong,” Gaadasaar said. “It showed the interest of the community in learning more about health issues.”

The health challenges of greatest concern to the largely Muslim community may also have been surprising. Mental health, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and relations between teens and their parents topped the list.

To address those concerns, the *Egal Shidad* team produced a one-hour TV show and a one-hour radio show about mental health, a 30-minute video on STDs, and a 30-minute TV and radio show about communication between Somali youth and their parents. A nine-member advisory committee, composed of attendees from the first meeting, provided advice and feedback throughout the media-making process.

Project partners included [Emergency & Community Health Outreach](#) of Minnesota, which took the lead in forming health messages and managing the project’s everyday details. [KFAI RadioWithout Borders](#), and [Saint Paul Neighborhood Network](#) (public access TV) provided technical skills and radio and TV airtime for the programs.

The [Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota](#) contributed connections to the Somali community, whose members determined content and participated in on-screen discussions, and whose leaders supported the project. Gaadasaar, a Somali refugee, served as producer for all the segments.

Dealing with taboo subjects such as mental illness and sexually transmitted diseases required someone who could build community trust and solicit community involvement. Gaadasaar’s deep understanding of the Somali community proved crucial to the project.

When the Egal Shidad team was developing a video on STDs, finding women who were willing to speak about the topic on camera proved difficult. However, because Gaadasaar was known and trusted within the community, he was able to recruit several women who agreed to have their comments recorded if their faces were not shown.

Gaadasaar said the project helped spur discussion on delicate subjects in the Somali community that many people were thinking about but few felt comfortable acknowledging. For example, “in immigrant communities parents want to raise their children the way they were raised in their home countries,” Gaadasaar said. “But kids want to be part of the American mainstream: they want to fit in. That’s why conversation between parents and children is very important.

“After we completed and screened the video on parent and teen communication, we held separate forums with parents and teens,” he said. Overall, “this project has started a conversation about issues that the community had not discussed before.”

---

**Prepared by: Susan Parker**

Reviewed by: Sandra Hackman and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Wendy Yallowitz

Grant ID #: NRCH

Program area: Vulnerable Populations

---