

Webinar Transcript:

Eskarlethe Juarez (Moderator):	Hi everyone. Good morning or good afternoon. Welcome to the Health Literacy Solutions Center Webinar Series. Today's webinar: Rockford Ready 2022 Health Literacy Poetry Series. Before we get started, I would like to go over some quick housekeeping items. All attendees will be muted during the webinar. If you have questions for the speaker, please use the Q&A feature. It's either at the bottom of your screen or at the top of the screen. It's a Q&A symbol. Just go ahead and click on that icon and put your question in that chat box. Now, if you would like to make any comments, please use just the general chat function on the side to put your comments in there. Please note that the webinar will be recorded and posted in the Health Literacy Solutions Center webinar archives. Now, if you are requesting continuing education credits, a follow-up email will be sent after the webinar that will include the evaluation link, and that evaluation link will also include the CE request form. You need to fill out the evaluation in order to receive continuing education credits. With that, it's a pleasure to introduce our speaker for today. Anqunette Parham is an Illinois-licensed attorney, experienced investigator, compliance leader, and executive director of the city of Rockford's Health and Human Services Department. The department provides services to individuals, families, and neighborhoods in Rockford, as well as in greater Winnebago and Boone Counties, by addressing systemic community and individual factors. Key strategies include provision of direct services, partnering, collaborations, and advocacy. With that, thank you Anqunette for being here today. I'll turn it over to you.
Anqunette Parham (Presenter):	Thank you so much for having us with you here today. And thank you to everyone for joining and tuning in to learn about Rockford Ready. The city of Rockford's Health and Human Services Department. We are the community action agency for Winnebago and Boone Counties, and as such we like to engage in work, not only around poverty mitigation, but also around addressing the social determinants of health. To that end, we applied for and received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health around the

proliferation of health literacy. As a part of that grant, what we developed is this Rockford Ready initiative.

Rockford Ready is indeed an initiative that's dedicated to improving the health of all Rockford residents by providing health education, connecting residents to health resources, and strengthening relationships between healthcare providers and residents. Our particular focus is on African American/black and Hispanic or Latinx residents that live in some select zip codes in our community. Those zip codes were identified based on the areas that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 infection.

Our efforts focused there, but we're really serving all of our community, because we're dealing with individuals that live and work in the target zip codes. And a number of the initiatives that we've been engaged in are actually citywide. But we're measuring our impact in those target zip codes that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

This Rockford Ready partnership has aligned the City of Rockford Department of Health and Human Services with the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine's Office of Health Literacy and the UIC College of Medicine in Rockford, as well as a number of trusted community leaders.

Rockford Ready is an initiative that's been designed by the community and is for the community. We developed a Health Literacy Task Force, which includes all of these key partners that I just mentioned and a number of other trusted organizations in our community. If you'd like additional information, please check us out at rockfordready.org.

Essentially, that is what this initiative is. And our focus around health literacy and the work that we're doing is what gave rise to this particular health literacy poetry series.

As you all know, October is Health Literacy Month. And the importance of this month is to help promote the importance of understandable health information. What we've done with Rockford Ready is to be committed to producing easy-to-understand health information and services.

Of course, this project came about as a result of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19. We recognize that based on the health outcomes that we see here in Winnebago County. And there were some other prior studies in our community that reflected this low-level health literacy, and pointed to it as a critical area that we could put energy towards to help

improve some of the health outcomes in our community.

Some of the things that we've done at Rockford Ready have been to promote personal health literacy for residents here in our community. In addition to that, we engage young residents to join this conversation of health literacy. And the way we did that was to develop this poetry series with our city of Rockford youth poet laureate. This was a great way for us to engage the voice of youth—and not only that, but diverse youth—in these conversations about the importance of health literacy: what it is, what it entails, what it means, and why young people should actually be concerned about it.

We also remind Illinois residents that they're not required to present identification or health insurance in order to get vaccinated against COVID-19. And that information was current as of this month, so that's not an extra requirement. We help people to understand and remove some of what may be perceived barriers around getting vaccinated or getting tested for COVID. We also provide that information.

We've also done a number of things to encourage residents to prepare questions ahead of their doctor's visits. And we've created resources for them to utilize. We even produced notepads with questions for your physician. We've engaged in social media, radio shows, internet radio shows, and practices involving the community in talking about these varying aspects of health literacy, and what that means for individuals to be able to take control of their health, and even to be able to engage in the necessary conversations with their providers—how to go into your doctor's appointments or your provider's appointments being more prepared. We encourage them to prepare their questions and be ready and write them down, and to feel empowered about communicating with their providers.

We've encouraged residents who have limited English proficiency to ask for interpreters—that it's their right to ask for interpretation in their native language. We've encouraged participants in our community to do that in order to increase the quality of the visits that they're having with their providers.

Additionally, as part of this initiative, we provided COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters to residents throughout our community. We've engaged in a number of community-wide events and made sure that vaccinations and boosters were made available. And we meet people in the community

where they are, going into our target zip codes and going to events where people already are—events that already draw our target populations—and engaging with them there.

Additionally, we've implemented a strategic communications plan that includes radio shows, internet radio shows, and social media, as well as out of home ads. We recently have done direct mailers to the homes in our target zip codes as well.

We also service organizations throughout this project. We've created toolkits for individuals, organizations, and specifically for healthcare providers with our partners at the UIC College of Medicine. We have created and implemented health literacy and cultural competence training as well as a training for HR professionals with regard to COVID mitigation.

We've attempted a very broad reach in terms of how we engage with our community to help us reach our overall goal of making Rockford ready. And by that we mean ready to be healthy, ready to understand their health conditions, ready to increase their health literacy, and—God forbid, but—ready in the event that another pandemic happens, we've increased health literacy, so folks know how to better process and understand information and take better control of their health to ultimately get better health outcomes.

As you see in the headlines on this screen of Art Meets Health, art forms are being utilized in supporting and communicating contextually about health. We're seeing more and more that art is serving as a vehicle, both to address and to listen to communities that may feel disenfranchised. Americans may feel excluded in the dialogue concerning their own health. So health initiatives and programs are using art to meet populations where they are, and to hear them more clearly.

According to the Creating Healthy Communities: Arts + Public Health in America initiative, the arts can be especially beneficial for public health in five key areas:

1. Collective trauma
2. Racism
3. Mental health
4. Social exclusion and isolation

	5. Chronic disease Research by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe has shown that the use of artistic media in healthcare and in communities can have a variety of benefits for health outcomes. They can be used to communicate valuable messages across cultures and political divides, help affected communities understand the risks of certain diseases or behaviors, and provide ways for affected populations to process and learn from their individual and collective experience to improve their well-being, among a number of other benefits. These efforts of art meeting health we're seeing both at a national scale here in this country as well as through the World Health Organization. Health educators and healthcare practitioners should pay more attention to the ways that we can utilize the arts to help engage the patients that we serve and the communities that we serve in improving their health literacy and taking control of their health outcomes. We're going to share this poem called "This Is Bad Enough" by Elspeth Murray.
Elspeth Murray (Poet):	This Is Bad Enough This is bad enough So please ... Don't give me gobbledegook. Don't give me pages and dense pages and "this leaflet aims to explain ... " Don't give me really dodgy photocopying and "DO NOT REMOVE FOR REFERENCE ONLY." Don't give me "drafted in collaboration with a multidisciplinary stakeholder partnership consultation

short-life project working group.”

I mean is this about

you guys

or me?

This is hard enough

So please:

Don't leave me

oddly none the wiser or

listening till my eyes are

glazing over.

Don't leave me

wondering what on earth that was about,

feeling like it's rude to ask

or consenting to goodness knows what.

Don't leave me

lost in another language

adrift in bad translation.

Don't leave me

chucking it in the bin

Don't leave me

leaving in the state I'm in.

Don't leave me

feeling even more clueless

than I did before any of this

happened.

This is tough enough

So please:

Make it relevant,

understandable –

or reasonably

readable

at least.

Why not put in

pictures

or sketches,

	or something to guide me through? I mean how hard can it be for the people who are steeped in this stuff to keep it up-to-date? And you know what I'd appreciate? A little time to take it in a little time to show them at home a little time to ask "What's that?" a little time to talk on the phone. So give us the clarity, right from the start the contacts, there at the end. Give us the info you know we need to know. Show us the facts, some figures And don't forget our feelings. Because this is bad and hard and tough enough so please speak like a human make it better not worse.
Anqunette Parham (Presenter):	As you can see, this poem underscores the importance of taking health literacy demands into account when you're communicating health information or interacting with patients in a healthcare setting. Our initiative took inspiration from this poem as an opportunity to share the perspective of our residents with healthcare providers and healthcare organizations, and used it as a means to help improve our efforts of working with them towards improving those individuals' personal health literacy. That poem was an inspiration to the poems that you'll hear that we will present shortly. And that poem got us thinking about what the

	opportunities were to hear from local voices on the same or similar topics, and how our community was interpreting these issues of health literacy, how they were interacting with their healthcare providers, what their perceptions were, what they were feeling when they were going to appointments. We could look on the front end at this data that was showing us that the health outcomes were poor. But there weren't necessarily all of those anecdotal pieces filling in the picture and adding those pieces to the puzzle of why, indeed, health outcomes were so poor. So we look to this piece of art as a piece of inspiration, and helping us to move forward and say, "All right. How do we engage our community and get their perspectives on this very topic and subject and get their feedback." From that we moved forward with this Health Literacy Poetry Series. That poem by Elspeth inspired us to say, "Well, what can we do? How can we hear from our community?" As we were going through this project, the city of Rockford had named our new youth poet laureate recently. After engaging with this other poem, it made sense. Let's reach out to the new youth poet laureate. Her name is Giulyana Gamero. Giulyana is a senior at Auburn High School here in Rockford. She was selected as the youth poet laureate, and she has a 1-year term. Giulyana is an amazing young woman, and she's very passionate about her poetry, about this community, and about the impact that the arts can have, especially for young people. She shared that she's always been surrounded by language, particularly Spanish and English, and growing up in a Mexican and Puerto Rican household deeply influenced her love of language. She was published in the Young American Poetry Digest in both 2015 and 2016, and earned an honorable mention with the National Scholastic Art and Writing Award in 2017. She is currently working on her first novel. It was not difficult at all for us to have a desire to engage with Giulyana as our youth poet laureate, and to get her perspective and hear from her about this topic of health literacy and talk about that and allow her to express her art through it. We'll hear from Giulyana herself.
Giulyana Gamero	The Health Literacy Project was presented to me by Rockford Ready. I heard about it when everyone from the Arts Council was very nice and saying that

(Poet):	I could be a person for it—I could be the poet that puts it together. I think what really drew me into this project is the fact that I do come from a Spanish-speaking household, and my parents are both immigrants. So the topic really does correlate with me. I have my own experiences in the healthcare system, and I have been in the position of being a translator for my parents, or trying to get them to say something or advocate for themselves when it feels like things are really confusing. Rockford Ready is an organization pretty much dedicated to helping individuals with health literacy and advocating for themselves in the healthcare system and being more confident in the healthcare system. My father was born in Mexico, and his first language is Spanish. Even though he's been living in the United States for a very long time, my father still predominantly speaks Spanish. He also speaks English, but is definitely more comfortable with Spanish. A lot of the healthcare providers here don't speak Spanish, and I can often see his look of confusion when something doesn't make sense. He'll ask my mom to help with translating, or he'll even ask me sometimes with certain things outside of the healthcare system. So I feel like I have a really big tie to that desire to help, but also to help them help themselves. The thing about health literacy is that as much as we like to portray individuals afraid of asking for help—specifically when it comes to health literacy—as older or stubborn in their ways, or something like that, I feel like health literacy really does affect young people, because in understanding it sooner we get to know more. As we grow, as we develop, and as we have to make more choices for ourselves, I think it's important to understand this before we get to that point. I hope that my poems help people not be afraid to ask questions because, as someone who is kind of anxious, I struggle with asking questions myself. I know it can be hard. But at the end of the day, is it really worth the risk of something not going right? Is it really worth the risk of getting hurt or being in danger? I feel like my voice matters because we all have our perspectives in this world, and in sharing mine I can give someone else insight into their own lives. A lot of people my age, and even people older than me and people younger than me, we're all in a place of not knowing. There's a lot of unknowns in this world. And listening to other people and taking insight
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from others, we are motivated to do more with our lives and getting to experience life. We have more insight to share with other people just by living. I think that's why my voice matters—because I know someone out there is in the same position as me, or someone out there doesn't know what to do.

I feel like a lot of my poems do incorporate metaphor and a lot of emphasis on urgency. This is a really important theme for me. Specifically when it comes to this project, I wrote the poems the way I did simply because I was trying to accomplish that theme of self-advocating. I feel like that is by far one of the most important skills that we can learn in life. Communication in general is an incredibly important thing, and self-advocacy is just one facet of that. I focused on that impact, on the idea that you need to learn how to help yourself in order to prevent things. The overall nature of the healthcare system is intimidating, so we need to find a way to surpass that.

The themes and topics in my poems range from simply a conversation with your family to literal ER visits. My first poem is "Jargon." "Jargon" is essentially about not understanding, and the confusion that comes with not understanding. When you have to ask a question, two pieces in your mind are not connecting, and that is an issue. And you have to address those issues head-on. Oftentimes, when people are explaining to you something that they're really well versed in, they don't make it easy for you to understand. It's okay to not understand that. It's okay to be confused. But it's not okay to let that confusion continue.

Jargon

If I wanted strings of letters,
I'd eat alphabet soup.
Soup.
But they gave me a diagnosis—
a word
that my Scrabble board won't count,
that doesn't give me closure just gives me doubt.

Don't leave me hanging on for more explanation
say it all, right here
right now,
and don't spare my feelings.

I know you know how to rip off a Band-Aid.

Can't you just do that
for me?
For us?

Say it upfront, how it is,
and don't leave us hanging on for more,
having to resort to articles online that make us think
it's far worse
or far better.

"Breathe. Listen. Ask." is about talking with my father, and my worries for when I have to leave for college and my father, who primarily speaks Spanish, has to learn how to advocate for himself. From a very young age, I had to help my father with translating certain things—not just in the healthcare system, but outside of it as well. I really want him to not have to depend on me when it comes to things like that. I feel like it's a very shared experience, especially with immigrant children, or children of immigrants. It's an important thing to know how to advocate for yourself. You really just need to breathe, listen, and ask. It's a hard thing to do, but that poem essentially is an encouragement to do so.

Breathe. Listen. Ask.

Hearts and
Chests and
Lungs and
Breathe

I tell him to breathe.

There is a waver in his voice when he asks me
for rough translations—

but I'm counting the days down
until school resumes to capture me again
swooping his little girl from his home.

I tell him to breathe, listen.

If I wasn't here, the puzzle would remain undone.
If I wasn't here, how would he ever know?

I tell him to breathe, listen, ask.

Breathe, listen, ask.

	I won't be here forever, holding your hand like you held mine. I know we want time to last forever. We want to keep it on a cycle. One blink of an eye, and I'll fly. You'll be on your own. You need to breathe. Listen. Ask.
Anqunette Parham (Presenter):	As you can see, Giulyana is a phenomenal young woman, and her words are so powerful and beautiful. We are so excited to have been able to work with her, to platform her even more through this process, and to help to produce a very polished product. The full poetry series that she created as part of this initiative will be available on the IHA Solutions Center in the coming weeks. We look forward to sharing that with you all, so please check there for it. In addition to that, if you're interested in more about what we're doing here at Rockford Ready, please sign up for our newsletter at rockfordready.org. You can follow us on Facebook to see what we're doing and the initiatives that we have going on in our community. Question 1: How do you track the residents who get their COVID-19 vaccinations if they don't provide their identification? With this particular project, we're not tracking individuals on getting their COVID-19 vaccinations. What we're measuring is the difference in vaccination acceptance rates within our target geographic areas of the community. So we're not necessarily saying, "Did this individual get their vaccine?" It's not as necessary. What we're tracking is the overall rate of vaccine acceptance in the community. All the research that we've done has been anonymous. The surveys that we completed were anonymous in that regard. We did get IRB approval for all the research that we've done. We also did engage in some focus groups as well, but we're not tracking that individual vaccination acceptance of folks, but more so collective vaccination rates.

Question 2: How will you continue to work with poetry at Rockford Ready?

In addition to Giulyana's creation of these poems, we just participated a couple weeks ago in a community-wide event that happens here in Rockford that's called Art Scene. This event platforms artists and a variety of art forms throughout our community in spaces that are not traditionally art spaces. Spaces will open up, and they'll serve as a venue, gallery space, or even performance space for that particular weekend.

We hosted an event in one of our target zip codes that was called South Side Scene. At that event, we featured Giulyana. She performed some of her pieces there. We also had a number of health resources and artists that were present. We had an artist who created a live painting based on the feedback that she got from participants about what health literacy meant to them. They talked with her about their interactions with healthcare and healthcare providers, and she created a beautiful piece as a result of that. If you follow us on Facebook or sign up for our newsletter at rockfordready.org, you can see that piece. We're open to the impacts of art meeting health.

Giulyana's term is going to be coming to an end here soon as our youth poet laureate. But I really hope that working with Rockford Ready has set her on a trajectory to keeping health literacy in her focus and talking about the importance of it. As you can tell, it was such a very personal piece for her in terms of her experience as a young Latina. We look forward to working with her even more and working with other poets. We've been open to that. I think it's been a great addition to what we've done—allowing ourselves to lend space for voices of our target population to speak about what health literacy means to them, why it's important, and how they can engage with us, with their providers, and with healthcare organizations as a whole around these topics. We look forward to doing even more.

Question 3: I would love to learn about how one might be able to collaborate with you and your initiative.

We do have a Contact Us form on our website. Or you can like us on Facebook. You can reach out to us there as well. Those are ways that you can partner with us as we proceed in the future.

We're really excited about this partnership and how we've been able to

elevate the voices of the populations that we want to reach most through this effort.

Additionally, at South Side Scene, we used the National Academy of Medicine's health equity traveling gallery, which entities are able to use. We had that on display at our event as well. That was a very creative way to talk about health equity and to highlight the stories of people around the country—how they engaged in issues of health literacy, and what health equity meant to them. That was just one more way to highlight the partnership between art and health and the importance of the two.

Question 4: How can we use artforms to connect with youth, or with otherwise disengaged populations in our communities?

I think one of the best things we did was reaching out to those groups where they are. We've gone to a number of neighborhood initiative events that happen throughout our community during the summer. We've gone to events where people are already gathering or congregating around those things that are important to them. The arts and poetry and music were infused into those events. That's how we look to collaborate. We went in and said: "This is what we're trying to do. This is the messaging that we want to convey. These are the conversations that we want to have with you, because we know that we cannot improve the health outcomes in our community without the direct input of our community."

A number of the ideas came from our Health Literacy Task Force—key voices and organizations in our community, as well as our community outreach workers that are part of the project, that have helped to be boots on the ground and engage with our community members. These are folks that are entrenched in the community.

We looked for different ways and opportunities to partner with those that are actively engaged in creative and performing arts around this topic. A number of those opportunities came about or were suggested even from our Task Force members.

We engaged the community to have the conversation. We let them know that we were here for it, and we wanted to platform creative ways to engage these segments of our community that may not have wanted to be engaged. We met them where they were to engage in the conversation.

Question 5: What impact do you hope this poetry series will

	have? I hope that this poetry series highlights the importance of diverse youth voices in this discussion around health literacy. You're never too young to start empowering or to start being empowered. As adults, service providers, healthcare providers, and health educators, it's so important that we think about how we empower young people to speak up for themselves, and how we empower young people to experience self-actualization, and acknowledge that they have a voice, and that that voice matters. It matters in school, in the community, and in the doctor's office. They should be able to speak up for themselves, and it's important that they understand health literacy. It's not something that you start picking up once you reach middle age, or you start having other health problems. Health literacy is something that can actually change the trajectory of your life. And it's important for young people to be engaged in that conversation, and know how important it is for their own health. I think so many more conversations around mental health and wholeness are happening with people younger and younger. It's so important that young people realize that they are empowered to speak up and advocate for themselves. I really hope that this poetry series helps to highlight that, and helps to highlight experiences that sometimes healthcare providers may not think about from their perspective. They need to understand that young people are their patients, that they have to be empowered to speak up, and that their experiences matter.
Eskarlethe Juarez (Moderator):	Thank you so much Anqunette. It was a pleasure to have you here. It was very inspiring, and I agree that art could play a role to better explain and understand public health messaging. It's a very creative way to engage communities to understand their needs and experiences. Thank you very, very much for sharing your expertise and pieces of the poetry that the youth poet created. Thank you so much for being here. Before we close out the webinar today, I would like to go over some last-minute housekeeping items. Thank you everyone for attending. You will receive an email containing a link to a brief online evaluation. If you are requesting continuing education credits, you must submit that evaluation in order to receive your CE certificate. Please note that this recording and presentation slides will be made

Webinar Title: Health Meets Art- Health Literacy Poetry Series

Moderator: Eskarlethe Juarez, MPH, CHES

Presenter: Anqunette Parham, JD, MPH

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	available at the Health Literacy Solutions Center. The follow-up email will include the link to that. If you're interested in any of our upcoming webinars, you can check them out at our Health Literacy Solutions Center. We update that constantly. Thank you again Anqunette.
Anqunette Parham (Presenter):	Thank you so much for having me. Giulyana's in school right now, being a great scholar. It's been our pleasure to platform this brilliant young woman and her talent, and the beautiful way that she's helped us to carry this message to the next generation. Thank you for having us.