

Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre

Facci, Franca "Chairperson's Report" Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre, 1995 Annual Report, Wollongong, Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre, 1996, p 1-2.

1995 Annual Report

Chairperson Franca Facci's Report

1995 marks my third year as Chairperson of the Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre and each year as annual report time comes around, it always gives the committee and workers a great sense of accomplishment to review the work carried out over the year and put forward future projects and ventures. As will be evident to you as you peruse this report, the IMRC has achieved a great deal this year. I would like to draw your attention to a number of the more significant outcomes.

You will already be familiar with the recommendations submitted by the management committee to the membership to change the constitution as it relates to its membership categories. The IMRC elects its committee of management from 3 membership categories. These are: i) Ethnic Groups; ii) Community Groups and; iii) Individuals. The decision to form a committee made up of people from these groups was to ensure that the IMRC would always be managed by a group representing the target groups of the work of the Centre. However, over the last 3 years, the IMRC has consistently had vacancies on the management committee and all of these have occurred in the Ethnic Groups category. Whilst we have always found it difficult to fill committee positions in the Ethnic Groups category, there have always been a number of candidates for the individual category. The committee decided therefore to put to the membership changes in the constitution that

will ensure full representation on the committee without compromising the management of the organisation.

Changes have not been limited to the constitution, the management committee spent most of the year reviewing the accountability structure of the Centre. The committee consulted closely with staff members to come up with a more efficient and comprehensive accountability structure within the Centre. Staff are now accountable to the Committee through the Centre Coordinators. This allows the committee to move away from day to day operational issues and focus more closely on broader policy matters.

Throughout 1995, and indeed in all the years past, the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs has always provided the Centre with expertise and advise on policy and operational concerns. For over 11 years, the DIEA consultant to the Centre has been Ms Gail Maurice however, in 1995, Gail was successful in obtaining the position of Area Manager for DIEA. The new community grants consultant for the Migrant Resource Centre is Ms Gillian Craven. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gail for all the time and commitment devoted to IMRC work over the years as well as welcoming Gillian as an ex-officio member onto the IMRC Committee of Management.

The Department of Immigration provided significant financial enhancement to the MRC funding program this year. The Minister for Immigration, Sen. Nick Bolkus, announced increases to funding for the Migrant Resource Centre program nationally. This enhancement provides for additional funding in the operating component and the establishment of a fifth core position. This was welcome news after the Centre's involvement in lobbying the

Department to provide realistic operating funds. The allocation of a base level of operating funds will alleviate the insecurity we have faced in the past and allow us to plan more effectively. For the Illawarra MRC, the fifth core position will allow us to work more intensively in the area of employment.

Despite these financial gains with the DIEA, there are unfortunately a number of ongoing settlement issues that have remained unresolved. The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), continues to procrastinate with regard to setting up a local panel of interpreters in demand languages and does not provide on-site interpreters for asylum seeker interviews. The Centre has been the focal point for lobbying around this issue and a number of public meetings were held to illustrate the problems, however, TIS have yet to resolve these issues satisfactorily. We hope 1996 will prove more productive.

The 510 hours of English language tuition allowed to every new immigrant is another burning issue. The DIEA have been bombarded with information and protestations, not only from the Illawarra but elsewhere, stating the difficulties people have learning English in this short timeframe as well as the impracticalities imposed on this learning. In August the Minister announced some concessions allowing flexibility to give unused hours to students requiring additional tuition. However, there has been no increase in the overall allocation of hours. It is hoped that persistence will pay off in the coming year and new arrivals will have enhanced opportunities for English language learning.

In August/September, the Centre participated in the Review of the Special Services Program of the Department of Human Services and Health. This Department funds the Ethnic Children's Services Worker position. This was the first comprehensive review of the program. The main concerns raised in the community were the perceived overlap in community development between the various components of the program, the lack of accountability and program

guidelines.

A particularly disconcerting aspect to the federal budget for 1995 was the limitations imposed on those able to apply for Austudy. The Federal Government has restricted Austudy to citizens of Australia, thereby disadvantaging large numbers of people by limiting employment prospects and study options. The underlying assumption that permanent residents are in some way less committed to Australia and should therefore be penalised is inconsistent with Australia's multicultural and social justice policies. In the past, Australia's social policies have been based on equity of access to benefits for all permanent residents. The linking of benefits to citizenship represents a major departure from this policy, and in our view sets a dangerous precedent.

All these issues have been raised throughout the year with our local Federal Members of Parliament, Stephen Martin and Colin Hollis. The meetings are held approximately every three months and have been useful in keeping our local representatives abreast of current issues relating to settlement and immigration and in making representations on our behalf.

The above represents a sample of the issues that the Centre has addressed, the rest of the report will provide you with more detail. If you are interested in participating more actively in the coming year, feel free to talk with any one of the committee members or Centre workers. The strength of the IMRC lies in its membership and collective work, congratulations therefore to all who contributed to its success.