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STAND OUT REPORT

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS EVALUATION REPORT:

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY CONNECTORS AND PEER EDUCATORS

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FOR THE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL OF SA (MCCSA)

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CULTURAL CONNECTIONS IN DISABILITY: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

During the period October to December 21st, evaluator Carole Strong met with Peer Educators and Community Connectors to obtain their feedback and insights about the program.

Interview Questions

Interviews were semi-structured and guided by the questions below.

1. How **useful** has the program been so far for you/your community?
2. What do you find **most valuable** about the program?
3. How could it be **improved**?
4. What are the **challenges** facing you in raising awareness about disability and increasing participation of people with disabilities in their communities?
5. What are the **challenges** facing you in supporting communities and people living with disabilities in the community?
6. What **helps you** in meeting these challenges a) within your role in the project as either a Peer Leader and/or Community Connector/Leader; b) in the Cultural Connections project?
7. **Is there any other feedback** you would like to provide?

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

To date, interviews have been completed with **6 Peer Educators** and **10 Community Connectors** from all targeted communities with the exception of the Congolese community as the evaluators are awaiting advice from the MCCSA on interpreting.

Despite initial lack of certainty about their role, this has since rectified by training and support from the Project Coordinator and project partner (KDG Partnerships).

Q1: HOW USEFUL HAS THE PROGRAM BEEN SO FAR FOR YOU/YOUR COMMUNITY?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- Those interviewed have been very positive about the project model and its impact on them, describing it as "*excellent", "an eye-opener", 'very useful", "lots of information, advice and help",* and *"a way to meet others and form connections".*
- One person described it as giving *"confidence in approaching/supporting other people given that NDIS advertising is still confusing and unclear."* Another described it as *"an excellent program to offer to community members which helped them to know the NDIS".*
- The Project is described by them as having been delivered *"professionally",* with *"clear communication".*

Q2: What do you find most valuable about the program?

Addressing disability-related shame and stigma

One of the challenges being addressed by the Project is to change the perceptions of many community members that disability is something shameful, something that is ignored rather than discussed openly. Stigmatisation and negative stereotyping is a significant issue (highlighted in this evaluation's survey findings) and can be exacerbated when intertwined with some cultural traditions, and some spiritual beliefs.

Many of the Community Connecters have expressed appreciation for being able to discuss this issue, and to identify strategies for addressing it in their communities, helping to "normalise" disability.

However, more work still needs to be done in addressing this challenge.

Building community capacity and awareness

The Project has also helped Community Connectors by building their confidence to discuss disability in an informed way, and to help their communities understand the NDIS and how to access its services.

Community Connectors told us that they received good feedback from their communities which helped them to design and tailor a specific information and support package for their community. They described a subsequent change in awareness as community members realised that the NDIS was an entitlement, gaining new understanding of what they could receive, and learning how to access its services. Many had no idea of what was available to them or how to approach the NDIS or where to begin. Community Connectors have described the positive changes resulting from this increase in awareness levels.

Project assistance given to coordinate community events as a means of building community connections, awareness and understanding has been valued enormously. This strategy has been described by them as "a fantastic way" to engage and highlight access opportunities.

> *"The Project has been extremely useful in terms of awareness of disabilities in our community and has helped us to understand and implement initiatives that have increased engagement."*

> *"The FOLDERS are really valuable and the fact that people have started to talk about disability."*

Capacity building through training and associated development

There has been extremely positive feedback about the training program (reinforcing ongoing survey findings), with some of those interviewed stating that this had been the most valuable component of the Project. Some of the reasons given for valuing the training were its role in assisting them to connect to their community, and the strategies given for practical application of learnings in their community.

> *"The training was fabulous, really good and clarified a lot."*

> *"The project has been really useful for our community particularly after the training as it helped us to better connect with our community."*

"What has been really valuable is after the training we then have the knowledge to pass on to our community and we feel less afraid to let them know that the Government is here to help them and in turn they are less afraid."

A key strength of the training was seen to be its ready translation into practice, no doubt because the Project as a whole has focused on capacity building through a combination of training and associated support and development (by both KDG Partnerships and the MCCSA).

"Learning is good when we implement it".

THE MULTICULTURAL SUPPORT LEADING TO INCREASED AWARENESS

Those interviewed have valued the multicultural support offered, particularly the provision of information in community languages (although this has not always been successful as described in Question 4 responses below) and within a culturally-specific context. A key outcome has been increased awareness by many in the community who needed assistance but had not been aware of available formal services and supports and how to access them.

"The awareness component has been the most valuable. There were people in our community that we were unaware of the extent of their disability and we have now engaged with them."

Providing a culturally safe environment for the Project was described by several as increasing their confidence in sharing stories and this was also valued highly.

Q3: HOW COULD THE PROGRAM BE IMPROVED?

Participants had nothing but praise for the support they had received so far. Most participants expressed that they were extremely grateful for the help they had received and felt that it had been more than generous and accommodating to their needs. Community Connectors have stated they have 'lots more work to do', with the Project providing a strong foundation to do this.

If resources were available for the Project to be continued, these are the suggestions made for enhancing its impact:

- Further help with strategies for particular communities that includes translation support due to their significant language barriers. Some translations have been described as being inaccurate or incorrect and this has confused people. It was suggested that the MCCSA could work closely with each community to get the translation right as there are words in some languages that do not translate easily. More assistance is sought with language and interpreter support for the training.
- The Project still needs a lot more work as significant stigma remains, including around the word "disability". People from CALD backgrounds are described as needing language education *"… around why we use the words we do – start from there. People need to learn that this is an OK word to use. Also if we are going to use the words "NDIS Workshop" it would be good to start from the beginning as some people are coming for the first time."*
- Some asked if the Project is "really culturally appropriate", noting that it is important to *"always start from the beginning – 1st steps are very important always. The project needs to be*

a more co-design model across all communities, that is, find out from each community what they want and what are the issues and how can these be best addressed."

- Clarification for Peer Educators about the most effective ways they can contribute. It was suggested that a role description with clear boundaries would be helpful, specifying the range of duties, roles and responsibilities.
- Sharing of facilities with other communities was suggested, along with more interaction from different communities at each other's events. Targeted advertising and perhaps a MCCSA staff member visiting to help coordinate events.
- Providing transport to take people from different communities to events.
- Planning with communities to reach out to more people.
- Gift Vouchers and petrol vouchers for the wider community in terms of an incentive to attend gatherings.
- Finding more ways *"to connect to people via gaps in leadership eg doctors, priests, care workers as part of care plans, social workers at hospitals, NDIS and Centrelink because people need assistance to make the actual connection to the services."*
- *"Focus on outcomes, reducing barriers – are we really helping people? – would like to hear of success stories."*

Q4: What are the challenges in raising awareness about disability and increasing participation of people with disabilities in their communities, and in supporting communities and people living with disabilities in the community?

Not surprisingly, multiple challenges have been faced in implementing this Project because of the complexity of issues involved. These were identified in our interviews:

- **Stigma associated with disability** was identified by most of those interviewed as a key challenge – something that Project developers were aware of when first designing the Project model.
- **English language and cultural differences** have been a challenge as well as negative past experiences. In some cultures, sharing feelings and personal information is not the usual practice so people can *"keep things to themselves and not confide in others."* Interpreters were described by some as not interpreting correctly.

  "Lack of understanding of cultural relevance for example, people think they did something wrong because they have a disability or it was their karma and then they try to hide that, hide their children, particularly those with a disability that is not visible – this is why they don't want to use the word "disability".

- **Low levels of awareness about rights**, and the need to help people to understand their rights, especially regarding disability services.

  "People in our community are afraid to speak up or show themselves in public."

The NDIS is a new and complex concept for many, and it takes a long time for them to understand all aspects of the program.

- **Communicating effectively** with others in the community and **engaging** them in the Project.
- Awareness, **stress on carers and emotional impact** is a challenge.
- **Technology** was also a challenge for many to overcome, particularly in the older groups. Because of the pandemic, people were less likely to meet face to face and technology became a barrier.
- Another challenge was that to help people not feel so isolated and make it fun – breaking down the stigma of "I don't need help".
- Coming forward is a big challenge for people living with poor **mental health** and progress is slow. Starting the conversation with others has been challenging – due to the **sensitivity and privacy** of the issue.

  "Those people who have been in the system for a long time feel that the system is not really there for them – they sometimes think they know the outcome before pushing for a service. "

  "Fighting against limiting oneself was a challenge – this can come after many put downs hence why a mentor is needed to inspire and help bring initiative. A further challenge was gaining more information and having a review of community options."

- **Volunteers giving their time.**

  "It would be good if MCCSA could assist with or help to find funding targeted toward a staff member to help with necessary administration and writing grants. 1 day a week dedicated to communities would be good."

  "Initially it was finding relevant volunteers to dedicate their time to attend events and help people fill out forms etc., people with the skills and an ongoing commitment to manage responsibility. Financial incentives could help with this."

Q5: What helps you in meeting these challenges a) within your role in the project as either a Peer Leader and/or Community Connector/Leader; b) in the Cultural Connections project?

The enabling factors identified reinforce key features of the Project model:

- An effective **training** program.

  "Connector Training Course helped to clarify many things. What helps is when others are careful to communicate what is real because if someone is rejected by the NDIS it is very hard. It would be good to have a strategy for rejected cases – what do you tell them?"

- **Community support and team work**

  "Positive helping works – not pressing, being available and being discreet and making it fun!"

- **Planning** how to move forward – gaining insight, asking questions, building confidence.

- **Sponsorship** by a credible organisation

  "Having the backing of the MCCSA helps to make things official and legitimate for the community – gives recognition."

- **Translated information and good communication processes.**

  "Materials with steps to share with our communities – we are now waiting for feedback from them."

  "All information and support from Hannah and Maria has helped plus the Psychologist especially with the language barriers."

  "More meetings helps as people don't know the NDIS and it is all very new for my community."

- **Effective awareness raising and community education.**

  "Raising awareness and breaking barriers that having a disability is not the end of the world, you have not done anything wrong, it can happen to anyone. Once people gain an understanding of this they can start to talk openly. People relate more to someone with a disability telling them these things because they can see that they are "Living" with a disability successfully plus they come from a CALD background."

Q6: Is there any other feedback you would like to provide?

Additional feedback provided reinforced the overall positive perceptions of the Project. In their own words, the people interviewed said –

"Thank you, good training, Lovely people, all help was wonderful."

"Very much enjoying what I am doing on this project."

"Like how this project is not rushed – like the length over two years and love to work with MCCSA – now established a long term working relationship."

"The project is being delivered in a very knowledgeable and thorough fashion – migrant needs are being met via this project. Would like more info from NDIS re entitlements."

"This is an important project and new in the way it is delivered – it gives people hope."

"Fantastic Project, good learning and would like to know what is the next step?"

"Our community has a lot of gratitude toward MCCSA as they have brought a new enthusiasm to the community and toward those in need."

"MCCSA and Maria doing a great job. Would love for this project to continue after October 2022 – it needs to be long term (minimum of 5 years) and using a Co-Design Model."