

REPORT ON EXTENDING ASSISTANCE FOR CaLD SUPPORT WORKERS

APRIL 2007

ETHNIC DISABILITY ADVOCACY CENTRE
PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DISABILITY SERVICES COMMISSION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge our project partner, ACROD and thank members of the project Steering Committee for their substantial input and support throughout all stages of the project. The steering committee members are:

- Jenny Au Yeong Executive Officer, EDAC
- Carlo Calogero Executive Officer, ACROD
- Jacinta Hanrahan Funding and Support Officer, DSC
- Sheryl Stone Multicultural Aged Care Services
- Zel Iscel Project Officer
- Thuan Geh Evaluation Consultant

The project would not have taken place without the cooperation and support of the former students and we would like to take this opportunity to give special thanks to them.

Also vital for the operation of the project was the funding provided by the Disability Services Commission, and we thank the DSC for its support and flexibility to accommodate the outcomes of the project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project follows an EDAC initiative that was undertaken over 2004-2005 whereby students from various CaLD backgrounds were supported to complete the Certificate III Community and Development course at TAFE, specializing in support work for people with disabilities (see 'Evaluation Report: Training of CaLD Disability Support Workers'). The aim of the training was to respond to the concerns expressed by disability service providers and the CaLD community to increase the number of CaLD Disability Support Workers available for employment. There were 28 graduates.

As an extension to that project, EDAC conducted this follow-up initiative to ascertain whether graduates of the TAFE course did pursue a career as Support Worker in the disability field and to identify and respond to any further training and support needs – to identify and address problems in either gaining employment in that specialty, or for those currently employed, provide development and support to enhance their levels of felt competency, development and satisfaction, their levels of networking and mutual assistance, and to contribute to their long term employment sustainability.

The aim of the project was to determine:

- Whether the graduates obtained employment in the disability field;
- If employed, whether they required any further training or support to assist them in their current job; or

- If unemployed, what kind of further training or support they require to help them secure employment in the disability field.

The information surveyed was obtained by a questionnaire mailed to each graduate and follow-up phone interviews.

The project also canvassed interest in several possible types of training workshops. These were:

1. Using the internet to seek employment - with particular attention to the Ideaswa website;
2. Other job seeking skills such as interview techniques; and
3. Disability Services Standards.

The two workshops on job seeking skills were suggested for those unemployed, and any others wishing to advance their careers through change of employment. The workshop on the Disability Service Standards was suggested for all the former students to update their skills relative to DSC Standards monitoring requirements, with particular focus on the new *CaLD Perspectives on the Disability Services Standards*. However, the possible workshops and their focus/content was to be determined by the questionnaire and phone interviews.

Additionally, or alternatively, individual case support was available for those who had not gained employment or those in jobs who required further support.

GOVERNANCE OF THE PROJECT

The Steering Committee comprised representatives from EDAC, ACROD, Disability Services Commission and the Multicultural Aged Care Services (Department of Health). The Committee met as required and the Project Officer provided regular updates via email.

The Project Officer was employed part-time to implement the activities as outlined in the funding application. The main tasks undertaken by the Project Officer were:

- ✓ support the Steering Committee;
- ✓ survey administration graduates' needs;
- ✓ provide workshop training or other support they may require;
- ✓ establish an ongoing graduate network; and
- ✓ complete a Report on the Project

ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions were made in the research for this project. That:

- the majority of the graduates could be contacted and would respond to the survey;
- the majority of the graduates would be engaged in a career in the disability field and most of the others would be pursuing such;
- some of the graduates may require, or be open to, further training and/or support.

METHODOLOGY AND OUTCOMES

Graduate survey

EDAC had kept a record of the address and phone numbers of the former students and the Project Officer's first task was to be in touch with them.

The graduates' contact details had not been updated since their completion of the course so the project officer first endeavoured to contact each graduate by phone and through colleagues and employers to update their email and postal addresses. Subsequently, the questionnaire was mailed to all 28 graduates.

Twelve surveys were returned, four of which were anonymous. Subsequently, the Steering Committee meeting confirmed the decision for the Project Officer to follow up those who did not respond, with a telephone survey.

The questionnaire was re-structured to make it more suitable for the telephone so that the relevant information could be ascertained quickly. Eight more responses were obtained via the telephone survey.

In total, 20 responses (71%) were received of the 28 students who had completed their course in 2004.

Findings

The results of the survey were tabled at the Steering Committee meeting in September.

Employment status:

- ❖ Of the 20 responses in total, 60% are employed.
- ❖ Of those employed, 57% are in the disability field.

- ❖ 83% of those employed in areas other than the disability field, said they would still be interested in working in the disability industry.
- ❖ Of those unemployed, 66% indicated they were still interested in working in the disability field.

Gaining employment:

- ❖ 20% of the respondents identified their qualifications and work experience to be important in finding employment;
- ❖ A further 20% said understanding of the sector was important; and
- ❖ 10% identified good communication skills.
- ❖ Motivation to work, positive attitude, and experience in teamwork were also identified as factors that helped graduates find employment.

Further training and development support:

- ❖ most were content with their current skills for their job;
- ❖ some stated that relevant training was being provided to them through their place of employment;
- ❖ some could not commit to any training sessions due to family commitments;
- ❖ 20% of the graduates said they wanted other further training,
 - one graduate wanted to receive training to operate the computer;
 - another wanted to do a Certificate IV in Disability Support; and
 - another desired to improve his English.
- ❖ This left 25% of respondents (5 in total) showed interest in the EDAC workshops offered, however follow-up indicated their priority was for more individualized support.

EDAC follow-up support

Unemployed graduates seeking employment

The Project Officer networked each unemployed graduate seeking employment with potential employers in the disability field:

- letters were mailed to the 5 relevant graduates advising them that positions were available from the IdeasWA website; and
- web addresses of some major employers were also provided;

Individualised employment and career support

Information and linkage for those employed outside the disability sector:

- as above; and

- information of on the seminar held by a disability organization on the jobs it had available.

Information and linkage for those employed in the disability sector:

- the Cert IV in Assessment and Training;
- the Federal Government's Profit From Experience Program available to mature job seekers wishing to retrain.

Information and linkage for CaLD Support Workers generally:

- free English lessons; and
- free Support working training.

Network linkage to information sources and for mutual assistance

- Relevant information stakeholders regarding dissemination of CaLD Support Worker employment and training opportunities were provided with the email list of Graduates, so they could each receive relevant career information direct; and
- All Graduates were provided with the email addresses of the others – and encouraged to keep in contact with each other for mutual career and case-work consultation, support and information, and to be able to exercise a collective voice in the industry on developmental issues and matters of concern.

At the time of this Report, the Project Officer was informed that Graduates were following up on these initiatives from the information and contacts provided to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this research indicated that the project undertaken in 2003-05 was highly successful. Most of the graduates thanked EDAC for supporting them through the Cert III course in Community and Development at TAFE and had put their newly acquired skills to good use.

Although over half (57%) of respondents who work in the disability field reported satisfaction in their job, this also indicated the potential for this follow-up EDAC employment support initiative to be of value to them and encourage them to continue in working effectively in the CaLD disability sector.

Consequently, we recommend that:

- more programs be made available to train CaLD Australians in support work for people with disabilities; and

- as only 57% were actually employed in the disability field, that successful participants be networked with potential disability services employers before they seek alternative employment by default in other service areas; and
- from our experience in this Project, that individualized follow-up employment support is made available to each year of graduates; and
- an active ongoing network of CaLD Disability Support Workers is maintained, and that they become increasingly involved in mentoring new graduates as their levels of experience develop.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research indicated that the Cert III in Community Development has been successful in getting CaLD people into employment in the disability sector – it helped most participants in building their confidence and self esteem to take on and succeed in TAFE training and to subsequently find employment.

The Project outcomes emphasized that the uptake of graduates into the disability services sector needs to be improved and suggests linking students into the disability employment sector during their training to reduce the probability of them remaining unemployed or resorting to employment in other sectors.

The successful response to the individualized support intervention provided by this Project suggests that follow-up employment support be provided for graduates each year and that there be resource for maintaining an ongoing active professional development and support network of CaLD Disability Support Workers who can be increasingly involved in graduate mentoring and support.