



**MDA**

Multicultural Development  
Association

**UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR  
CHILDREN FROM CALD BACKGROUNDS - OPTIONS FOR  
CONSIDERATION 2012-2013**

**SEPTEMBER 2012**

**SUBMISSION PREPARED BY THE MULTICULTURAL  
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION INC.**

**in collaboration with**



## BACKGROUND

### **Multicultural Development Association**

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) is an independent, non-government, settlement organisation committed to achieving the best settlement outcomes for our clients and to working actively to promote multiculturalism. MDA is Queensland's largest settlement agency. In 2011- 2012 MDA welcomed a total of 2,438 clients and the Brisbane Multicultural Centre hosted social inclusion activities for a further 1,500 people. The new arrivals – refugees support team worked with 1,298 people of 77 different cultural identities in 2011-2012. MDA Case Managers had almost 17,000 interactions with their clients over this financial year.

### **Centacare Cairns**

Centacare Migrant Services (CMS) provides free services for eligible individuals, families and migrant communities in the Cairns region. CMS has been providing a range of settlement services for newly arrived humanitarian entrants and migrants in the Cairns region since 1999. These services include intensive initial settlement assistance to refugees and special humanitarian entrants (HSS), individual and family settlement services for non-English speaking migrants and refugees (SGP), community advocacy (CAMS), community development, youth support and a vibrant volunteer program. Our vision is for a just, diverse and inclusive society where migrants apply their strengths to realise their potential. To achieve this vision CMS encourages and facilitates migrants' full participation in all aspects of community life.

### **Queensland African Communities Council**

Queensland African Communities Council (QACC) is an umbrella organisation for African community organisations and individuals residing in Queensland, incorporated since 2008. We facilitate and support collective development while encouraging each African community and individual to promote his or own culture and skills. Our vision is to be a united voice for our communities' wellbeing. We achieve this by developing strong partnerships with governments, service providing organisations and the wider community to improve the quality of life for our members so African individuals, families and communities are able to properly establish their lives here as fully participating members of Australian society. We aim to create a viable and sustainable organisation governed by our values of integrity, accountability, social responsibility, inclusiveness, respect and honesty that empowers, promote and build capacity among African communities in Queensland.

#### **Education is valued by refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse communities**

Refugee and CALD leaders and community members value and recognise the importance of education for their children and welcome opportunities to educate their children to prepare for a better future in Australia. Community leaders consulted believe that *Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* will provide critical support to their children's needs and facilitate them to perform well academically, like their peers from mainstream Australia.

"Newly arrived African refugees and migrants are determined to give their children every opportunity to succeed in education. Families across African communities have had a very diverse range of education experiences and we all want our children to make the best start possible. Access to Government Early Childhood Education programs certainly offers this opportunity. The Queensland African Communities Council is eager to talk with the Queensland Government and Kindy Program providers to collaborate on strategies to improve access to these Programs"

- **President, QLD African Communities Council**

## Education in the context of settlement

Refugees and migrants arrive in Australia from very different educational systems in their home countries. Many refugee children have had disrupted education, or long periods of no education. Settlement is a critical period of time when families re-establish themselves in all aspects of their lives - housing, employment, education, health, social and community networks, transport and understanding the Queensland system for all of these. Unless targeted and dedicated information and engagement strategies are used to inform refugee and CALD families about the importance and availability of childhood education, this information can easily be lost during this hectic and demanding time for families.

Unlike Queensland born residents who are able to put their children on waiting lists for places in childcare and kindy well in advance of requiring such services, newly arrived refugees and migrants have not been able to plan their immediate need for such services.

## Consultation

MDA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Discussion Paper “Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for Children from CALD backgrounds”. Consultations were undertaken to inform this submission (Attachment A):

- Queensland African Communities Council, African Seniors & Elders Club and African community leaders (16 leaders)
- Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) workers (4 Services)
- Centacare Cairns for case studies
- Multicultural Development Association staff

The input from all these contributors are included in this submission.

## KEY MESSAGES

We support the notion that to achieve equitable education and childhood development outcomes, dedicated strategies will be required for some CALD communities.

- **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT** – Many people from refugee backgrounds are largely unaware nor have a full understanding of the availability of kindy services for their children. To ensure that target people from CALD and refugee backgrounds understand the benefits and availability of early childhood education services, *a dedicated CALD communication and engagement strategy* is required.
- **CULTURAL COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION** - To engage and retain CALD and refugee families in early childhood education, a *cultural competency framework needs to be implemented* to facilitate cultural inclusion within policy, programs and staff behaviour/practice. A cultural competency framework could facilitate culturally inclusive policy development, culturally competent business and communication practices, staff training and on the job coaching, and traineeships to increase the number of CALD early childhood teachers. This cultural competency framework should be implemented in all locations, not just the priority locations.
- **TARGETED IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING** - Implementation needs to be monitored through effective and relevant data collection, the data should be analysed and shared with the community on a regular basis, and there needs to be a redefinition of the priority locations based on new and better quality data sources.

## KEY STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION

### COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

MDA consultations found that community leaders from refugee background have little awareness of the government's early childhood education program. This was supported by the worker consultations. Other socially and economically disadvantaged communities such as the Pacific Islands and Maori communities also lack this basic knowledge (confirmed by the Statewide Pacific Islands CAMS worker).

In particular, leaders and families are not aware of the cost concessions and benefits of early childhood education programs. People are particularly confused about the differences between long day care and kindy programs. The community leaders emphasised that these should be highlighted clearly in any information campaigns.

To increase community knowledge about the benefits and availability of kindy, a CALD community communication and engagement strategy is required. MDA's consultations with community leaders and community workers highlighted some important strategies that have been proven to be effective.

Overall a targeted strategy that engages cultural communities face to face (including visual cues) is more effective than written communication :

- *Face to face approaches* - bicultural community workers are engaged to run information sessions and workshops in target communities. This allows families to ask questions and clarify their understanding of information. African community leaders highlighted the importance of participants being able to ask questions before a full understanding could be reached. Peak ethnic organisations could be engaged to undertake community education for their respective communities.
- *Multicultural media* - many people from refugee backgrounds come from oral oriented societies, therefore, they should be targeted through multicultural media in particular radio 4EB and other ethnic radio stations. Pacific Islands communities are also high users of their ethnic radio programs.
- *Audio-visual resources* - provide access to people with low or no literacy.
- *Direct targeted promotion to eligible families* - community leaders recommended a letter from the Department of Human Services with clear information about the age, cost, and location of the nearest kindy available to them.
- *Use existing information channels* - information could be disseminated through settlement organisations, peak ethnic organisation, religious bodies (churches or mosques).
- *Facilitate community attendance at kindy spaces* - open days for target communities or having the kindy centres as shared space. For example, a women's group could use the kindy centre as a meeting space in the evening or on weekends when there are no kindy services operating. Other community meetings could also be conducted at kindy premises.

#### Summary of issues to highlight in CALD information strategies:

- Why is Kindergarten important?
- How do I find a Kindergarten that suits my child's needs?
- What is the difference between kindy and long day care?
- It is not my culture to send my child to a government centre- what are the benefits?
- My child does not speak the language, eat the food or follow the routine of the centre
- As a parent how can I be involved in my child's early education?
- How do I understand the costs and fees associated with childcare?
- How do I transport my child/ren to kindergarten?

*(Provided by Multicultural Worker, CentaCare Cairns)*

## **CASE STUDY - BARRIERS AND EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN**

*Mrs Radhika Dahal is a member of the Cairns Bhutanese community. She has been employed as a casual child-care worker in Manunda, Forest Gardens and other Centres in areas of Cairns after qualifying with Certificate III in Childcare. She is also soon to undertake her Diploma. Radhika has also completed training by the Multicultural Development Association in Brisbane as a bicultural Childcare support worker. Radhika talks about the experience of families in her own community accessing early-childcare centres (commonly in long day-care settings):*

*“The biggest challenge for the children is the language barrier. Children have no previous experience in childcare, coming from the refugee camps. They are only used to the ‘play centre’ – it is only a place in the refugee camp to play, not learn and it is only in Nepali language...*

*Parents (from migrant communities) also find things difficult, like understanding Australian food habits and requirements of the centres. Things like lunchboxes, water bottles and those types of things. They don’t know about things like sitting at the table with other children to eat. Parents find it very difficult particularly if they are not educated. Of course there are many languages and different cultures. In our culture for example, we eat rice and with our hands. So the child needs some support to learn to use a fork if that is what they are expected to do.*

*One other example was about hazard safety... parents, they don’t know about lots of hazards that can occur and how to report accidents that occur. Completing forms was a challenge.*

*Not only were the practical things a concern for parents but feeling confident about leaving their child with people they don’t know, this can be hard. They also are unaware of kindergarten and its role in the early education process. They commonly prefer to keep their child at their side. Many don’t think of 4 years or 5 years as the beginning of their child’s education. In fact they would prefer to keep their child at their side at this age.*

*It is also hard for the children because they are just asking and pointing...they can’t say the names of the things and toys and things like that. Discipline is another thing – the children can’t listen and jump everywhere ... they find it hard to follow the rules. Not only because they can’t grasp the language but also cultural reasons and their history....”*

In addition, community leaders identified systemic opportunities to facilitate greater access to kindy:

- the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP), administered by TAFE English Language and Literacy Services, facilitates childcare arrangements for newly arrived refugees. An integrated approach with AMEP providers could facilitate greater access to kindy for children of an eligible age.
- Long day care, childcare and Family Day Care providers could advise parents prior to their children turning three of the availability of kindy programs.

The Department has already translated information sheets. Two important languages were omitted, being Dinka and Nuer. These South Sudanese languages are spoken by an increasing Queensland population and their omission is an example of ineffective targeting.

Feedback was also received that Google translate is an inaccurate translation service. Although more costly, it would be preferable to have Departmental information professionally translated by NAATI accredited translators. It should also be acknowledged that the languages that disadvantaged new and emerging communities speak, are not available through Google Translate.

The availability of the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) to access the Kindy Hotline should be promoted. Many people prefer to access TIS first, and then ring the hotline with the assistance of the interpreter. The discussion paper does not mention if interpreter training will be provided to kindergarten staff and Kindy Hotline staff. This would be required to ensure that staff are able to use interpreter services effectively. There are several existing training programs offered within the community sector, and within Queensland Government on how to use an interpreter (onsite and telephone).

### **INCREASING CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

A cultural competency framework should be developed and implemented. Increasing the cultural competency of policy and programs related to early childhood education and the providers themselves will be a sustainable approach.

Evidence on organisational cultural competency shows that staff cultural competency is only one component of providing a culturally inclusive service and that a culturally competent *system*, is the primary enabler of culturally competent staff practice and behaviour (Queensland Health, 2011; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2005; Multicultural Access Project, undated).

### **CASE STUDY**

Tashi\* attends a long day care centre in Cairns City. His parents both work and have ethnic backgrounds from both India and Nepal. Tashi was enrolled at the centre in 2011 and was initially very distressed when dropped by his parents daily at the Centre. He spoke Hindi and other languages, not including English. Subsequently he did not engage well in educational activities, or with other children at the centre. The early childhood teacher struggled with his behaviour and raised her voice to communicate with him.

A bystander parent asked his name, how he was transitioning and what language he spoke. The teacher responded, "I don't know, mum and dad speak some gobble-di-gook with him". The Centre did not consider Tashi to be from a non-English-speaking background because his parents could speak some English.

Having the support to recognise children's language needs and working with their families to support cultural and social transition into a kindergarten setting, may have improved the abilities of teachers to support Tashi. His parents may have also felt more confident in sending their son to kindergarten and could have shared the importance of kindergarten to other families in their community.

*(Provided by Centacare Cairns)*

*\*not real name*

Our consultations identified several specific strategies that would increase the cultural competency of kindy providers:

- Engagement of cultural support workers by kindy services - for example, Community Guides employed by MDA already work in some Queensland Childcare Centres and support a range of services that work with diverse client groups in overcoming a variety of different language and cultural barriers. They provide support to understand the cultural needs of the clients by offering insight into specific cultural practices as well as language support for effective communication. MDA currently provides services to two Kindys in Cairns. This is a proven successful model.
- Providing cultural competency training (including the use of interpreters) to educators and also managers and staff.
- Increase the cultural diversity among kindy staff:
  - Recruiting people from CALD and refugee communities to work as teacher-aides and cultural liaison officers (CLO). This model has been adopted by Education Queensland in Primary and High Schools, and it has proven to be successful.
  - Present early childhood education as an attractive career option to young people who may finish studying soon.
  - Offer traineeships to enter this workforce
  - Explore bridging programs for childcare workers to become early childhood education teachers. There are many childcare workers from a CALD and refugee backgrounds. By providing a bridging program, there could be a natural progression into early childhood education for many of these workers.
- Offer kindy programs in ethnic childcare centres. For example, there are successful African child care centres in Brisbane. These centres should be included in any expansion programs so that new kindy programs could be placed in these centres.
- Reinforcing cultural diversity through appropriate books, resources and activities in kindy.

## CASE STUDY - IMPORTANCE OF BICULTURAL STAFF

*Radhika also talks about the importance of bicultural support staff or liaison people working to support both the Centre staff and the families and children.*

"It is important to give the community a good message about kindergarten. For example, new parents could participate in an introduction to the Centre...and play and stay at the centre. They can observe and participate and learn what is happening in the centre. Then their confidence will grow. This orientation is good.

I have done training with MDA as a bicultural support worker. Bicultural staff are important – staff from the same community to support them. Other workers also benefit from learning the language and culture from bicultural staff....and how to tackle the children. This was effective. We also went to the parents' houses and informed them how to make the lunchboxes, how to get to the centre, about hazard safety and things like that.

The other Centre staff commonly ask about how to understand the child- such as when are they asking for water, hand-washing, when eating at the table and using of forks...practical day-to-day things and things like how to encourage the child to play with the rest of the group. They also ask about cultural things and what languages the children were speaking at home. This education is important in all centres– not only the multicultural ones.

One example was a boy who was two and a half...I supported the family and the child when he didn't want to come to the centre because he didn't see or recognise anyone from our culture in the Centre. He always used to cry and try to escape...this went on for more than one month. I started to work with the centre and I used to go and talk with him and encouraged him to play with other children in the group. He made some friends and now he plays with them independently. I taught some of the teachers some words from our language and they started to use those with him and this helped him play with the others. Other parents of the Centre started to use those words as well...like "Namaste" and how are you in our language. Other families welcomed this exchange and helped the boy as well.

## TARGETED IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

- **Targeted implementation**

To achieve equitable education and child development outcomes, it will be necessary to implement targeted and CALD dedicated strategies. The priority locations identified in the discussion paper need to be redefined. There was some confusion during our consultations on the methodology employed to select these locations, when other locations with greater needs were well known to participants. It is recommended that the priority locations be reviewed and that the following data sources be considered:

1. 2011 Census data
2. Australian Early Development Index data
3. MDA's settlement data

MDA is available to provide advice and assistance with the re-identification of priority locations.

- **Data collection**

It will be challenging to monitor implementation success without adequate baseline data. The multicultural sector is challenged by a lack of high quality and reliable data to inform and improve services and programs. Government departments are in a similar predicament. It is recommended that the Department requires all kindy operators to collect adequate data that identifies children from CALD backgrounds. It is recommended that the Department liaise with the Interdepartmental Working Group on Data under Multicultural Affairs Queensland to ensure that any new data collections are consistent with other data collections. MDA is also available to provide expert advice on which data indicators should be collected. Attachment B provides a summary of the issues that should be considered.

- **Monitoring and sharing data**

Once appropriate data collection is in place, it is recommended that it be centrally extracted and analysed. This will also assist the Department to fulfil its obligations under the Queensland Government Multicultural Policy. Data should be published or shared with the sector.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### **DEFINING CALD POPULATIONS**

Clear definition of terminology is required. The inclusion of a glossary/definition of terms is recommended. The glossary of terms is recommended because there are different definitions adopted of important terms such as 'non-English speaking background', 'non-English speaking', 'culturally and linguistically diverse' and 'new and emerging community'. By providing a definition, it will be very clear which groups are included or excluded, which is important when dealing with communities with very diverse needs. It is also important that any data presented, matches the definition. For example, the data presented on page 3 requires some clarification.

MDA supports the identification of new and emerging communities, particularly refugee communities as requiring support to access resources and services. In addition, there is emerging Queensland data that Pacific Islands and Maori communities may require similar support (Multicultural Development Association, 2012; Kearney, 2010; Queensland Health, 2010; Queensland Health, 2010).

In the absence of reliable data that informs which communities may be under-represented in kindy enrolments, it is recommended that socially and economically disadvantaged communities be prioritised for communication and engagement strategies.

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- Queensland Health. (2010). *The health of Queensland's Maori population 2009*. Brisbane: Queensland Health.
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## **Attachment A - Consultation Participants**

### **African community leaders**

1. President, Association of the Burundi Community Inc.
2. Secretary , Association of the Burundi Community Inc.
3. 2 Members, Association of the Burundi Community Inc.
4. Sudanese Community Association in Queensland Inc. (SCAQ)
5. President, United Somali Association
6. Member, United Somali Association
7. Member, Eritrean Community Association of Queensland
8. President, Eritrean community Association of Queensland
9. President, Queensland African Communities Council
10. A Family Day Care Provider
11. President, Ethiopian Community Association of Queensland
12. Vice – president, Togolese Association of Queensland Inc.
13. President, African Seniors & Elders Club Australia Inc (ASCA)
14. Vice President, Rwandan Association of Qld
15. Secretary, Queensland African Communities Council
16. President, AusCongo Network Inc

### **Multicultural Organisations**

1. Centacare Cairns - Migrant Settlement Services
2. Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture & Trauma (QPASTT)
3. Queensland Council of Social Services
4. CAMS Statewide Pacific Islands Advocacy Coordinator, Multilink
5. CAMS Statewide Refugee Communities Advocacy Workers, MDA & QPASTT
6. Direct Service teams of MDA

## Attachment B - Advice on Data Collection

Data collection to capture cultural and linguistic diversity is guided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity*. *The Standards* identifies a minimum data set that contains *four* variables or indicators: country of birth, main language other than English spoken at home, proficiency in spoken English and Indigenous status. The standard set contains an additional eight indicators: ancestry, country of birth of father, country of birth of mother, first language spoken, languages spoken at home, main language spoken at home, religious affiliation, year of arrival in Australia.

MDA has identified that the current minimum data set is dated (13 years old) and no longer captures the cultural diversity that is present in Australia's population. It should be noted that the ABS undertook a review of these Standards in late 2011. International evidence suggests that 'country of birth' cannot capture cultural diversity in a population where international migration is common (Bhopal, 2007; Ministry of Health, 2004), as is the case in Australia.

There is a preference internationally in comparable countries to Australia for the collection of 'ethnicity' as a primary indicator of cultural diversity. Ethnicity is a multifaceted quality that refers to the group to which people belong, and/or are perceived to belong, as a result of certain shared characteristics. Both the New Zealand and Australian definitions of ethnicity involve a social construct of group affiliation and identity and both are based on self-identification.

The advantages of using ethnicity include being able to capture the following groups:

- children born in Australia but brought up in a non-English speaking cultural environment;
- ethnic minorities who migrated from countries such as New Zealand, UK, and USA who affiliate with their cultural background and ethnicity; and
- ethnic minorities who can only be identified by ethnicity or sometimes language, for example refugees who were persecuted because of their ethnicity (e.g. Karen born in Thailand).

In Queensland, children from some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged populations cannot be captured by collecting country of birth or language spoken at home - refugee children are often born in a country different from their country of origin; and Pacific Islander, Maori and Australian South Sea Islander populations are also not captured by these indicators. The Pacific Islands and Maori populations in Queensland are very large and fast growing. Children from these communities are not captured because:

- Many are born either in Australia or New Zealand
- Many speak English at home

Refugee children are not captured because:

- they were born in a country different to their country of origin
- they belong an ethnic minority which is important to capture due to past persecution or language preferences

In Queensland, the areas of the greatest urban social and economic disadvantage have growing refugee populations and large Pacific Islander and Maori populations. Australian South Sea Islander populations mainly live in regional areas and have a long history of social and economic disadvantage and the added complexity of 50 per cent of the population also having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestry. Unless this is captured in Department of Education, Training and Employment data, programs and initiatives are likely to remain poorly targeted as the cultural needs of these large populations remain unaddressed and the monitoring of initiatives like the Kindy First program will be incomplete.