

Assyrian Refugee Women's Project

A project to improve the health and wellbeing of Assyrian refugee women residing in Fairfield & Liverpool local government areas in NSW.

Marlin Babakhan. Multicultural Health Service (Fairfield). Sydney South West Area Health Service

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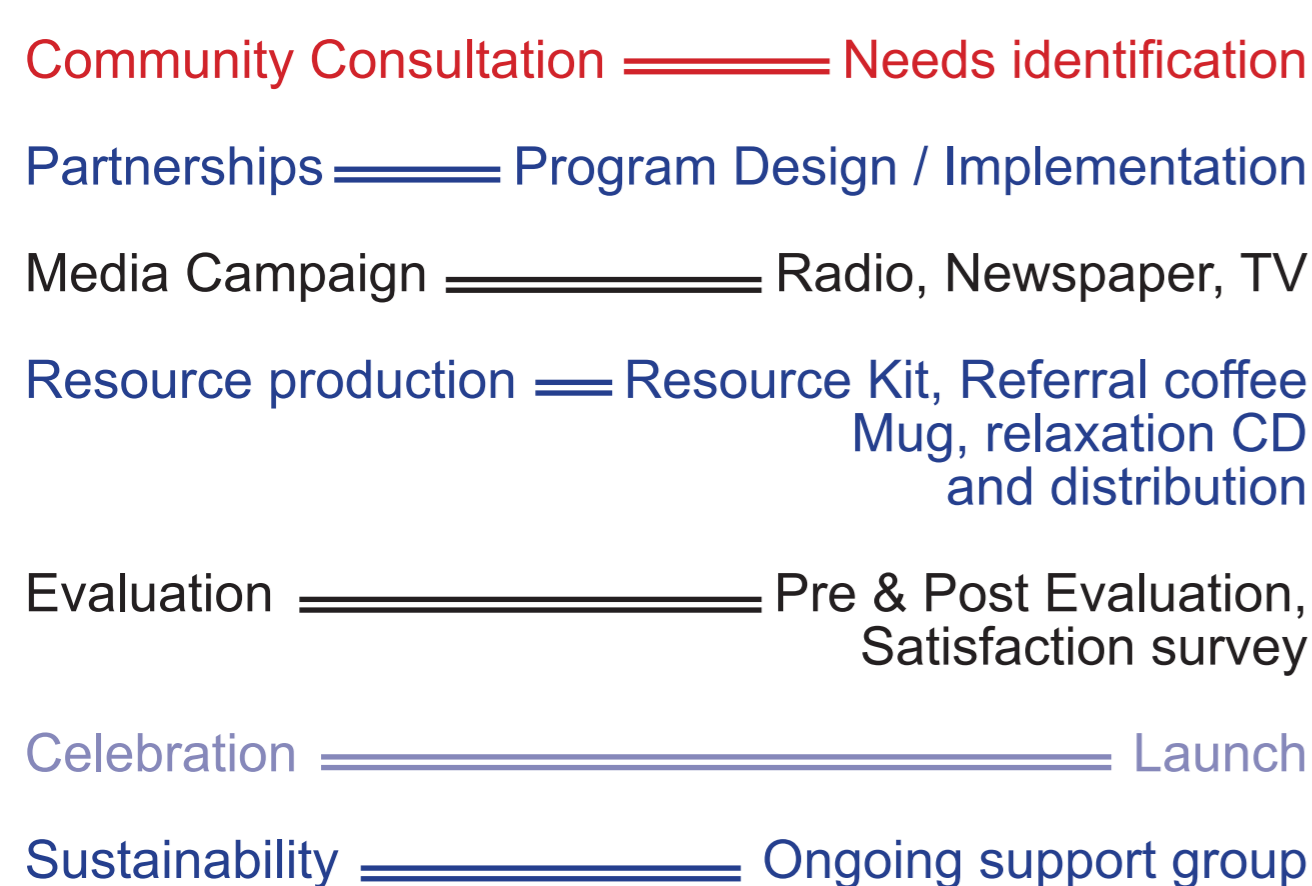
PROJECT SUMMARY

- Assyrian refugees from Iraq represent one of the highest proportions of new arrivals settling in the Fairfield LGA. Community Consultation with Assyrian refugee women revealed that many of the participants were not aware of the services provided by mainstream service providers (NSW Refugee Health Service and Fairfield Multicultural Health Service, 2006). This project aimed to improve access to mainstream services for Assyrian refugee women and focussed on building capacity, enhancing resilience, and overcoming feelings of isolation.
- Culturally appropriate psycho-education and information sessions were organised and a referral resource was developed. Participation in this project enabled women to develop a friendship network which continued beyond the project. The skills gained through information/education sessions have enabled participants to access appropriate services as evidenced by new referrals to various services. Services most utilised were Assyrian GPs, Assyrian Resource Centre and SSWAHS Multicultural Health Service, due to availability of bilingual workers. It has also provided a useful example of an effective strategy which could be transferred to raise awareness in other cultural groups regarding health and welfare services.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To increase access for Assyrian women living in the Fairfield and Liverpool LGAs to mainstream health and community services.
- To build the capacity of these women to provide peer support, participate in information and education programs and to access services.
- To enhance their overall sense of health and wellbeing.
- To create a sense of belonging and to overcome feelings of isolation.
- To encourage Assyrian women to become more independent and self-reliant.

The Project's life span



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

- 25 women participated in the initial consultation.
- Fifty percent of group participants were identified as experiencing physical health issues, depression, anxiety, relationship difficulties and domestic violence.
- Services most utilised were Assyrian GPs, Assyrian Resource Centre and SSWAHS Multicultural Health Service, due to availability of bilingual workers.
- Most of the participants identified social isolation, mental health, housing and financial difficulties as the main issues.

EVALUATION

- Average of 28-35 participants for each of 10 information sessions complemented with psycho education and relaxation techniques
- Information kit including relaxation CD developed and distributed
- Referral resource (coffee mug) designed, developed and distributed
- Positive feedback received from participants

"I was depressed before joining this group, now I feel more confident"

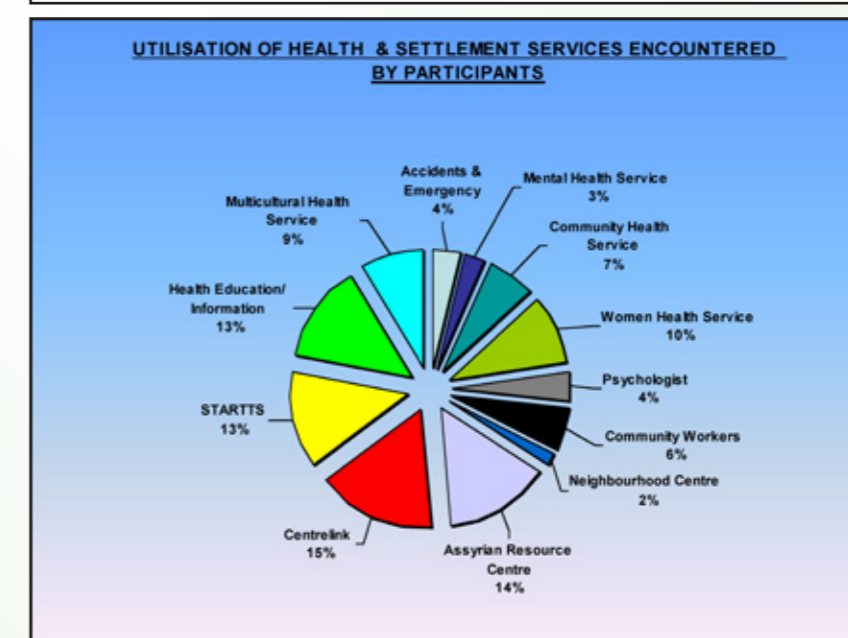
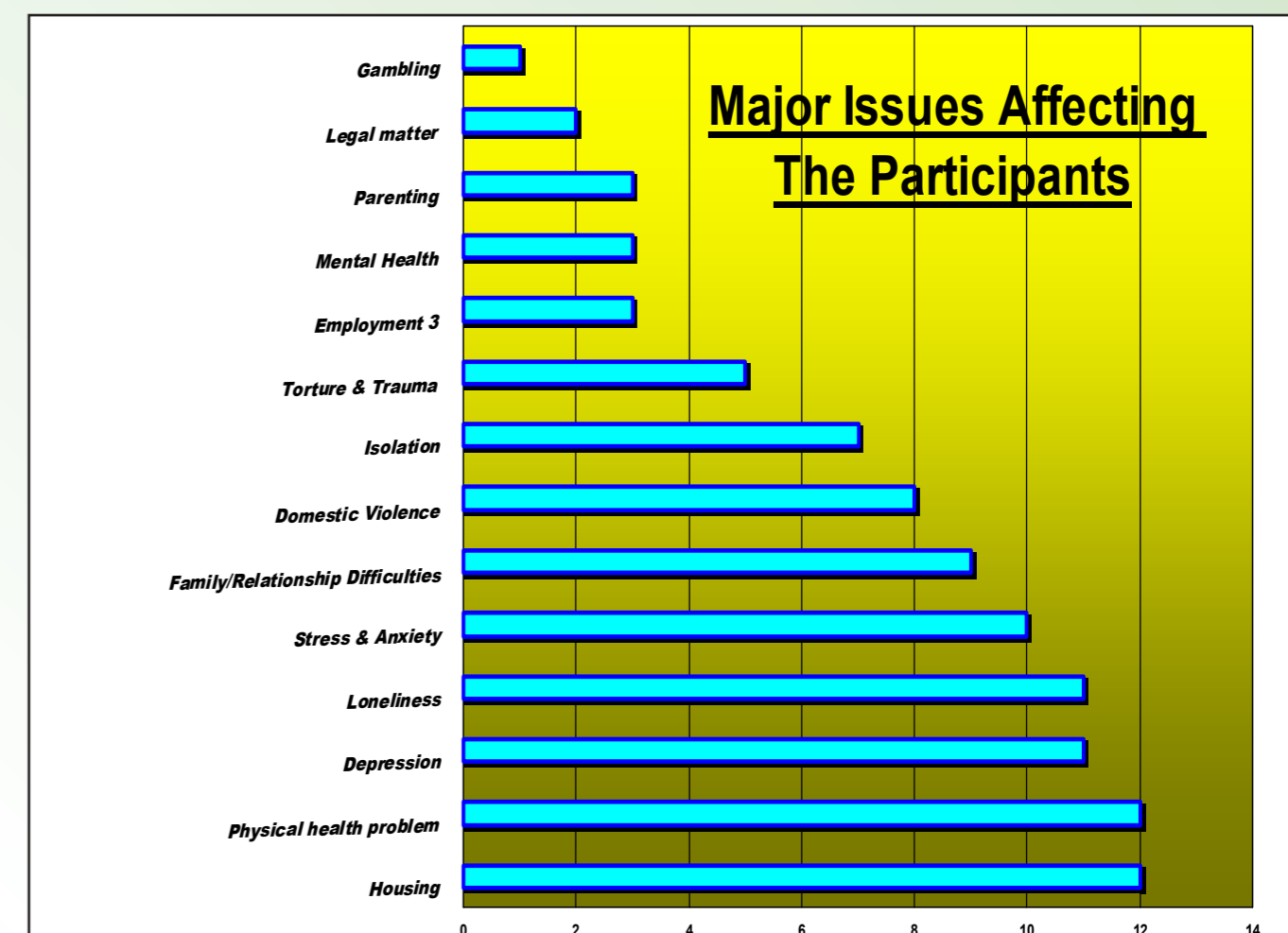
"I moved from the dark to the light. I can open up now and speak more freely about my feelings"

"Australia is a lucky country and I want to contribute more to Australian society, as Australia has so many services to us"

"The program opened the doors to my understanding. I can speak about my problems and solve them"

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- A number of Assyrian women identified as currently suffering from stress or trauma and were referred to the Service for Treatment and Rehabilitation for Torture & Trauma survivors (STARTTS)
- Women reported increased self-confidence, coping better with stress, feeling inspired and motivated.
- Information/program presented was an important first step in assimilating Assyrian refugee women into Australian society.
- Further health and social issues identified including domestic violence, reduced physical activity and the need for psychotherapy.



CONCLUSION

- Participation in this project enabled women to develop friendship networks which continued beyond the project and were self-sustaining.
- Women gained knowledge and better understanding re the available health and community services as all sessions were provided either in their own language or by using professional interpreters.
- Skills gained through information/education sessions enabled participants to access appropriate mainstream services
- Women successfully learnt the concept of 'Respond, Relax and Release' relating to stress management, education & information and positive thinking.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Funded by the Ross Divett Foundation Grants Program 2007 – 2008