

Interview with Extended Families

PART 2

In our continuing series of interviews with service providers, we further explore the work of Extended Families. Julie Langdon, the CEO of Extended Families, highlights that there are also challenges in responding to community needs. Some of the biggest challenges include lack of resources, complexity of cases and high levels of need.

According to Centrelink data, (other than English speakers) people who speak Vietnamese, under the age of 65, make up the highest numbers of Disability Support Pension recipients in Brimbank and Western and Southern Melbourne. Taking into account the high level of need in the Vietnamese community, Extended Family's services are stretched. For example, the agency provides support to CALD clients during planning meetings and also offers hour-long one-on-one pre-planning sessions. The agency has delivered more than sixty one-on-one sessions to the Vietnamese community but are finding that one hour is not sufficient time to address the complexity of issues they encounter. These issues are often interrelated and linked to language barriers, cultural factors and difficulties understanding and navigating service systems, thus requiring additional time and preparation. Julie claims, "Sometimes the information presented can be overwhelming...and people can become confused."

An example involves a Vietnamese family that had an NDIS plan for 12 months and came to Extended Families only in the second 12 months of the plan. For the entire first year, the family had not accessed any funds even though they were funded for support coordination. No contact was ever established between the family and the support coordinator, which is partly a system issue but also indicative of the family's lack of understanding of the process. Similarly, when the *Helping Children with Autism Packages* were available, if an initial service was not available, there was a change or if told to seek services themselves: "many people didn't know how to, which resulted in funding packages not being utilised...it shows how easily people can fall off the service pathway if they don't get support."

Julie explained that the provision of support to CALD clients for planning is outside of Extended Families' funded activity and was, therefore, not sustainable in the long run. This support, however, is such a crucial component of the work considering the complexities associated with many CALD communities' limited knowledge and familiarity with services and cultural and language barriers.

There is also a strong desire in CALD communities for language specific services such as support coordination. Extended Families are currently advertising for a Mandarin-speaking support coordinator as their Mandarin-speaking worker based in the Eastern and Northern regions is unable to meet demand: "everyone wants her to do their plan...some of it is the relationship as they know her but some of it is cultural." It is the shared understanding of the language and culture, which makes people believe they will be understood.

This cultural aspect is apparent when Vietnamese community members, despite speaking English, continue to seek the services of Vietnamese-speaking workers. This was particularly evident in

recent one-on-one sessions on preparing for planning. Extended Families found that irrespective of English language proficiency, people had an overwhelming preference for bilingual staff.