

# JOINING A GROUP: THE CLIENT'S JOURNEY

*"We had to do a lot of work to give that sense that when you come here you are special, it's all about you."*  
- SSG Coordinator.



There are several key steps for you to consider in order for CALD clients to join and remain in your Social Support Group (SSG):

- Promotion of the group, the agency and the activities
- Assessment
- First impressions

From the information available about your services to the impression formed by the client on the first visit, interest in cultural diversity, excitement at the opportunities it offers and flexibility of service need to come across clearly. The impression given to the potential or new SSG client during their journey to access your services must be one of welcome and inclusion.

### Tips Promotion

The way your service and SSGs are described in information and promotional material (including on the My Aged Care portal) will be critical in your ability to attract new CALD participants. If potential clients do not recognise themselves in the way your service is described, they are likely to feel that 'it is not for (them)'. Consider the following:

- Is your material in plain English?
- Does the imagery include visibly CALD participants?
- Does the material mention bilingual staff and volunteers?
- Does the material clearly mention cultural diversity in positive terms?

Think of where you promote your service and how you can reach CALD communities: as well as local newspapers and radio, have you thought of the ethnic media (newspaper and radio), presenting to CALD seniors groups, local ethno-specific or religion-based groups, multicultural events?

Finally, remember to emphasise the inclusiveness of your SSG to the Regional Assessment Service so that they can accurately inform potential clients about what your service offers. (See [Connecting the Pieces, Discussion Topic 1 Know our community](#) and [Discussion Topic 2 Removing barriers to accessing services](#).)

### Assessment

Some key questions to ask when assessing the client's needs and preferences include:

- How important is their cultural background to them?
- How comfortable is the person with communicating in English? Will this change as conversations become more complex?
- Are they able to read in their preferred language, or in English?
- What are their interests and hobbies?

It is important to acknowledge that joining a new group or activity can be intimidating, and to reassure the person that the service will do its best to make them feel welcome and included. (See [Connecting the Pieces, Discussion Topic 3 Working with people](#) and [Discussion Topic 4 Putting the person at the centre of their own care](#).)

### First day

Preparing the group for the person's arrival can also help the new client to feel welcome and want to return. This can include:

- Informing other group members and volunteers that the person is joining, and letting them know of the person's level of English and any cultural requirement
- Finding a 'buddy', who will look after the new person when they join the group
- Learning simple words of welcome in the person's preferred language
- Involving existing group members into sourcing and placing some in-language signs or other references to the person's cultural background around the room.

In preparation for their first day, you will ensure that you have confirmed:

- Food requirements
- Possible culture-related self-care needs
- Possible religious needs such as a quiet praying room and praying times
- The availability of a volunteer (if possible) who speaks the same preferred language

Following the person's first session with the group, check with them and their family/ carer how it went. What did they like? Is there anything they would like to change for next time?

## Case study - Uniting Care, East Burwood

At Uniting Care East Burwood, diversity is a source of excitement, curiosity and celebration. Members of Anglo-Saxon, European, Sri Lankan and Filipino backgrounds participate in groups and have the opportunity to showcase and celebrate their culture through events, celebration of national days, food, music and dance – either through unique events or through 'mixed' ones such as the Olympic Games, where everyone 'barracks' for different country teams.

Staff and volunteers use cue cards and read about people's cultural profiles before a new participant joins in. The room is large and set up for different activities, with some

members engaging in craft and exercise, while others may choose to sit quietly and listen to music in their language. Occasionally dogs are brought in, to everyone's delight.

Several of the CALD participants in the Uniting Care groups have chosen this group over (or alongside) ethno-specific ones. For instance, 84-year old Silvia, who comes to the Uniting Care East Burwood Positive Living Group three days a week and has done so for years. Silvia has been in Australia since the 70's and has three adult children. She used to attend a Singhalese group, which was 'good in a way':

*We used to have a nice time. It was good to be with people from the same culture, we took part in National Day celebrations in our national costumes at Federation Square.*

However she does not need the language interaction (there are many opportunities for her to speak Singhalese if she wants to at the temple, through Sri Lankan clubs and fellowships) nor to be immersed in her culture of origin as she feels very Australian:

*Since coming to Australia, we do what Australians do.*

### Who needs to be involved?

- Staff
- Existing group members
- Volunteers
- Access & Support Workers (for advice)

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### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Aged Care signage (25 languages): <http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/resources/multilingual-resources/aged-care-signage>
- Eastern Health Cue Cards in community languages: <https://www.easternhealth.org.au/services/language-services/cue-cards>
- The technology that supports machine translation (such as Google Translate or iTranslate) is improving rapidly. CEH recognises its value in the translation of single words or very simple phrases only but recommends exercising caution particularly where nuance and sensitivity are required.
- Migrant Information Centre (East Melbourne) provides a range of services for migrants and refugees living in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne: <http://www.miceastmelb.com.au>