

# **Putting People First, Meeting Needs, Meeting Challenges**

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I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. I would like to pay my respects to the elders of the Ngunnawal people and to acknowledge their continuing role in caring for the country and helping to create the community of which we are a part. The Ngunnawal people have a long tradition of gathering together and our conference today is, in a sense, another meeting in this long tradition.

## **Introduction:**

Our theme for this morning is “Putting People First, Meeting Needs, Meeting Challenges”

I am speaking with you as people committed to delivering quality services. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by Anglicare services in so many fields around Australia. I am sure that many of the thoughts we will share today will come as no surprise. In fact you may have very exciting answers to some of the questions posed. I am pleased we will have time for discussion and questions later on in this session. I hope to raise some interesting, even challenging thoughts and questions for us to consider.

Firstly I want to talk a little about who are the people who make up this great country today. Secondly, let us look at some of the kinds of challenges we face, both as individuals and as organisations working with people in today's changing society. Later we will be looking at some innovative responses to the changing needs and circumstances we are facing. I will be asking some broad based questions and hoping to hear some responses in the discussion part of the session.

Let us start with our people. People are the reason we work in community services. In this work we are surrounded by people whether these people are service users, volunteers, co-workers and managers, members of governing or funding bodies or potential service users. How well do we know these people - our people's needs and challenges? How do we know if we are really meeting these needs and challenges? Are the many services we have developed, including advocacy, still our best response to our people's needs? Is empowerment of all our people for example, still an effective part of our agenda?

## **Diversity:**

### **People**

Let's talk a little more about our people. Each of us is a person first and we each want to be acknowledged and treated with respect. Beyond that, our attributes, our demographics and our circumstances are very diverse. Let's look very briefly at some demographics to see the variety that makes up our Australian population today.

Starting with our background, what country we were born in: almost one in two Australians was either born overseas or has a parent born overseas. The United Kingdom and New Zealand remain the largest source countries of new settlers in Australia. However in

proportionate terms, the fastest growing communities of Overseas born people in Australia now come from such very different countries as Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, China, and especially sub Saharan Africa.

The previous major source countries of immigrants to Australia from Continental Europe now send few migrants. As a consequence, these communities in Australia, like the Greek Community of which I am proud to be a part, now have a rapidly ageing population profile. We are working for changes in Aged Care sectors to reflect these changing demographics. Let's come back to how to best meet the needs of our diverse ageing population in a little while.

### **Faces of diversity**

As well as ethnicity, there are many other faces of diversity.

Gender and the different roles and aspirations of women and men remain an important consideration in understanding our people and our services. In addition almost one in ten Australians has a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

Disability Almost one in five Australians has a disability, whether physical or intellectual or both.

Mental Health More than one in ten people reported in the last year that they currently have a long term mental or behavioural problem. Almost one in five people (18%) had a mental disorder sometime just in the twelve months before the last national survey.

We are diverse in our attributes, in our demographics and in lots of other ways of course; in our sport, our culture, our tastes, and our lifestyles. You live it and know it as much as I do.

'Diversity is us'.

This could almost be the motto for Australia. Diversity and variety is what makes our society the vibrant, creative successful one it is. In

fact, people come from overseas to study how we promote and celebrate our diverse Multicultural society.

Our diversity is not static. It's dynamic. It keeps us on our toes. People from new countries are coming to Australia in bigger numbers. People with a whole range of different attributes and different life experiences are emerging. Earlier this month for example I participated in a Conference convened by the Multicultural Disabilities Advocacy Association and the National Ethnic Disabilities Association. It was really great to be a in a room in which people with so many different life perspectives respected and listened to each other. I felt the wider challenge:

How can we as a society recognise and indeed benefit from the great potential this diversity represents?

### **Cultural visions from the past**

This dynamic diversity of our society challenges us to keep checking our visions and our images are up to date. The vision of Australia represented by a 'white picket fence' is, for example, an anachronism, notwithstanding some affection amongst our political class for the supposed stability of the Australia of the 1950s and 60s. It is understandable for old times to sometimes be remembered fondly, but that Australia is yesterday.

The vision of Australia projected on our television screens and through our talkback radio programmes also lags along way behind the variety of who we really are.

Perhaps Australia's Multicultural World Cup football team stands as a successful marker of change we can all acknowledge.

# Changes

## Times of Choice and change.

For change is very much the experience of our people, our organisations, our country, even our world. Let's look a little more closely at some of the great changes in social, family and work arrangements.

## Social and family changes

We have been living through a massive gender revolution in which the accepted roles for women and men have been under pressure and sometimes painfully being redefined. The daily experience of marriage and the family, for example, is today very different from what it was even a generation ago.

Our households are becoming smaller even whilst our new houses are becoming bigger. Living alone has become the single most common household. Single parent families are becoming common in this diverse tapestry of household shapes and sizes. Family changes have big repercussions on how organisations need to be structured and what kinds of needs people will bring to us. Family changes also mean we need a whole lot more organisational flexibility for our workforce to be able to meet their family obligations.

## Work

The world of work, itself, has also been undergoing huge changes and restructures, bringing great benefits but also bringing insecurity and loss. With the recent introduction of the Federal Government's 'WorkChoices' legislation we are seeing the beginning of a period of even greater flexibility for employers and greater change for employees.

Not everyone is a winner, however, in this era of flexibility. Some of the people who have worked so hard in the old style jobs especially in manufacturing industries now find their labour is no longer required and they don't have the skills for the new style jobs. 145,000 people have lost their jobs in the manufacturing industries though restructures in the last ten years alone.

Amongst those out of work and still looking for a job, a growing proportion, 20%, have been unemployed for over 2 years. Older people and especially older people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds are particularly represented here. Many other people who have lost their jobs after working in Australia's manufacturing industries have given up on the possibility of a job. Women, and particularly older women, are over represented here. These people are a hidden reservoir of untapped skills and knowledge. A resource we can ill afford to under utilise if we truly want to become a clever country.

Other people especially those working in service industries like cleaning find that flexibility means their bargaining power is being eroded and they are having to work 'faster' and increase their hours to maintain a living wage. For some, flexibility means more friendly work life balance. For others, it means pressure to boost productivity. For all of us flexibility means an accelerated pace of change.

## **Technology**

The communications and information technology revolution is another great force which has already fundamentally changed the way many of us live, work, communicate, inform, and entertain ourselves. This change goes on at a relentless pace contributing to a revolution in our sense of identity, and of our place in the world. There are many positives in these changes, many opportunities and challenges. Creative Australians are seizing the opportunities. In many ways computers, emails and information technology have changed the

scope and even the style of our work. We are doing much more than we ever could before the advent of some of the information technologies.

## **Anxiety**

The pace of change and the sweeping away of the old sense of stability and predictability has, however, its costs. Some people are left feeling bereft or disenfranchised. Anxiety is a common response to the uncertainties of change and we are witnessing a rising toll of anxiety in terms of substance addictions and abuse, physical and sexual abuse and gambling. Binge drinking, for example, is now at equal rates in teenage girls and boys.

Another response to the uncertainties of rapid change is to look for certainty through symbols. Flag wearing patriotism, Cronulla riots and some of the vehemence of commercial talk back radio draw some of their energy from this response to change.

## **World of work**

### **WorkChoices changing the face of working Australia**

Lets look a little more in detail at changes in the world of work, an area that has become even more central to many people for their sense of identity.

‘WorkChoices’, the Federal Government’s new Industrial Relations system will be great for the flexibility of powerful employers and powerful employees. Flexibility is producing ‘winners’ and for many people who have the capacity to bargain from a position of strength, monetary wealth is increasing.

In this talk, I want us to think about how the changes will impact on the people we work with and serve.

The new legislation is already active at a Federal level. Going or gone are the Australian Industrial Relations Commission protections of a living wage which have been the basis of the Australian social compact so successfully since the birth of the nation. This includes, at a Federal, ACT and Victorian level, the whole of the Social and Community Services (SACS) Award. This alone has the potential to make life a whole lot more complicated for those of us trying to run a Community Sector organisation. For staff also, working conditions may become a lot more unpredictable.

The protection many people working in low paid areas of the economy had from awards, collective bargaining and a strong union movement is already greatly reduced.

Early indications suggest that the Work Choices legislation is adversely affecting the wages and conditions of workers.

We are beginning to see workers in areas such as cleaning and service industries being offered a choice between less pay and no job at all.

### **Engagement in workforce:**

There is a danger of exploitation and of growing inequities if we do not learn how to manage these risks. We already have a situation of disadvantage amongst immigrants, especially people from diverse backgrounds. Lack of recognition of overseas acquired skills, cultural differences in job seeking processes, and lower English language skills already lead to higher levels of unemployment. Many immigrants are forced to take jobs well below their existing skill levels and are restricted in their career path and their desire to be able to contribute fully to the growth of Australian economy. The challenge of our community organisations is what can we do to make the difficult process of finding productive employment in a new country with a different language a little easier.

## **Welfare to Work**

There is not a person in this room, I dare say in all our organisations, who is not aware to some extent of the Commonwealth Government's Welfare to Work legislation. These changes have been presented to the general public as a way of promoting engagement and responsibility amongst people receiving public income support payments. It was thought to be reasonable to expect people on a Disability Support Pension who could do some work or parents at home receiving benefits whose children are of school age to find at least part time work. We are very conscious of the huge extra stresses being imposed on people who are already vulnerable due to physical or mental illnesses, disabilities or other challenging circumstances. For people from culturally diverse backgrounds in these circumstances, 'Welfare to Work' becomes a double whammy. Especially when combined with the 'WorkChoices' legislation.

FECCA has highlighted these issues on the submission to the Fairpay Commission inquiry into the Minimum Wage. We argued that Minimum wages not be allowed to fall relative to average wages as this may amount to a form of discrimination against people from diverse backgrounds and members of other disadvantaged groups

## **Our own agencies in times of change**

Turning to our own agencies in more detail. Are our services and organisations just as relevant today as they were when they were established and developed in a different cultural climate, when our people looked and sounded different?

To take an example: Is the single mother with a number of young children from the Somali refugee camp going to be able to understand and access what services we are wanting to offer? Does she know, for

example, that she has access to many goods through ‘opportunity shops’?

Are we able to understand the challenges she and her contemporaries face and offer relevant accessible service? Do we have, for example, in the opportunity shops, the clothing, furniture and goods that her family needs? Do our medical personnel have the training and skills to meet her families’ health needs?

What about the older person who emigrated to Australia relatively late in life, whose English language skills are limited and who has limited family support? If this person needs Aged Care whether in Home or in Residential Care, are there services available which can be delivered in a culturally competent way? What will be the quality of life in this person’s last years? How will our staff relate with this person and how well can our workers assess the requirements of aged people from diverse backgrounds?

More broadly, are we using the knowledge and skills we have developed in addressing the concerns of the past as successful leverage into addressing the needs of today and tomorrow? How do we know?

### **Challenges facing our organisations.**

It is not as if our own organisations are standing still. We are being challenged by the changes in our people, our society and our world. These opportunities and challenges come at an organisational level as well as personal level. It is getting harder and harder to find and retain skilled staff. Many of the challenges and opportunities we are facing in our work do require a high level of skill and competence in the workforce. Inexperienced staff and too much turnover means we never get to the more difficult and complex concerns facing our people.

Our paid and volunteer workforces are ageing. Costs are increasing and in many cases resources are diminishing. Increasing prescription and interference from funding bodies affects our flexibility, responsiveness and service delivery.

We are required to be flexible in our work practices. We are challenged to acknowledge and respond to the diversity of circumstances and needs of our workers and potential workers both paid and voluntary.

Some of the people who are using our services today, may be the most skilled and effective members of our workforce in the future. How can we let people know this is a possibility? How can we tap into this great potential?

## **Volunteering**

Many of our agencies developed during a time when volunteering was more common. Are we able to develop new sources of volunteers and to find ways to make their involvement worthwhile and sustainable?

Given the diversity of our society, are we reaching out in meaningful ways to the range of potential volunteers?

## **Times of challenge and also opportunity.**

We often work with people at vulnerable times in their life.

We are passionate about this work. We have built up an expertise which is adapting to changing circumstances and needs. In this time of ongoing change, we ask ourselves:

How do we represent the people we work with and how do we account to these people?

Are our boards of management and our staff profiles representative of the people we work with, and relevant to those people?

Do Board members have close association with these people? Are some of the people involved in setting strategic directions for our work,

people who have experienced some of the same issues or are drawn from communities in which some of these issues are experienced? If someone comes to our agency or comes into contact with us in some way, are they going to see anyone or anything which looks welcoming, familiar or accepting?

How do we make people welcome at our agency? Are there people around who are of similar background, age and gender?

Given that we are often under pressure in our day to day work, how do we look beyond the immediate need to the broader opportunities? For example, how do we know if we are attracting all the people to our service who could benefit?

How many people come from diverse backgrounds? How many indigenous people? How many people of each gender? How many people with a disability? Are there changes we could make which could open doors for people who are not gaining access at present? Are there people we would like to offer service to who are not coming? How do we know?

### **Recruiting for diversity**

What about our recruitment processes? What do they look like from the perspectives of people with diverse backgrounds and circumstances? Are we recruiting in culturally appropriate ways that make the challenging process of applying more accessible? One refuge for example, who wanted Indigenous workers held an information afternoon during which, in an informal group setting, people could explore whether this might be a suitable and productive place to work. In the end nearly all the attendees received training and became part of the staff pool. What had been for Indigenous people the alienating experience of traditional recruiting processes was bypassed and a new pathway created.

From another perspective, that of a wheelchair, some of our leading employers work in buildings accessible only via steps. Potential

employees who use a wheelchair cannot get in the door and may never even apply for vacancies they would be well skilled to fill.

## **Governance**

Much of the direction, tone and priorities of our organisations are set by our Board of governance and by the organisations members. The continuity and organisational wisdom they represent is invaluable. The challenge for the long term health of our organisations is how can board membership be made accessible and relevant for members of our diverse communities?

For example, do Policies need to be written in plain English and provided in a range of languages?

Are Interpreters needed for effective participation?

Is the Boardroom a comfortable place for people from varied backgrounds?

It can be hard to find any people who want to contribute through Board membership. Knowing that, perhaps we can see this kind of participation as a scarce resource, one that needs to be carefully husbanded and promoted.

## **Commitment to Human Rights**

I have the privilege of serving as Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Our role is to advocate and promote issues on behalf of

our constituency to government, business and the broader community. Our charter has a strong focus on community harmony and the celebration of diversity, demonstrating how Multiculturalism is central to the social, economic and cultural health of Australia. We promote full access and equity and champion human rights. FECCA members and constituents are actively involved with a huge range of service provision, partnership and advocacy activities.

We take the international framework of Human Rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent treaties as our starting point.

Human Rights can be expressed both in terms of national social responsibility and provision and also in terms of the experience of people within our organisations. A Human Rights culture is something we can develop within our organisations, an inclusive culture which promotes the Human Rights of all, service users, employees and management. A culture which identifies and works to remove barriers to people enjoying their human rights whatever those barriers may be. The right to a “fair go” for example, is an expression of the human right not to be discriminated against on the basis of some attribute such as gender, race, religion etc.

As citizens, I am sure we are already contributing to building an inclusive respectful society. As service providers we share the challenge of building inclusive respectful organisations and developing pathways for people with specific needs and challenges.

## **Good practice models of Integrated service**

I would like to briefly share with you some examples of positive responses to the challenges of diversity from a service level, from a state level and from a national level. It would be great to hear your examples in the discussion period later.

## **Victorian Multicultural Commission**

Speaking more broadly, in Victoria the community and the government have recognised that the diverse cultural backgrounds, languages and abilities we have contribute significantly to the success of our State with tangible economics and social benefits.

Our success also relies on building on the skills and talents of our people from different cultural backgrounds to reach their full potential.

Since 2002 these understandings have been embodied in the 'Valuing Cultural Diversity Policy' based on four core principles:

- ⇒ Valuing diversity
- ⇒ Reducing inequality
- ⇒ Encouraging participation and
- ⇒ Promoting the social, cultural and economic benefits of cultural diversity for all Victorians.

An example of the policy in action is that government and partner agencies are required to respond to the range of needs in the community. So, for example, people whose English skills are limited cannot be denied access to service on this basis. This has recently been further strengthened by the adoption of a Charter of Human Rights which applies to government agencies and non government organisations operating with public funding.

I commend the Victorian Multicultural Policy to your attention as being perhaps a useful benchmark in your own service's thinking.

## **Interpreter Symbol and Card**

Recently an Interpreter Symbol was launched to assist people with limited English proficiency identify where they can ask for language assistance. This is an initiative of the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) and will be used across Australia. It is in fact thought that this is the first such symbol in the world. The symbol can be

downloaded from the following site: [www.voma.vic.gov.au](http://www.voma.vic.gov.au). The Interpreter Symbol will be displayed in places such as public hospitals, community health centres, local councils, police stations, migrant resource centres and employment and housing offices.

There is also an 'Interpreter Card', launched at the same time, which is a wallet-sized card that features the Interpreter Symbol and has the holder's preferred languages for communication written on it. The Interpreter Card will help agency staff by making it easier for them to identify when a person needs language assistance and what language they speak.

### **Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing**

Another positive response to the challenges of diversity comes from the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing. Their newly launched online resource [www.culturaldiversity.com.au](http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au) contains a wealth of information for those interested in culturally appropriate health care. There are resource kits, online resident handbooks and a suite of other resources. Material can be readily translated into one of 13 languages. The Centre is funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care initiative.

### **Aged and Community Services Australia**

In an example drawn from the non government sector, the peak body called 'Aged and Community Services Australia' launched their policy 'Strength through Diversity' at their conference held last week in Queensland. They have called for a better deal for older Australians from multicultural backgrounds and suggested positive steps forward in their new policy including:

⇒ developing a vision for 2020 and beyond

- ⇒ harnessing pool of potential bilingual staff to provide welcoming environments
- ⇒ improving communication and cultural components of aged and community care services, staffing, training and research

### **Multiculturalism: Melting pot or Mosaic?**

In thinking broadly about our responses to people's needs, we know our work is not value neutral. If we can have a good sense of our values and our aspirations, this will give us a really effective basis from which to respond. Of course, in this Conference we have valuable opportunities to reinvigorate our deeper values and understandings.

Our society as a whole also seems to be in a period of questioning values and reevaluating how we see Multiculturalism:

Is diversity something we are not quite sure about and which perhaps might be a danger or a menace to Australian Society?

Deep down do we feel more comfortable with a white Anglo based Australia with a few extras like interesting restaurants and coffee shops?

Is our society a 'Mosaic' in which we retain our diverse cultures but also contribute to a greater whole?

Or is Australia like a 'melting pot' in which we gradually become 'coffee coloured people' with shared culture?

Do we need to be frightened of the differences we have all - these different backgrounds, different cultures, different abilities?

Do we want a society in which we look and think the same?

Does our democracy extend to accepting and respecting views which are different? And appearances which are different? When we see person wearing hijab, what is our gut reaction? A person in a wheelchair? An African?

I am raising these questions because I believe that we will better understand how to get where we want to go if we have an in-depth understanding of who we are and what our cultural blinkers are.

## **What is our response to prejudice**

The Australian community has a very welcoming side. Just to take one recent example: In 2001-2, people started to become aware of the needs of asylum seekers coming to Australia from Afghanistan and Iraq. Very quickly groups of Australians came together under the banner of Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR). Over ninety RAR groups sprung up throughout Australia reaching out to approximately 15,000 members and friends. These people made diverse creative and heartfelt responses to the needs of people arriving in Australia without formal papers. I am sure many of us in this room were involved with these or similar groups of Australians trying to make a difference for the newcomers.

The Australian community does also have a frightened side. Fear of the unknown, the unfamiliar can break out as prejudice from time to time. We must be honest about this and see this as one of the challenges of our time. Are these prejudices alive and active in our people and our organisations? How do we know? What can we do to open constructive conversations and provide the information which can help breakdown prejudices born of ignorance? What role do we have as Community service agencies in addressing prejudice which impacts on the people we work with? I know for example some agencies have undertaken, as part of a Reconciliation process, systematic training of all staff to raise awareness of indigenous peoples' histories and needs. Relevant knowledge has replaced ignorance in a positive first step to developing cultural competence.

## **Arab and Muslim Australians**

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has released an extensive report called ISMA-Listen 'National Report on Consultations on Eliminating Prejudices against Arab and Muslim Australians'. It makes sobering reading.

Especially since September 11 2001, there has been a big increase in the incidents of abuse and prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians.

The biggest impact of prejudice on Arab and Muslim Australians is a substantial increase in fear. "Scared", "isolated", "uncomfortable" "vulnerable" and "alienated" were words commonly used by consultation participants to describe responses to racial abuse and violence.

"Everywhere you go you have this constant fear that someone's going to attack you, or expect everywhere you go someone's going to be racist to you".

Sounds reminiscent of experience of Indigenous people in the past in this country.

So if our Human Rights Commission has found these kinds of impacts of prejudice on some of our people, how are we responding in our services?

It sounds like even going out in public is becoming harder and more confronting for many Arab and Muslim Australians. It would be likely people would stay home more and yet their need for our services is not similarly reduced. What kind of efforts are we making to be known amongst the communities in which people live and feel comfortable? For example are our workers participating in community events and gatherings so that some sort of contact or relationship can be established with the people of our target groups? How are we reaching out given that it is harder for some people to walk along the street and in through our service doors? Women have been especially impacted.

Young people and even children have also been heavily affected. These people are an integral part of our society. People we need to connect with.

## **Older Australians**

### **Diversity amongst older Australians**

Turning now to older people, a large number of Anglicare organisations provide quality services for older people whether in home based care, residential care or in other settings.

Older Australians are going to look and sound increasingly more diverse as the years go on. The number of older Australians (65 years and over) who are immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is expected to increase by 66% over the current 15-year period<sup>i</sup>, 1996-2011

The corresponding increase for the Australian-born population is projected to be 23%.

Put another way, in 1996, there were 393,000 older immigrants from these backgrounds in Australia -18% of the total number of older Australians. In 2011, this number is expected to increase to 654,000 people, or nearly one-quarter of the total older Australian population.

The age profile of older people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds is catching up to the rest of the community. In 1996, about 16% of the 65 and over immigrant population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were aged 80 and over. This compares with 23% for the Australian-born.

'By 2011 the age profiles of the two groups will be very similar, -the respective figures will be 26% and 28% of the two older populations being aged 80 and over.'

Italians are expected to be the largest group in 2011, with a projected 117,600 older Italians living in Australia. People born in Greece will form the second largest group (70,200), followed by Germany (43,700), the Netherlands (37,500) and China (28,300).

On a State by State basis:

The Australian Capital Territory had the most diverse older population in 1996. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds made up almost 24.8% of its older population. Victoria (23.1%), the Northern Territory (20.3%) and Western Australia (19.6%) also had higher than average proportions. Both New South Wales and South Australia were very similar to the national average (17.7% and 17.8% respectively). Queensland (10.4%) and Tasmania (7.3%) were well below the national average.

This picture is already becoming dated. By 2011, Victoria will have the most diverse older population with immigrants from a culturally and linguistically diverse background expected to make up about 1 in 3 of the State's older population. So what are the implications of figures like these?

### **Service delivery for our ageing immigrants**

With our post-war immigrants now entering their senior years, there has never been a more urgent need for a comprehensive response that address the needs of this large cohort of our ageing population.

Post-war immigrants, helped build the economic, social and cultural fabric of our country. There are the large numbers of post-war immigrant workers from countries like Italy, Greece, Germany, Holland, Poland, Malta, Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia who often did the difficult jobs needed in a post-war boom economy. Jobs like building our renowned Snowy Mountains Scheme and operating our manufacturing industries. These people are now elderly.

Our more recently arrived immigrants groups such as the Chinese and Vietnamese communities will also see their community average age rising in the coming decades.

Some statistics from the report on Cultural Diversity and Home and Community Care published by the Department of Human Services to help us get a clearer picture. I am using figures from Victoria, my home state, but the situation is similar in other parts of Australia.

In 2011 38% of Melbourne's seniors' population, for example, will be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. That is a huge statistic by any measure. This makes the Commonwealth's recent cuts to the Community Partners Program, affecting the Polish, Maltese, Spanish, Italian and Greek communities among others, particularly disappointing.

By country of birth the Italian, Greek, German, Polish and Dutch communities are now the largest older culturally and linguistically diverse populations in Victoria in that order. Currently an amazing 41% of the Dutch-born Victorian population are over the age of 65. By 2021 the oldest CALD communities in order will be the Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Macedonian communities.

### **Multicultural Aged Care Strategy**

The key element of our *Multicultural Aged Care Strategy* is that all the various piecemeal programs be combined into one as a *Multicultural Aged Care Strategy*, which would address this significant public policy challenge.

The second element of the strategy is a recommendation to strengthen the capacity of ethno-specific service providers to effectively deliver home and community care or HACC. This is an area in which Anglicare providers may like to take up the challenge and

share their considerable expertise through partnerships or collaborations.

The third element of our Multicultural Aged Care Strategy is a recommendation to provide for more client choice in selecting Home and Community Care (HACC) services. Many older people from diverse backgrounds would be more satisfied in receiving ethno-specific services if they were provided with that choice, just as many would be happy to continue receiving services from existing providers.

The fourth element of the strategy is ensuring that state public sector aged care facilities provide culturally sensitive services where appropriate. The State of Victoria is the largest residential aged care provider in Victoria and as such is a key part of getting culturally competent residential aged care service delivery right.

The final fifth and six elements of the strategy call for greater funding ethnic senior citizens clubs to run healthy living programs so that our ethnic seniors can benefit from active and healthy living programs and also to ensure any elder abuse in ethnic communities is appropriately addressed.

We would very much value the expertise and support of Anglicare providers in helping to address the challenges outlined in this strategy.

## **Services for New and Emerging Communities**

Let's look at the challenge of Diversity in services for New and Emerging Communities. By way of example: Victorians speak over 180 languages and dialects, ranging from well established languages such as Greek, Arabic and Italian to newer and emerging languages like Dinka and Oromo. One in five (one million) Victorians use a language other than English at home. In 2001 the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data indicated that 177,460 Victorians could not speak English

well or at all<sup>1</sup>. This highlights our cultural diversity and the importance of accessible language services to ensure access to government and non government services and to enhance the well being of people with low levels of English proficiency.

A small and emerging community has been defined by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as a community that has an Australia-wide population of fewer than 15,000 and of whom 30% or more have arrived in the past five years<sup>2</sup>. Small and emerging communities identified for 2005-06 are the Afghan, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, Sudanese and Kurdish communities<sup>3</sup>. There are also new and emerging communities from Central and West Africa, including Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo. Immigrants from these communities are ethnically, culturally and religiously very diverse and typically consist of relatively small populations concentrated in metropolitan centres.

These figures differ from State to State and area to area. They highlight the need to be alert and responsive to changes in the nature of the needs of people living in our wider community. As service providers and as citizens we are doubly charged to be alert to the needs of people from these new and emerging communities.

Humanitarian refugees in these new communities may have spent many years in refugee camps and missed out on formal education. They may not have had exposure to the kind of social structures which we take for granted. Simple things like water and electricity bills may be completely unfamiliar, not to mention car registration and road rules. Families may consist of women without partners and with many children.

Speaking of humanitarian refugees from new communities, the Commonwealth Government has announced Australia will be accepting more of the Karen people, a persecuted minority from Burma. These people have also been living in refugee camps in very difficult circumstances for some years. Their experiences of

government and authority figures in Myanmar have been such that they will not readily trust or expect help in the way that native born Australians would.

How can we reach out to the people from these new and emerging communities to make their difficult journey a little easier? Great benefits will also flow to us and our wider community as we meet these challenges effectively. We will have happy, healthier fellow citizens, a better educated and skilled workforce, lack of alienation, more recognition of the skills which are brought into the country from overseas, more adaptability and flexibility and resilience and possibly more energy for our own service! The better we can connect with these new people to Australia, the less burnout we will face, the more renewal and the more knowledge that we are doing a state of the art job.

## **Youth**

Let's look more specifically at the needs of young people. I know there are many Anglicare services focussed on the needs of our youth. Taken overall, young people form a higher proportion of our immigrant communities than of the native born population. In fact, for some communities such as the communities from Sub Saharan Africa, places like the Sudan and Somalia, the average age is very young with large families and lots of children being common.

In the area of youth, the cultural perspective needs special attention. Many young people of diverse background often find themselves in an identity vacuum, caught between family values and expectations and peer/host community pressures.

Identity becomes somewhat blurred and they will seek familiar models, normally from TV and media. This is evident among youth

who endeavour to reinvent themselves - rebelling against both home and mainstream culture.

Education is obviously the most powerful variable in this; but the school can inadvertently act as a source of the problem rather than the solution, particularly if it rigidly endorses mainstream values and minimises home values. The main cause of this is a lack of understanding, suspicion and at times fear of the minority culture. Young people often have to navigate through this competing social maze of at time opposing views and life perceptions.

Once again we need to educate our staff to be sensitive and attune to the challenges and dilemma which youth in a bicultural situation face. There is a need to build on the common foundations of each culture and train youth to discriminate between what is ethical, legal and socially just and what is not. Community services need to be more aware of the challenges young people face and provide balanced mentoring and opportunities to achieve and engage, for example in sport. Counselling needs to be more relevant and culturally adept. This does not mean endorsing 'cultural relativism' for there are obvious tribal or traditional practices which are illegal and incompatible in the Australian culture and civil life but rather, as mentioned earlier, there is a need to build on the strengths and positives of each culture.

Young people may need time out. Programs which provide them with respite from the pressures of life can be very beneficial. They also need above all to feel like they can succeed and achieve - the provision of homework centres, study groups, class volunteer mentors all facilitate a growth towards educational and personal goals. The setting of realistic goals in education, career and life in general is important.

One thing that is almost universal among migrant youth is the desire to succeed and achieve. But often lack of adequate understanding of

schooling and pathways towards a desired career can set young people up for failure. Careers counselling needs to be realistic but sensitive; it needs to educate the parents as well as the children and above all it needs to be practical and the outcomes measurable.

Counsellors and other youth workers need to be mindful of the importance of family and the need to reconcile rather than separate child from family in a crisis or conflict. In many cultures family (immediate and extended) are an essential and familiar support network. It is therefore essential in most cases to maintain the dialogue and engagement with the family while negotiating generational issues. Separation from family can often lead to emotional as well as social isolation which may create more problems than it solves for young people of diverse background in distress or crisis.

Our services need to draw on their own rich heritage of innovation and flexibility to be able to adequately work with all the young people in today's Australia.

Concluding now, I hope this discussion has raised relevant questions for you and perhaps given some useful pointers in the ongoing creative journey we call our work.

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<sup>i</sup> Gibson D, Braun P, Benham C & Mason F 2001. Projections of Older immigrants: people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, 1996-2026, Australia. AIHW cat. no.AGE 18. Canberra: Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (Aged Care Series no. 6). <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/age/poi/poi.pdf>