

Interview with Extended Families

Victoria's recent transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) means that disability providers need to adjust to a new way of delivering services. This brings both opportunities and challenges in how services will respond to the needs culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in this new environment. Considering that uptake of disability services in CALD communities has traditionally been lower compared to the general population (Zhou 2016), what measures will NDIS providers put in place to ensure their services are more culturally and linguistically accessible and responsive in the NDIS marketplace? I spoke with Julie Langdon, the CEO of Extended Families, to explore how their organisation engages with CALD communities and the impact the NDIS has had on their work.

Extended Families provide NDIS support coordination, plan management and recreational and capacity building programs to young people with disabilities and their families throughout Victoria. The organisation has adopted a number of measures over the years to develop relationships and effective engagement with CALD communities. One of the most crucial measures has been the employment of bilingual staff. The agency has Support Coordinators who speak Vietnamese, Mandarin and Cantonese and run groups for families in the Southern and Western metropolitan regions, which are facilitated by Vietnamese speaking workers. The groups offer regular get-togethers for parents and children where families can share experiences, make connections and receive information and resources.

A significant relationship has been formed with the Vietnamese Families with Special Needs Group, a parent led organisation established 15 years ago. Extended Families formed a link with the group over 10 years ago and for the last few years have supported the organisation's Thursday parent support group by funding a worker. They also support the group by helping with grant submissions and camps. The Thursday Group facilitator is a well known community leader who works for Extended Families part time, she facilitates the group one day a week and provides individual support to community members as required.

This important relationship with the Vietnamese community has yielded many mutual benefits. Extended Families is now invited to cultural celebrations, they are able to organise events more effectively and with greater reach and disseminate information in innovative ways. For example Extended Families has delivered sessions on 'preparing for NDIS' at the Thursday Group and at the group's annual camp. The organisation has also run an NDIS information session in partnership with the Vietnamese Community in Australia (Victoria Chapter). The event was a great success, with over 60 people in attendance. Taking into consideration the stigma associated with disability in many CALD communities, the willingness of community members to participate in public forums on the topic is indicative of the trust the organisation has built up over the years with the Vietnamese community.

According to Julie, "it's about relationships...there is a strong need for key people that are trusted by the community. It is about building trust over the years." A part of that trust building comes from having positive relationships with community leaders and employing and supporting bilingual staff.