

Equal Disappointment Opportunity? Executive Summary

Meekosha, Helen; Jakubowicz, Andrew; Cummings, Karen; and Gibbings, Beth, Equal Disappointment Opportunity? - A Report to the Department of Community Services on Programs for Immigrants and their Children, Wollongong, 1987.

A Report to the Department of Community Services on Programs for Immigrants and Their Children

Executive Summary

"Equal Disappointment Opportunity?", the report to the Department of Community Services, identifies the major problems facing the Department in the development and implementation of programs for non English speaking immigrants and their children. It also includes programs for refugees and their children. The report offers an integrated set of actions which can overcome many of these problems and begin to ensure that access and equity for immigrants becomes a reality. The acceptance by the Commonwealth Government of the principles of Access and Equity now requires a detailed implementation strategy - often demanding rather more creative and sustained action than the Commonwealth has been able or willing to undertake in the past.

Chapter One offers an overview of the project and its methodology. It indicates that the Department has a major credibility problem in its relations with ethnic communities. As a service funder rather than provider, its major role should be the stimulation of and support for direct providers - the States, local government, the voluntary and private sectors - to be more sensitive and responsive to immigrant needs. A qualitative methodology was adopted which has allowed an exploration of the issues in ways which reflect the experience

of a diverse group of consumers and potential consumers of services.

The social context of service provision is canvassed in **Chapter Two**. Basic data on immigration and settlement point up the increasing incidence of immigrants in major "needs" priority groups - people with disabilities and those in need of rehabilitation, the aged and particularly the isolated frail aged, parents needing child care, and women in fear of domestic violence. Society make it particularly difficult for immigrants to have their special needs recognised, particularly where prejudices already exist - e.g. sexism, ageism and ableism. The resurgence of racism in Australia has also complicated a situation that many thought had been eased by an apparent broad social commitment to multiculturalism. The way in which community services have developed in Australia - an unclear federal role with often ad hoc and erratic State and local services, depending on the happenstance of voluntary organisation activity.

The policy context (**Chapter Three**) has also become complicated by the tension between rising community needs and expectations, and declining financial commitments by governments to meet those needs. Policies which have particular implications for non English speaking immigrants include

- the expanding demands made on volunteers to deliver direct services;
- the commitment by governments at all levels to policies of de-institutionalisation, often limited in their effectiveness by constraints on resources;
- associated with de-institutionalisation, philosophies of normalisation and the least restrictive alternative;

- changing perceptions of the social roles for women, including demands by women for equality and independence, and demands by conservative forces that women remain in the home;
- access and equity commitments by the federal government, and the associated discussions on operationalisation of multiculturalism through "mainstreaming" strategies;
- needs-based planning, with some attempt to quantify the "ethnic" factor;
- program budgeting based on quantified goals and specified target groups;
- the recognition of the training needs of community services staff and the skills required to operate effectively in the delivery of services;
- information strategies which reflect a concern for user rights and access.

The Department of Community Services thus faces increasing responsibilities to people of non English speaking background (**Chapter Four**). The common issues for immigrant communities are defined as the economic constraints imposed on and by government, the spreading of a "new" racism within the bureaucracies and society at large, rigid and inflexible Departmental program boundaries, confusion over the roles of the Commonwealth and the States, the poor quality of information produced on Department programs, and the haphazard quality of services in the non-government sector.

There are also problems which appear across the Department. Few officers have any direct knowledge of the immigrant experience and the processes of settlement. The Department lacks a policy on services for immigrants - some programs encourage ethno-specific projects, others exclude them. Senior management has not developed its own philosophy in this area. While Equal Employment Opportunity plans exist, staff recruitment processes have not identified experience of working with

immigrants as generally desirable, while publicity and communication has assigned contact with immigrants low priority. Inter- and intra- departmental disputes over responsibilities (between program areas and between portfolios, for instance in relation to refugees) have consumed staff time with a generally confusing outcome for field staff in DCS. Ambivalent attitudes and strategies exist in relation to non-government organisations, and the use of volunteers in welfare services. Some programs advocate volunteers, others oppose them. Data collection is poor, with a number of consultants' reports on crucial policy and program areas failing to collect useful data on immigrants. The voluntary sector has also had major problems in providing data to the Department, as they lack the time and resources to do so. There is a lack of a Department central policy and plan of action on immigrant and refugee needs. Consultation is also haphazard and under-resourced, though there is a general willingness across the Department to draw on ethnic community experiences to help resolve Department dilemmas. Current Department strategies have not incorporated the principles of Access and Equity, though some program areas are rather more advanced than others. Staff training has not addressed these issues.

Residential Programs (**Chapter Five**) have recently been modified in the light of the report of the Ethnic Aged Working Party and the Hostels and Nursing Homes review. However it is argued that the EAWP proposals seriously underestimate the magnitude of the task facing the Department in the light of the bed numbers planned as a result of the Hostels and Nursing Homes Review. A strategy is outlined which will help to overcome these problems. The steps required are:

- reassess the level of need for various types of residential care in the light of the effective reallocation of all general care beds as acute care beds by 2001;
- use the updated data now available on likely levels of need affected by differential mortality and differential disability rates and

types among different ethnic groups (e.g. the likelihood of a high proportion of elderly Greek women living into very old age; the high proportion of occupationally-disabled elderly southern and eastern European male labourers);

- improve and apply quality of care criteria in nursing homes and hostels to take account of needs of immigrant elderly;
- establish regional Immigrant Geriatric Assessment Planning Groups in conjunction with the Geriatric Assessment Teams;
- modify residential, SAAP and HACC guidelines to allow funding of ethno-specific small-group hostels and homes with support services where necessary;
- develop EEO, affirmative action and training programs with funded services and require action as a condition of funding;
- increase the proportion of respite care beds available in each region;
- improve Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit to \$15 per day to allow the preference for community rather than institutional care to be realised for poorer immigrant families, particularly immigrant women, looking after an aged person at home;
- State based Immigrant Elderly Strategic Plans should be developed encompassing all relevant programs.

Community programs (**Chapter Six**) have brought together a diverse group of Department activities. The Home and Community Care Program has non English speaking immigrants as one of its target groups. However only limited action has been taken to date to ensure that all services are capable of meeting the needs of immigrants in the localities they serve. HACC should be extended to ensure that the general community work, investigation and advocacy needed by many communities can occur. HACC-funded project local personnel

should also have access to effective training on issues affecting immigrants with disabilities and those who are ageing.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program faces particular problems in relation to immigrants. The women's sub-program has developed the most advanced response to the needs of immigrants of any DCS funded program. However funding of women's refuge workers is very poor; additional support is needed through the provision of specialist organisers to support immigrant women workers in refuges. In addition the moves towards effective EEO in centres (rather than sole dependence on occasional workers in a "pool" situation) should be supported. In the youth area, the two main issues are those affecting refugee youth and second generation youth. For the former, the existing funding criteria are complicated and there is no framework for longer term support with traumatised Indo Chinese refugee youth. For the latter, the assumption (that there is "no specific problem") often made by refuges and government requires review. Evidence suggests insensitivity by refuges to the particular experience of second generation youth, denigration of their familial background and lack of other communal resources. The need exists at the very least for refuge worker training, if not also the active recruitment of second generation workers.

The Children's services program has the longest track record of identifying immigrant issues and implementing multicultural projects. There is an ambivalent attitude expressed to ethno-specific services by the Department - acceptance of the principle but rejection of the practice. More recently the shift to family day care approaches may be quite harmful to immigrant children; this form of child care is not the preference of parents. There is also conflict between State and Commonwealth roles in pre-school education and child care provision - parents want child care to provide educational support; the child care program does not facilitate this goal. Recent consultants to the Department have proposed the extensive use of volunteers in

centres to help reduce costs. Such an approach is particularly deleterious for immigrant families and their children. The converse is proposed - more professional and trained staff and a requirement for funding to be that multicultural programs are developed and implemented.

The recent coalescence of disability and rehabilitation programs has left many areas in a state of flux, a situation exacerbated by the contemporary regionalisation of rehabilitation services and the closure of large rehabilitation institutions (**Chapter Seven**). In addition the 1986 Disability Services legislation has introduced principles of the least restrictive alternative for clients and de-institutionalisation of services. There is no evidence that any sustained national consideration has been given to the implications of these changes for immigrants with injuries and disabilities. It was therefore proposed that a national task force on immigrants and disability be established to advise the Department on appropriate action. In addition all new staff should be sought and selected on the basis of their sensitivity to immigrant needs, as well as the other dimensions of their professional competence. Funded organisations should be encouraged and resourced to provide information in languages other than English, and their staff should be trained on issues affecting immigrants. Rehabilitation guidelines which effectively discriminate against immigrants (e.g. on the English language prerequisites for substantial gain) should be reviewed. Detailed changes to rehabilitation policies and practices were also proposed within the context of regionalisation, to ensure that the practice of Department staff becomes more sensitive and effective. It is imperative that these changes be implemented as part of the regionalisation process, rather than left to a later date as proposed by some officers. The Department should ensure that the earlier Meekosha report, Breaking In and Breaking Out, is released in full to the public to enable informed debate on the rehabilitation needs of immigrant women.

In keeping with the Access and Equity guidelines of the government, **Chapter Eight**

draws together the issues affecting immigrant women and community services. The interaction of racism and sexism is discussed, with problems raised for immigrant women by Department policies and service provider practice. Immigrant women are the main consumers, care givers, parental contacts, employees and volunteers from immigrant communities in the community services area. Yet immigrant women are rarely the client spokespeople for their own communities. They are the survivors of domestic violence, the mothers of children, the daughters and daughters-in-law of the elderly, the wives of injured workers, injured workers in their own right, the vast majority of the elderly, and a significant proportion of those with disabilities. It is important for Community Service personnel to be aware of and sensitive to the gender dynamics within immigrant communities, and the impact of services on the needs of immigrant women. Too often an undifferentiated and ungendered mass of immigrants is allowed to mask a gendered reality - in such cases the assumptions made about immigrant needs are often those of male immigrants and male senior bureaucrats, which may seriously distort the experience and needs of women.

The final Chapter (**Nine**) focuses on the main problem of the Department - how to bring about change in attitudes and practices and ensure their long term implementation. Political commitment from the top is necessary - so too is bureaucratic commitment. Training is needed, and sufficient emphasis on the importance of immigrant issues to ensure they do not get lost in the rush, or allowed to remain on the sidelines and be kept marginalised. In order to achieve these changes there will need to be an addition to the Department Mission Statement offered over the names of the Secretary and Minister, committing the Department more clearly to equitable access. Divisional Heads would be required to develop and implement Three Year management plans on the policy. This corporate strategy needs to be widely communicated and workshopped with staff. Program outlines should be advertised in

languages other than English. Publicity expenditure should ensure that 30% is aimed at non English speaking people. A multicultural services radio unit should be established to develop and produce material for ethnic and public radio, and on audio cassettes.

All DCS positions should specify the understanding of issues of importance to a multicultural population, and a variety of affirmative action strategies should be adopted to increase the proportion of immigrant and multilingual staff. Training should be developed and required of all personnel. All community organisations should be required to demonstrate how they will make themselves available and appropriate to immigrants. Funds should be made available for the training of service provider personnel on these issues. Special flexible funding should be made available to improve the quality of services available to immigrants. Contract compliance to ensure EEO, etc, by service providers should be instituted as Department policy.

Data collection needs to be modified to provide useful information on immigrants, while a longer term examination of computer based multilingual service information should be explored. Training support to the non-government sector should be extended. Joint action research projects on innovative services and identification of needs should be supported, at levels of funding necessary to attract experienced staff. Projects should allow for the secondment from the public service to the voluntary sector. Welfare careers for immigrant women should be examined and appropriate action taken under EEO.

To ensure co-ordination and effective action an Immigrant Access Action Unit should be established in Head Office, with a range of identified functions. Advisory structures should be reviewed to ensure they include people experienced and skilled in working with immigrant communities. Joint committee structures with Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs should be created to ensure the early resolution of boundary disputes. A

national research program with a publications series should be established to develop and disseminate information on issues affecting immigrants - e.g. disability and rehabilitation; disabling conditions; respite care needs; child care patterns; community development and action research strategies.

This report, *Equal Disappointment Opportunity?*, should be published as a training and program development resource. A Plain English synopsis should be translated into community languages, placed on cassette tape, and offered in Braille. In recognition of the value the Department places on consultation and the importance of providing feedback to people who have freely provided the Department with information, free copies of the report should be made available to all the groups who participated in the consultations and research.