Inquiry into Multiculturalism

Yabbo Thompson (Ms)
(private capacity)

Introduction

I have worked as a Cultural Community Development Officer for *Relationships Australia Tasmania* (RA Tas) and while there I developed an action/dialogue meeting, *Bridges*, starting with African communities, who were the main humanitarian entrants from 2000 to 2006. It is still in operation. As part of that I helped organised an African Forum to discuss family relationship issues in 2007,the report from that, *Now I Can Move Forward*, published jointly with RA Tas and Colony 47. Some of the recommendations have been taken up from that report. I also published online through the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Communities and Families Clearing House Australia, a *Promising Practice Profile -Bridges for African Men and Families,* in 2008.
Reference: http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/pppdocs/cfc_bridges_ratas.pdf

Currently I am Diversity Project Officer for *Carers Tasmania,* which is a non-profit, community based, incorporated association dedicated to improving the quality of life of the estimated 69,500 Carers living in Tasmania. Programs at Carers Tasmania are funded by both Federal and State government.

Positions like mine are vital for mainstream agencies/organisations to enable service provision that is appropriate to all. Strategies need to be employed to engage with communities, make links/partnerships with key communities/organisations and to position service providers to be responsive to diverse carers.

I work on Advocacy with women from migrant/refugee background via a consultancy through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). I was part of a National Advocacy Project through the Multicultural Women's Health Centre in Melbourne in 2010, called *Points of Departure*, which produced a toolkit that I have been using in this work. This work is about giving women a voice in not only influencing decisions that affect them but in advocating and lobbying on issues of importance to them.

In a community capacity I have been supporting a group of women, mainly from African countries, meeting semi regularly for over 9 years. I find that it has taken a number of years

for these women to gain enough English for training and employment and a number will never have enough language for any meaningful work.

Through all that work and support I find that CALD women are the most disadvantaged.

Importance of Multiculturalism to Australia

We live in a globalised and interdependent world and Australia has always been a diverse multicultural society. There needs to be full acknowledgment, celebration and valuing of different cultures and peoples and of their belonging, participation and contribution. Multiculturalism advances Australia culturally, economically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Australia doesn't yet have a Human Rights Act but we have obligations to ensure that all Australians are included in the social inclusion agenda. We must ensure that our Government's policy on Multiculturalism includes the rights of people from migrant/refugee background to live free from discrimination and to have equality.

As part of fulfilling those rights, we know that settlement agencies provide support to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities but it is important that all other service providers can also offer their services appropriately and with cultural sensitivity. This includes those services exploring entry levels to employ people from diverse CALD communities, included within a national plan of action for employment.

Settlement & Participation

CALD communities face additional barriers than other groups in accessing services, which include:

- Language and communication difficulties (interpreter services such as TIS are vital-There are still numbers of organisations that can't and/or haven't used interpreters)
- Discrimination-for instance; Stories of discrimination and verbal abuse are very under reported in Tasmania. There are no vilification laws and people often don't know they can at least report to the *Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.* Discrimination also means that it is challenging for people to gain employment, rent houses etc. The situation is gradually improving however but it is still especially challenging for people from African countries.
- Lack of understanding of community health care, disability support and other systems, and difficulty accessing information on services that will assist them
- The cultural competence of those systems in responding to people from CALD backgrounds
- A high level of stigma around certain issues such as; disability and mental illness (There needs to be more sensitive education and information around these issues.)
- Fears around lack of confidentiality - particularly in smaller communities

Recommendations

- A stronger focus on support for women from emerging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- More opportunities for consultation and engagement particularly with CALD women in decisions that affect their lives and roles
- Addressing the discrimination and lack of opportunities for CALD communities
- Funding programs to be responsive to CALD communities and their particular needs, for example, culturally sensitive services for older people who need more interpreter service to be included in Home and Community Care (HACC) programs, and more appropriate activity based programs
- Addressing the gaps in services to CALD communities
- Mechanisms to be found that better measure the effectiveness of services
- Better and more appropriate access to timely information from service providers
- Services to become more responsive to diversity
- Initiatives by government, business and services that allow for better participation and integration

Conclusion

As a migrant to Australia, I have appreciated the diversity we have in our midst but so much more needs to be done for all Australians to recognise the richness we have in this diversity and how it enables all of us. Overall there needs to be an Australian government framework to support multiculturalism, which will ensure that there is equity and access for all through cultural competent services, provision of appropriate services, education and information, and better access to meaningful employment, housing and all that leads to a more just, open, peaceful and sustainable society.