

DIVERSITAT DISABILITY FINDINGS REPORT



 **diversitat settlement**
& community programs

recommendations
inclusion
cultural
rights
control
service
independence
diverse
Disability
access
NDIS
provider
responsibilities
advocate
community
support
choice
barriers
carer
entitlements
underrepresented

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Diversitat is the peak regional body representing 70,000 residents through 50 affiliated and incorporated CALD associations, including all Refugee and Humanitarian communities in the Barwon Region. Building on our proud history of migrant services, Diversitat provides innovative and high-quality responses to the changing needs of a culturally diverse community. Diversitat’s vision is to empower individuals and communities to reach their full potential. Diversitat provides a full suite of health, education, employment, training, youth, aged services and community enterprises across the Barwon Region.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people with disability

Almost 20 per cent of Australians experience disability and about one in four Australians with a disability are from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background (FECCA, 2011), making people from a multicultural background the second largest group with disability, after women. However, people from non-English speaking backgrounds with disabilities face multiple barriers and are less likely to access government-funded disability support services than others with disabilities (Productivity Commission, 2009). These support systems can include community support, respite services, employment services and accommodation support.

About one in four Australians with a disability are from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background

Dwayne Cranfield, CEO of the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA), estimates “there are one million CALD people with disability in Australia and, if reached effectively, 20% of eligible National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)¹ participants are likely to be of CALD background. However, current numbers do not represent these estimates as CALD are a cohort who does not traditionally put their hand up for assistance and they are not being intentionally targeted by the government.” Out of 2907 people with NDIS plans in the Barwon region only 62 are of CALD background, according to Year 1 Quarter 4 NDIS reporting (NDIS, 2014).

People from non-English speaking backgrounds with disabilities face multiple barriers and are less likely to access government-funded disability support services than others with disabilities

The recent relaxation of the health requirements for humanitarian entrants being resettled from overseas, along with the 2011 change in policy from ‘life-time cost’ to ‘net benefit’ of accepting the person with disability and their family, has allowed greater numbers of people with disabilities to be resettled in Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

If reached effectively, 20% of eligible National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)¹ participants are likely to be of CALD background

Diversitat, the peak CALD organization in the Barwon region, is finding clients from non-English speaking backgrounds face barriers to accessing the NDIS and other disability support services. Newly arrived migrants and new arrivals from a refugee background often face difficulties in navigating the Australian welfare system and support services. This places them in a vulnerable position with the potential risk of unemployment and poverty. Diversitat’s experience with regional CALD communities has taught us that emerging communities require a service system that is capable of providing information and support in a timely, relevant and contextualised manner. In particular, there is great need for early intervention and support available as a part of settlement on arrival to reduce the incidence of being lost in the system until a crisis evolves.

“CALD are a cohort who does not traditionally put their hand up for assistance and they are not being intentionally targeted by the government.”

¹ The NDIS is an insurance scheme that funds reasonable and necessary supports for eligible participants. It also assists people with disability to access mainstream and community supports

2. BARRIERS TO CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PEOPLE ACCESSING DISABILITY SUPPORT

CALD people with disability face barriers to receiving adequate and necessary disability supports, due to a lack of:

- Literacy (in mother tongue or English)
- Knowledge about disability entitlements and available support services
- Translated information about services
- Culturally and linguistically diverse and appropriate services available e.g. respite services
- Interpreters available with disability awareness
- Trust established with case workers to fully disclose disability
- Culturally appropriate assessment processes, as often assessment of a person's disability does not take into account cultural and/or lingual diversity
- Clear diagnosis
- Family and community support network.

Also, for children born in Australia, their family cultural background and how this impacts on their environment and supports is often overlooked.

CALD people with disability can face a delay in receiving disability services due to:

- Negative stereotypes about both ethnicity and disability in the general community and often stigma and shame about disability from a person's own ethnic community
- No diagnosis or an overseas diagnosis of new arrivals that is not accepted by Australian service providers. With no service history in Australia referrals are difficult to obtain.
- A delay in support in the time taken to receive a diagnosis
- A lack of linking and collaboration along with access and equity issues between refugee settlement services and disability services
- Traditional disability services being unfamiliar with specific needs of new arrivals from a refugee background
- Fear from refugees to disclose information about a disability because of insecurity about their visa status and the confusion surrounding visa entitlements. This can

impact service providers who are unsure about a refugee's eligibility to receive disability services.

- A lack of necessary equipment for new arrivals from a refugee background with a disability, due to no prescribed aids or a need to leave equipment behind.

The delay in service provision can also lead to families and carers of the person with disability becoming housebound, impacting on their settlement and integration into a new community.

According to Carers Australia, between 25-30% of carers in Australia are from CALD backgrounds,

According to Carers Australia, between 25-30% of carers in Australia are from CALD backgrounds, with between 543,404-652,600 of carers being born outside Australia or migrating to Australia (ABS, 2009; ABS, 2011). Many carers from non-English speaking backgrounds do not access services until they are at crisis point. This is due to language barriers; a lack of awareness about available services, the complexity of navigating the disability supports system and the lack of availability of culturally appropriate care (FECCA, 2011). In addition, guilt and denial about the disability and the sense of duty to the person in their care can inhibit carers reaching out for help when needed. In regards to the types of services and assistance available to better equip carers from CALD backgrounds, there needs to be improved links between settlement services and disability service providers. This will ensure the provision of resources and information can be provided to families upon arrival in Australia.

Many carers from non-English speaking backgrounds do not access services until they are at crisis point. This is due to language barriers; a lack of awareness about available services, the complexity of navigating the disability supports system and the lack of availability of culturally appropriate care

3. FINDINGS

People with disability in the Barwon region

Diversitat has identified more than 50 new-arrival clients from non-English speaking backgrounds² with a range of physical and intellectual disabilities along with behavioural and mental health conditions. Identified disabilities include cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, hearing and vision impairments, schizophrenia, epilepsy, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, intellectual disability and autism, in addition to a co-morbidity with other health issues including diabetes. While not all of these clients will be deemed eligible for NDIS funding, only a few have accessed the NDIS to determine their eligibility for the Scheme and are linked with disability service providers.

In addition, NEDA estimates the total number of people from non-English speaking backgrounds with a disability, under 65 years old and living in the Barwon region, to be between 4585 and 7980 people (NEDA, 2014).

NDIS

Diversitat has found people from a non-English speaking background, who have arrived in the past five years, are not accessing the NDIS in expected numbers to determine their eligibility

under the scheme, or to access the other services and support available to all people with disability.

CALD people with disability are vulnerable to being overlooked in regards to accessing the NDIS due to the following reasons:

- Many new arrivals with disability have not been linked with a disability service provider in the past so they will not automatically move to the NDIS, and in some cases may not be aware of the NDIS
- There is no specific case-management funding to support new arrivals with disability prior to NDIS eligibility determination and throughout the NDIS planning process, for example, to facilitate disability assessments. However, a Diversitat case-worker spent more than 50 hours providing support for just one client who was undertaking the NDIS planning process
- The lack of literacy and translated material means people are not aware of their disability entitlements and what disability supports are available
- There are insignificant numbers of CALD disability support workers and interpreters with disability awareness
- The NDIS model assumes empowerment and that people with disability from CALD backgrounds know what supports are on

To be eligible for the NDIS in the Barwon region a participant must:

- Reside in Australia and be an Australian citizen or the holder of a permanent visa or a special category visa holder
- Be permanently living in the launch site from before the 1st July 2013
- Be under 65 years, and
- Meet disability requirements

If a person with a disability moved into the Barwon area after 1st July 2013, an exceptional circumstances clause may be considered if they meet the access requirements and:

- There are compelling reasons for the move, for example they have to have moved to the launch area for a reason other than to access the scheme
- There are likely to be significant negative impacts on the individual or family if they are not able to access the scheme, for example the person would suffer significant financial or personal hardship if they couldn't access the Scheme

² These clients are from newly arrived communities who have been in Australia for less than five years; Diversitat has not mapped numbers of people with disability from more established CALD communities in the Barwon area

offer and how to define and articulate their goals. This is a foreign concept for many ethnic communities

- There is a lot of misinformation being given about disability entitlements for people from a refugee background. However, new arrivals from a refugee background and migrants with a permanent residency visa or citizenship – who satisfy other eligibility criteria – are able to access the NDIS as they have the same rights and responsibilities as others

Many new arrivals with disability have not been linked with a disability service provider in the past so they will not automatically move to the NDIS, and in some cases may not be aware of the NDIS

- The NDIS is taking early steps to access CALD communities in the Barwon region to improve cultural accessibility and understand the specific needs of people with disability from non-English speaking backgrounds. More work in this area is needed, evident in the low numbers of CALD people receiving disability services under the Scheme in the Barwon region.

The lack of literacy and translated material means people are not aware of their disability entitlements and what disability supports are available

The NDIS needs to be culturally competent and accessible, with culturally appropriate support for people with disability from non-English speaking backgrounds before the Scheme is rolled out nationally. Currently there is no CALD representation on key advisory groups to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)³ in the Barwon region. While the NDIS provides a personal plan and funded supports to people with disability, not everyone is eligible for this assistance, for example people who arrive in the Barwon region after the NDIS launch date. This is an issue of particular concern for new arrivals from a refugee background with a disability who are settled in Geelong by the Australian Government. While people denied access to the scheme because of their date of arrival in the Barwon launch site are able to

appeal the decision on the grounds of special consideration, this is not always communicated at the time eligibility is denied.

Disability Service Providers in the Barwon region

There are insignificant numbers of CALD disability support workers and interpreters with disability awareness

Diversitat met with various Disability Service Providers (DSPs) in the Barwon region to document the challenges they are finding when supporting established CALD clients through their engagement with the NDIS. The following points were issues raised by the DSPs:

- The NDIS model assumes an understanding of needs, supports on offer, the disability system and English literacy

There is a lot of misinformation being given about disability entitlements for people from a refugee background. However, new arrivals from a refugee background and migrants with a permanent residency visa or citizenship – who satisfy other eligibility criteria – are able to access the NDIS as they have the same rights and responsibilities as others

- If there is no previous relationship with NDIS staff, and if the DSP is not included in the client's planning meetings, then not all needs may be disclosed. This leads to a package that is not reflective of an individual's complex needs as it only includes supports for disclosed needs
- CALD clients' English literacy skills and lack of knowledge of the disability system is a barrier to liaising directly with the NDIS without DSP assistance

More work in this area is needed, evident in the low numbers of CALD people receiving disability services under the Scheme in the Barwon region.

- DSPs are receiving requests to assist CALD clients with understanding and filling in NDIS forms
- Pressure is put on families by the NDIS to gather the information to support their application – this is an issue for new arrival communities as they do not have the necessary documentation and generally have not undergone appropriate assessments
- Working with an advocate is proving challenging as there is a lack of CALD competent advocates and advocates with

experience working with CALD people with disability

- Visa status causes confusion in regard to NDIS eligibility and entitlements that DSPs can support.

In addition, most DSPs revealed they do not have representative numbers of CALD people with disability engaging with their services. This may be due in part to the lack of established relationships with CALD communities.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding disability in an Australian context, including access and equity issues, is a challenge for new arrival communities. People with disability from a non-English speaking background need access to information about human rights, disability entitlements, essential services and available support.

They require assistance to realize their human rights through self-empowerment and information on accessing individual advocacy.

People with disability from a non-English speaking background need access to information about human rights, disability entitlements, essential services and available support.

Furthermore, there is a requirement for targeted practical support to assist CALD people with disability to engage with disability services. This support will help them articulate goals to ensure relevant and necessary support to enable their social and economic participation. As newly emerging communities will continue to settle in the Barwon region, linking people with disability from non-English speaking backgrounds to disability services will be an ongoing need.

Recommendations for the NDIS

For the NDIS to improve cultural accessibility, safety⁴ and security⁵, the following recommendations are made:

- Fund activities to engage CALD people with disability in shaping the NDIS
- Foster inclusion through addressing access and equity issues
- Ensure there is CALD representation on NDIA advisory and reference committees
- Improve data collection on CALD people with disability and their carers to help plan adequate and appropriate disability services and supports

Ensure there is CALD representation on NDIA advisory and reference committees

- Make sure there is culturally accessible information, and culturally competent processes and support before a national roll out of the Scheme. This includes translated materials and budget for interpretation; cultural competency training for staff; increase multicultural staffing; KPIs regarding CALD service utilisation rates; and seeking advice from CALD communities

⁴ Cultural safety - an environment where there is no attack, challenge or denial of an individual's cultural identity. An environment that fosters shared respect, meaning, knowledge, and learning about diverse cultural identities and needs

⁵ Cultural security – an obligation on those who work with CALD individuals to move beyond 'cultural awareness' to actively ensure cultural needs are met and included in policies and practices, so all CALD people have access, not only those who have engagement with culturally competent workers

and CALD peak organizations to improve services

- Promote the NDIS to CALD communities through ensuring key NDIS and disability system materials are made accessible through translation and promotion of information via ethnic media and making this information available in places regularly attended by CALD people

Improve data collection on CALD people with disability and their carers to help plan adequate and appropriate disability services and supports

- Widening the pathways into NDIS as it has for early childhood, for example, not only self-referral but nominating others who can either refer on behalf of, or in partnership with, the individual with disability
- Produce NDIS information and resources in all languages and in various accessible formats⁶

Culturally accessible information, and culturally competent processes and support before a national roll out of the Scheme.

- Promote the awareness of rights and responsibilities of CALD people with disability, in particular eligibility regarding visas, for example, permanent residents and citizens can apply to be participants under the scheme
- Raise awareness about personal advocate and disability complaints options and complaints mechanisms
- Comprehensively map disability in established CALD communities

A key challenge in implementing the NDIS will be making sure the disability services sector is equipped to meet the individual and diverse needs of people with disability, particularly those from CALD communities.

- Ensure the NDIA considers workplace diversity in its workforce strategy for the NDIS. A key challenge in implementing the NDIS will be making sure the disability services sector is equipped to meet the individual and diverse needs of people with disability, particularly those from

CALD communities. The National Workforce Strategy needs to ensure the complex and diverse needs of CALD communities are being met, and for the sector to be responsive to these communities.

Recommendations for Disability Service Providers

Disability Service Providers will need to improve cultural competency through:

- Undertaking a cultural audit to highlight gaps and areas in need of improvement
- Procedures and policies to ensure access and equity
- Providing cultural competency training for staff
- Using interpreters when necessary
- Translating resources and materials
- Increasing multicultural staffing
- Promoting opportunities for CALD people to work as paid carers
- Disability Service Providers who are also Registered Training Organisations need to promote disability-related training courses to CALD communities to increase the CALD disability workforce.

All parties involved in the disability system need to ensure disability advocacy pathways, including complaints mechanisms, are culturally and linguistically accessible.

In general, all parties involved in the disability system need to ensure disability advocacy pathways, including complaints mechanisms, are culturally and linguistically accessible.

Providing cultural competency training for staff. Using interpreters when necessary. Translating resources and materials. Increasing multicultural staffing

⁶ Diversitat welcomes the recent translation of some NDIS materials in various languages but calls for additional language translations to be added to these resources

Measuring Success

A culturally competent disability service and support system will have:

- Increased utilization of disability supports from CALD people with disabilities
- Culturally accessible information, in a range of formats, and culturally competent processes undertaken by disability service providers and the NDIS. This includes translated materials and a dedicated budget line for interpretation; cultural competency training for staff; KPIs regarding CALD service utilisation rates; promotion of the NDIS and other disability supports and

entitlements to CALD communities; seeking advice from CALD communities and CALD peak organizations to improve services.

- Registered Training Organisations promoting disability-related courses to CALD communities to build up a CALD disability workforce.

Promotion of the NDIS and other disability supports and entitlements to CALD communities; seeking advice from CALD communities and CALD peak organizations to improve services.

5. CONCLUSION

The disability sector needs to address barriers CALD people with disabilities face in accessing services. There is a short-term need for case management and bilingual support to link a backlog of CALD people with disability to disability services. In addition, there is longer-term support needed to ensure ongoing support to CALD communities and an improvement in the cultural competency of disability service providers and NDIS.

Diversitat is advocating for processes that are inclusive of the specific needs of CALD people with disability; for cultural competency for staff and service providers, for cultural accessibility and for a CALD workforce strategy that considers the needs of a group that currently do not have access to disability services.

Support will enable increased opportunities and promote inclusion for CALD people with disability, enabling greater control, choice and independence.

Without support, vulnerable CALD people with disabilities and their families will continue to be underrepresented in receiving government funded disability support services and barriers to their inclusion will continue to restrict their access.

6. DIVERSITAT CASE STUDIES





Augustino

Augustino is a 50-year-old Karenni man from Burma. He has a degree in Mathematics and is the father of three children who were all born in a refugee camp in Thailand. Augustino lost his left hand in a landmine accident when he was 16 and now uses a split hook prosthesis. Augustino does not think he is eligible to participate in the NDIS as his support needs are not very high.

Augustino assists Diversitat and other local service providers to deliver important information to the Karenni community, and to help organisations understand Karenni culture and customs. He regularly helps organise traditional festivals and local events to create opportunities for the broader Geelong community to learn about Karenni culture, promoting mutual understanding and compassion. Augustino was an inductee into the Victorian Multicultural Commission's Refugee Recognition Record, in 2013, this award recognises individuals of a refugee background for their outstanding work in the community.

When Augustino lived in a refugee camp in Thailand he "had a prosthetic device made in a camp workshop out of local material". Upon arriving in Corio in 2009, Augustino received a new prosthesis. "I visit the medical centre each year to check it and make adjustments. I'm not sure who would cover the cost of a new prosthesis – the NDIS or the health system," he said.

Augustino does not require much day-to-day assistance with his disability but "if a manual job requires two hands sometimes I need some modification to the activity or the equipment".

Augustino works and does not receive any disability support or pension. He is not sure if he is entitled to any assistance but doesn't believe he would qualify because of his employment.

He heard about the NDIS through Diversitat and said: "It is there to support people with disability and to do assessments. I went to the website to see if I was eligible, but I was not eligible because I didn't pass questions related to support needs."

While he was not able to access any supports himself, through his bilingual work supporting Diversitat clients to access the Scheme Augustino has since "helped two other Karenni

families to access the NDIS and other services related to their disability and health".

Augustino found it interesting to "learn about the NDIS support that people with disabilities could receive if they couldn't take care of him/herself, for day-to-day life skills and care, and the support to continue their education".

Augustino is very active in his Karenni Community and he assists new Karenni arrivals from refugee backgrounds to settle in the Geelong region. He is always available for his community to assist others to attend medical and other appointments, advise and mentor the youth and support those in need, including the older members of his community, all on a volunteer basis.

"Most new arrivals lack knowledge about the available services...more accessible information in many languages would be good so that others can access the information that is available"

Augustino's English language ability is very good but he reflected on potential barriers and recommendations that he would make to improve disability system accessibility for culturally diverse people. "Many would not be able to access the information, many Karenni are illiterate in their own language and they need interpreters, they are illiterate as they never had the opportunity to go to school," he said.

"Most new arrivals lack knowledge about the available services but young people have more literacy than their parents and if they know English they can search the internet and read the flyers in the medical clinics. More accessible information in many languages would be good so that others can access the information that is available and visible at the medical centres."

He suggested the different circumstances of new arrivals from a refugee background will also need to be taken into account in the future. "The older Karenni refugees have had many years of hard labour and some injuries that restrict their work. Many of these people will face disability in the future because of their past labour experiences," Augustino said.



Divine and Marielle⁷

Divine is a 17-year-old Congolese person from a refugee background with cerebral palsy. She lives with her mother and four siblings in Corio after arriving in Geelong in 2010. Divine meets the NDIS residency requirements as she has a permanent visa and she resides in Australia, she is eligible for the NDIS. Divine and her mother have been through the NDIS planning process but there has been no implementation of her plan since November 2013.⁸

"I don't have good language ability and it is hard being new to Geelong, I don't know many organisations who are delivering the service we need for my daughter,"

Divine attends a mainstream high school and is learning English. As her cerebral palsy affects her speech and movement she receives some assistance from a teacher's aide and uses some specialised equipment. "I use the computer a lot because writing can be difficult," Divine said.

Marielle, Divine's mother and legal guardian, helps with Divine's showering, dressing and other personal tasks. She is concerned about how she will manage supporting Divine in the future: "I am alone here (Marielle is a widow) and I have a big family to look after so it is hard for me to cover all of Divine's needs. Transport is not enough to cover the needs of Divine, support about her future is needed. She is growing up and needs special care as her support will be expensive in the future."

While the Congolese community helps Marielle with general advice, she needs information about the disability system and the entitlements and services available to Divine. "I don't have good language ability and it is hard being new to Geelong, I don't know many organisations who are delivering the service we need for my daughter," Marielle said.

Divine receives some direct support from the McKellar centre. Marielle explains: "I am worried about the future because Divine is in year 11, I don't know if the McKellar program is connected to Divine being in school. I don't know much about how to manage Divine's disability in

the future, her education, helping her to be independent and planning for her future. I would like to know what disability support is available after high school, especially to help her keep studying."

Marielle has had some interaction with the NDIS. "I have had two appointments with the NDIS. Sally (case worker from Diversitat) helped us access the NDIS. The first appointment we answered questions and in the second appointment last November they told me there was a lady from the NDIS who would come and assist me, but up until now, nothing. Up until now we don't know what is going on."

"I was disappointed as I went there [to the NDIS] with much expectation but unfortunately after the assessment they said someone is coming around to help, but up to now it was a waste of time because no one came. I don't know why they told me to go there," Marielle said.

Marielle was not advised she could involve a personal advocate in her planning meetings. "No, I have never heard of this," she said. She was also not made aware of the complaints procedure. Divine understands English fairly well, however Marielle requires an interpreter. While the NDIS will organise interpretation for clients, relying on this support has been problematic. "The first time I went there they said they would organize an interpreter but no one showed up, so they got a phone interpreter. I disagreed with something the phone interpreter said, we quarrelled and they hung up. The second appointment they had someone on the phone organized and they gave me some assistance, however, none of the material was translated," Marielle said.

There is a lot of misinformation about disability entitlements for culturally diverse people, especially those from a refugee background. "I was told because I am a refugee that I would not be assisted like mainstream people, I was told that it would be hard to get the same assistance if I am not a citizen. I would like to recommend that people with disability are assisted without discrimination," Marielle said.

⁷ Names have been changed on clients request.

⁸ In June 2014 Divine's plan was reviewed to find out why no implementation had occurred, some additional support items were added at this time and the new plan is now being implemented



Marie Claire and Moses

Moses is six, he has albinism and low vision. Moses and his family arrived in Geelong in 2010 as refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Moses meets the NDIS residency requirements as he has a permanent visa and he resides in Australia.

Marie Claire, Moses' mother, was eager for him to attend a mainstream school. He receives some assistance through a teacher's aide and specialised equipment. Moses and his family also receive assistance from Vision Australia. Vision Australia have organised medical checks, given Marie Claire information about how to manage Moses' vision impairment, and assisted the family with books, an iPad and stationary for Moses.

Marie Claire first heard of the NDIS through a letter she received. She is unsure of how they knew to contact her. "I didn't fill out the first forms I was sent because I didn't understand them. I put them aside and forgot. Then I met someone [from the NDIS] who could help me at the Our Choice expo [in Geelong] and they called later to organise a meeting time for me to bring in Moses." Marie Claire went to the meeting and Moses is eligible to be a NDIS participant.

Marie Claire was not made aware she could invite a personal advocate to her NDIS meetings but because of the strong relationship she had developed with Vision Australia she asked them to attend. "A person from Vision Australia came to my meetings, I invited them to come because they know Moses and the support he needs."

Marie Claire was very happy with the support she received from Vision Australia before and throughout the NDIS planning process. Vision Australia's Geraldine Ryan said: "Vision Australia hosted information sessions about the NDIS for parents and in these sessions it became clear who struggled with language difficulties so we then offered individual supports to these clients."

Geraldine said culturally diverse people face barriers navigating the disability system in Geelong as they are "working their way through the new maze of hospitals and specialists, while dealing with their day-to-day responsibilities, to find the information that is relevant for them".

Marie Claire didn't understand the initial information from the NDIS. "I didn't know how to use the services. I was confused. I didn't know the source for funding for Moses, where to get money to help him, I didn't know. The goals part was hard. Explaining the need and putting together the goals of my son."

Geraldine agrees: "A difficulty that our CALD clients faced was understanding what was meant by 'goals and aspirations'. They didn't understand the NDIS paperwork and needed more discussion from a cultural perspective to turn the supports into what they want, as the concepts are very foreign."

Following the NDIS planning meetings, Marie Claire was happy to have clarified information about available disability support. "It was helpful to know what kind of services there were and how to get the services. I was happy because I became clear about the amount of funding and happy because I knew how to use the money," she said.

"I have now had two meetings with the NDIS and we have a completed plan for Moses. For the first meeting an interpreter was arranged but they didn't show up so I said don't worry about it because it wasn't completely necessary. The last contact was in February, we haven't implemented the plan yet but I know the next steps and will follow up when we move to Adelaide in the next few months," Marie Claire said.

"I find it hard to manage too many services, I will find out about what we can access as Moses' needs change as he grows older, we will go step-by-step."

When asked about her recommendations for how the NDIS can improve the services for culturally diverse people, Marie Claire said: "People from culturally diverse backgrounds will bring their NDIS letters to their Diversitat case workers if they don't understand them. NDIS need to use interpreters and not just the letters alone as people won't understand them. The initial phone call to organise an appointment could be with a phone interpreter but for the meetings they should use interpreters in person."



Tanha is a 19-year-old Afghani male with muscular dystrophy. He arrived in Australia in December 2013 through the Australian Government's refugee program and was settled in Geelong. Before coming to Australia Tanha assisted the International Organisation for Migration with English classes in Indonesia. Tanha would like to continue his education in Australia.

Since arriving in Australia Tanha has noticed a decline in his physical condition: "I have been getting worse since coming to Australia. I need help cooking and going places. It is hard to walk long distances. If I walk sometimes I fall down. Day by day my muscles are becoming worse. I don't use any equipment now but I will need help getting around soon. I am not currently using a wheelchair but I might need one in the future."

New arrivals from a refugee background with a permanent residency visa or citizenship – who satisfy eligibility criteria – are able to access the NDIS as they have the same rights and responsibilities as others

Due to the effects of muscular dystrophy he experiences, and with no family or carer support in Australia, Tanha requires external support to manage his disability and to access the community. With the help of a bilingual worker from Diversitat, Tanha visited the NDIS to see if he was eligible to receive disability supports under the scheme. However Tanha, who is a permanent resident of Australia, arrived after the NDIS Barwon's launch date so he was denied access to the NDIS and was not given any further information about how and where he could access other disability assistance.

"I know that there are things here to support me but I don't know how to access them. It is difficult as no-one has told me or shown me how I can access any information or support," Tanha said.

"I want to know how I can improve my life and my future here. I need lots of information, I am not aware of how I can get support as no information has been given to me. The NDIS

didn't help me with any services or support. Diversitat has helped me with taxi vouchers and filling in applications but nothing else has happened except a small disability pension and some physiotherapy and occupational therapy, which will soon stop."

In addition to the lack of practical support for people with disability who are not able to participate in the Scheme, there is a lot of misinformation about refugee eligibility in the launch sites. "I was told by the NDIA that I was not eligible. I was told that I needed to be here for over one year before I could apply," Tanha said.

However, it was Tanha's date of arrival in the Barwon region, not whether he had lived in Geelong for a year or more, which determined his residency eligibility. In addition, refugees with a permanent residency visa or citizenship – who satisfy eligibility criteria – are able to access the NDIS as they have the same rights and responsibilities as others in the launch sites. Furthermore, in Diversitat's recent conversations with the NDIA (via their 1800 number listed on their website) there have been three occasions where NDIA call centre staff have incorrectly advised that new arrivals from a refugee background are ineligible to participate under the scheme.

Tanha was not advised he could appeal the NDIS eligibility decision through an exceptional circumstances clause; Diversitat is now supporting Tanha to pursue an appeal. In addition, Tanha was not provided with translated material about the NDIS and the disability system and community supports, he was not advised of the complaints procedure or that he could involve a personal advocate in his discussions with the NDIS and he was not made aware that he could appeal his eligibility decision. Without access to correct information, people with a disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will continue to face barriers to reasonable and necessary disability support and assistance.



Ti Mo

Ti Mo is a 17-year-old Karenni refugee who, with her family, has been living in Geelong since 2010. Ti Mo has profound hearing loss and her speech is impaired. Ti Mo is not receiving necessary disability supports to communicate and feel safe in the community and this is increasing her social isolation.

Ti Mo is not receiving necessary disability supports to communicate and feel safe in the community and this is increasing her social isolation.

Despite living in the Barwon launch site for the NDIS, Ti Mo and her family have never heard of the NDIS, before being advised by Diversitat. Ti Mo's family has limited knowledge about the disability system in Australia and available supports. She and her family are not linked with a disability service provider and they are not receiving any disability supports (apart from Auslan assistance organised through Ti Mo's school). Ti Mo's eligibility for the NDIS has not been tested.

Despite living in the Barwon launch site for the NDIS, Ti Mo and her family have never heard of the NDIS... Ti Mo's family has limited knowledge about the disability system in Australia and available supports.

Ti Mo grew up in a refugee camp in Thailand and her family developed their own sign language to communicate with her. They have limited literacy in their local language of Karenni and a very limited understanding of the English language and Auslan. Since arriving in Geelong, Ti Mo has been learning English and Auslan at her mainstream high school however, as her parents are not learning English or Auslan, Ti Mo still experiences communication challenges and social isolation. Ti Mo's friends have some knowledge of the sign language her family developed but they too are not learning Auslan.

It is difficult for Ti Mo to engage with the community. Her father explains: "It is dangerous for her because she can't communicate. She was going to Melbourne for a cooking class at the hearing school but one night the train was delayed and we were calling her but she couldn't

talk to us. Another time when she used the bus she just got on and walked down the back and the bus driver was yelling at her about her ticket but she wasn't aware because she can't hear. Because she can't communicate it is very hard and it makes us very worried when she is out in the community."

"Ti Mo is emotionally not strong because she can't communicate with people around her," he adds. He believes the difficulty in communicating and the lack of support is impacting her mental health and resilience, and he describes her as becoming increasingly "mentally weak". Due to Ti Mo's anxieties about being able to communicate effectively and remaining safe when out in the community she is spending more time at home, which increases her social isolation.

Like all new arrivals from a refugee background, Ti Mo's family received some settlement support through Diversitat when they first arrived in Geelong. The current support from Ti Mo's school (Auslan aid) will finish at the end of her secondary schooling (Ti Mo is completing VCAL over three years). Her family are concerned about her future in terms of her options for further study and employment and for ongoing Auslan support.

At this time there is no case-management funding for CALD organisations to support new arrivals with a disability to determine their eligibility for disability supports and services and to complete the necessary health referrals.

The access and equity issues that the family face in engaging with relevant services (in particular the NDIS) include: language barriers (interpretation into Karenni and Auslan); a lack of knowledge about the disability system in Australia, disability entitlements and available support services; the complexity of navigating the disability support system; and the lack of availability of culturally appropriate care.

There is no case-management funding for CALD organisations to support new arrivals with a disability to determine their eligibility for disability supports and services and to complete the necessary health referrals

7. REFERENCES

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Diversitat can work with your organisation to increase cultural inclusiveness and improve staff skills to support people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Cultural inclusiveness is achieved through the development, delivery and evaluation of:

- Cross cultural training for staff
- A cultural audit
- Cross cultural/diversity plan, including working with interpreters
- Access and Equity Plan

Diversitat has established an extensive network with ethnic communities and ethnic specific peak bodies within the Barwon South West region and state-wide.

For more information contact:

Diversitat – Northern Community Hub

Ph: (03) 5260 6000

Email: maureen.okeeffe@diversitat.org.au

The image features a teal background with white text and a logo. The logo consists of a stylized white 'd' shape with a dot inside, resembling a lowercase letter or a symbol. To the right of the logo, the text 'diversitat settlement' is written in a bold, sans-serif font, with '& community programs' in a smaller font below it.

 **diversitat settlement**
& community programs

www.diversitat.org.au