

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents a range of issues explored by the North Queensland Multicultural Disability Research and Service Development Project. The project which ran for about eight months, (April – December 2001) aimed to look at issues related to the level of access to disability services by NESB people in the Townsville/ Thuringowa, Burdekin and Hinchinbrook Local Government Areas. The project examined three aspects of access to disability services.

- 1) It sought to determine the level of knowledge about and the attitudes towards disability services of the ethnic communities in these areas.
- 2) It attempted to take a snapshot of current practices of community disability services in working with NESB communities and individuals.
- 3) It briefly examined Disability Services Queensland (North Queensland Office) practices based on the National Service Standards in working with NESB communities and individuals.

A review of the literature in the multicultural disability field discusses the issues of equity and access for NESB living with a disability and outlines several best practice models that can be adapted by disability services to improve their work practices when working with NESB communities and individuals.

A review of data from ABS was used to give a profile of the ethnic communities in each geographic area. The proportion of NESB people in Townsville/Thuringowa is 5.1%, Hinchinbrook – 8% and Burdekin 6%.

Centrelink data on the age distribution and ethnicity of Disability Support Pensions and Carer Payments revealed that the proportion of NESB people receiving disability support pensions was slightly less than the proportion of NESB people for the region. (5.2% receiving disability support payments compared to 6% NESB population). According to

data from the Commonwealth/State Agreement Minimum Data Set DSQ Report, the proportion of NESB people accessing services through CSDA is only 2.4%, a relatively small proportion when compared to the 7.5% of people living with a disability in Queensland who are NESB. (MDN from DSQ 2000).

Using the Centrelink data showing that there were 4,628 people living with a disability in the Townsville/Thuringowa, Burdekin and Hinchinbrook areas, and the finding of the 1993 ABS Survey on Disability, Ageing and Carers, that the numbers of NESB people living with a disability in Queensland was 17.5%, we assumed that this 17.5% would also apply to the 3 geographical areas of the project. (See section 12). This would mean that there were 817 people living with a disability in the three areas covered by the project. We also assumed that only 10% of those eligible for Centrelink disability support payment would be eligible for DSQ funded service (i.e. 81 people, due to the narrower assessment criteria for eligibility for DSQ services). As the research into community disability services showed that there are only 27 people of NESB receiving services, we estimated that about 54 NESB people living with a disability are not receiving services.

The project used various methods to collect information from within three main stakeholders within the sector. 1) The ethnic communities. The utilisation of bilingual facilitators who were trained to undertake focus groups within their own ethnic communities. Ten focus groups covering seven different ethnic communities were conducted. Also key informants from within the ethnic communities were also interviewed including the case managers of Ethnic Communities Care Links. 2) The Community Disability Services. A survey using semi-structured interviews with managers of agencies was used. 3) DSQ (Nth Qld). The review of DSQ (Nth Qld) took place using the National Service Standards Self Audit Tool.

Each method was useful in gaining the necessary data though there were limitations with three of the methods. In the research within ethnic communities that involved using bilingual facilitators, difficulties were experienced where some of the facilitators did not have adequate skills and therefore they required significant assistance and support to complete their roles. In the method used with community disability services involving

semi-structured interviews, the main limitation was that many services did not collect data on NESB consumer participation. Therefore the information gathered was based on the knowledge of the manager of the agency. The review of DSQ was also limited by the fact that DSQ staff had received limited training in relation to the National Standards for Disability Services.

The overall findings of the project reveal that NESB people in the three areas are accessing disability services, though the level of participation within services is significantly low overall compared to English Speaking Background (ESB) people. NESB people appear to favour some type of disability services over others. This may be related to the degree of privacy offered by these services and/or the responsiveness of the service to the NESB person's cultural requirements, such as the ability to provide staff from similar cultural background.

The selection of disability services managers who were interviewed as a reference sample were found generally not to be practicing in a way that assisted NESB people with a disability to overcome barriers of access to services in the areas. There were some exceptions to this though, particularly in those services where a high proportion of staff were from the local ethnic communities. The attitude of managers overall to this issue was positive with many acknowledging their limited capacity and skills in improving access to their services for NESB people. They all expressed a desire to improve networks and receive assistance in achieving better outcomes for NESB people.

The review of DSQ (Nth Qld) showed that there was a large degree of uncertainty amongst senior staff about how DSQ managed the issues of access and equity for NESB people in North Queensland. This indicated a need to take a systematic and comprehensive approach by applying the principles of Best Practice or standards, as per the Disability National Standards for working specifically with NESB people.

The recommendations of the report indicate a need for continuing the work that has begun with this project; i.e. provision of resources and funds over time to assist both ethnic communities and disability services to develop networks and to work together

towards improving a range of work practices including adequate collection of data, the training of staff, availability of interpreters and culturally appropriate materials. The need is for organisational change within agencies and DSQ that requires leadership and resources. The necessary change will not take place without these factors in place.