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## **Report back from the Eastern Sydney Home and Community Care Bilingual Workers' Forum held on 23 November 2011**

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## **Report back from the Eastern Sydney Home and Community Care Bilingual Workers' Forum held on 23 November 2011**

### **Background and Methodology**

This Report is based on the HACC Development Officer's contemporaneous notes together with the notes from the discussion leaders, surveys completed by bilingual workers on the day, as well as discussions with the Eastern Sydney Multicultural Access Project Officer and the Aging Disability and Home Care, Metro South Office.

### **Definition of a bilingual worker**

For the purposes of this paper a *bilingual worker* is defined as a worker who speaks a language other than English and makes use of that language to communicate with clients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) on regular basis. Those workers who speak a language other than English but do not use that language to communicate with CALD clients on regular basis fall outside the definition of bilingual worker.

### **What makes bilingual workers different from other Community Care workers?**

- Bilingual Workers are a trusted people with who the clients can talk to and seek advice and support.
- Bilingual workers have a deeper understanding of the culture which helps them communicate intimately with CALD clients.
- Bilingual workers teach CALD people assertiveness and empowerment. This approach fits in with the enablement approach as teaching advocacy and self-care skills to CALD people empowers the individual to apply these principles to other aspects of their lives.
- Bilingual Workers help to acculturate and acclimatise clients at an important time of transition where they are seeking assistance from the wider community.
- Bilingual Workers have developed the following methods in building relationships with clients:
  - Identify the client's belief system including moral values.
  - Take an active role in what the client believes is best for them.
- Bilingual Workers are skilled at managing client expectations from one culture within the framework of another.
- Bilingual Workers find it necessary to invest time with clients explaining how the Community Care service system functions. It is very important to confirm with the client just what it is that they understand.



### Concerns identified by bilingual workers

- Broad support for a directory of bilingual workers.
- Training, supervision and debriefing were identified as key areas of concern.
- Bilingual workers identified a need for training on Occupational Health and Safety and successfully handling difficult situations.
- Cannot fit many interagency meetings given current workload.
- Issues around pay given the bilingual workers' additional skills.
- Lack of bilingual caseworkers.
- Lack of translated resources.
- Difficulty in engaging with CALD men.

### Service Provision Issues

- Many bilingual workers actively participate in community life together with their current or potential clients. Attendees spoke about the importance of striking a balance between the worker's formal role and their ability to participate freely in community life.
- Bilingual workers find it challenging establishing and maintaining professional boundaries with isolated clients.
- It is difficult to explain the complexity of the Community Care system to CALD clients, particularly the limitations.
- After winning the client's confidence it's difficult to explain that there are waiting lists for many services and limitations to what services are able to deliver.
- Hit and miss in availability of services. Clients require additional advocacy support in order to be able to access services from other agencies.
- Implementation of a program doesn't always align with planning – sometimes the community wants to change direction.
- Clients often ask for assistance with legal issues and interpreting during medical appointments.
- Many bilingual workers tend to be the only bilingual worker in the team which makes taking time off difficult because that worker is effectively the sole link with that community.
- Some mainstream clients can be intolerant of CALD clients.



## Bilingual Workers' observations of CALD carers

- Bilingual Workers found that many CALD carers do not identify with the term carer and are reluctant to accept support from community organisations.
- Bilingual Workers find that a significant part of their role is to educate clients on the concept of caring.
- Bilingual workers find that CALD carers are struggling with self-care in their caring role.

## Bilingual workers as interpreters

ADHC's Language Services Guidelines defined Interpreters as most often external professionals who are accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters to:

- *“facilitate communication, not conduct the interview*
- *interpret only, that is, convey messages accurately without addition, omission or editing (ensure all communication is relayed accurately without being ‘filtered’)*
- *interpret as the service provider assists the client to complete a form or take details or a history.*
- *when required read some information out to the client in the client's language (sight interpreting) as long as it is not of a very complex nature or very long. It remains the responsibility of the service provider to provide information to the client.* <sup>1</sup>

According to Language Services Guidelines Interpreters do not:

- *“act on the service provider or the client's behalf*
- *provide direct counselling or advice to the client or to a staff member*
- *fill out forms*
- *take information or provide information to the client.* <sup>2</sup>

Bilingual workers are often asked to interpret but are not necessarily qualified to do so. This is a significant issue as interpreting services are a right of prospective and current HACC service system users to have information delivered to them in their second language.

Bilingual workers tend not to be accredited to interpret and translate materials which means that their language skills may not be sufficient to translate and interpret for the client.

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<sup>1</sup> *Language Services Guidelines*, May 2011, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *Language Services Guidelines*, p. 2



Bilingual workers are not suitable interpreters as they act on the service provider's behalf. However, they are able to provide direct counseling and advice, assistance with filling out forms as well as take and provide information to the client.

### **Why is it important that bilingual workers have a platform to meet?**

Bilingual workers feel that it is important to have a platform to meet as a separate meeting allows them to:

- Develop strong working relationships between services that employ bilingual workers
- Shed light on working with CALD communities
- Identify important issues which need to be discussed with the sector
- Share experiences and new ways of doing things
- Identify particular training needs



## Results of the surveys of bilingual workers

We prepared a survey which we distributed to bilingual workers at the Forum. Fifteen bilingual workers filled out the survey. Five of the fifteen were employed by mainstream organisations, eight were employed by multicultural organisations and two were employed by ethno specific organisations.

Five of the fifteen were direct care workers, six identified assessment as their dominant job role, three nominated coordination and one advocacy.

Four of the fifteen were employed as bilingual workers for less than a year, five have been employed for up to 4 years, four have been employed for more than 5 years and two have been employed for 20 years.

We did not get consistent responses for the entry pathways into the sector. However, we found that two people studied Community Development overseas; one undertook TAFE studies and another volunteered before gaining paid employment.

### Languages Spoken

Seven of the fifteen spoke either Cantonese or Mandarin. The remainder spoke the following languages:

- Portuguese
- Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian
- Spanish, French
- Russian
- Filipino, Indonesian
- Afrikaans
- Bengali/Hindi
- Spanish

### Support

Three of the fourteen responses we received identified *communication skills* as the support they required, five identified *professional development* and others identified:

- Supervision and understanding cultural issues
- Problem solving and understanding cultural issues
- Peer support
- Managing community organisations
- Collaborative practice
- Communication skills
- Recognition in mainstream services



### **Recommendations and further steps**

**Recommendation 1:** Establish Regular Forum for Bilingual Workers so as to allow for continued peer support, training and networking opportunities for bilingual workers.

**Recommendation 2:** Establish and maintain a Directory of Bilingual Workers for Eastern Sydney.

**Recommendation 3:** Build relationships with other Bilingual Worker Forums. Assist other regions in establishing a Bilingual Worker Forum.

**Recommendation 4:** Develop further issues papers for the purposes of advocating on behalf of bilingual workers and ultimately their clients.

**Recommendation 5:** Identify Bilingual worker training needs and in partnership with Volunteer and Service Training organise relevant courses.