

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Workers: **Developing Cultural Competency**

In order to work effectively with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) young people and their families, workers should:

- Be open to developing their knowledge and understanding of different cultural groups and of diversity within those cultural groups.
- Explore the impact of their own cultural background on the development of their values and beliefs.
- Reflect on how their own values impact on their approach to their work with families.
- Be aware of the limited value of stereotyping individuals from certain cultures or ethnicities.<sup>1</sup>

Literature on working with people from CLD communities highlights the importance of workers developing Cultural Awareness, Cultural Sensitivity and finally Cultural Competency.

### **Cultural awareness**

Developing cultural awareness is often the first step in working with young people and families. This involves learning about the cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices of the CLD communities that your agency services. Workers should find out about the:

- languages spoken within these communities
- traditional family structure within the CLD groups
- child-rearing practices
- approaches to discipline
- religious affiliations etc.

Much of this information can be gained through reading relevant literature and speaking with cultural consultants or ethno-specific workers.

### **Cultural sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity occurs when a practitioner develops an understanding that families within cultural groups differ considerably in the way they express their culture. They may differ in how they express cultural norms or to what extent they follow norms.

Culturally sensitive practitioners rely less on norms, although still referring to them as a basis for understanding, and try to understand culture from each family's unique perspective. This level of work develops over an extended period of time through exposure to families from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### **Cultural competency**

A worker achieves cultural competency when they can understand how their own cultural norms impact on the way they view themselves, the families they are working with and the situation they are facing together. Culturally competent workers are less judgemental and more flexible in their response to how others interpret and respond to events.

Cultural competence can be defined as:

The ability to identify and challenge one's own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs. It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another's eyes, or at the very least, to recognise that others may view the world through different cultural lenses.<sup>2</sup>

### **Understanding of adolescence and complex needs**

It is very important to check with the families that you are working with about their understanding of childhood development and of the health and wellbeing issues affecting their child. Some CLD families may have a very different understanding from yours of issues such as:

- the adolescent stage of development
- roles and responsibilities during the adolescent years
- mental health and physical health issues
- strategies for dealing with complex problems
- appropriate discipline

It is important to be open to understanding the family's perception of the problems their child is experiencing and how they believe their problems can be best addressed.

For example some CLD groups do not recognise adolescence as a stage of development within a young person's life. They regard a young person as ready to take on adult responsibilities once they reach puberty.

The western concept of adolescence may not be well understood and can be mystifying for some parents. It can also be a source of tension as some CLD parents expect their teenagers to take on responsibilities that other parents don't.

It is important for workers to explore the parents' interpretation of the presenting problems carefully and openly and to find out how they believe their child's problems or issues of family conflict can best be addressed.

<sup>1</sup> Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (2006), Cultural Competence Guidelines and Protocols, Victoria

<sup>2</sup> Fitzgerald (2000) cited in Stewart, S (2006), Cultural Competence in Health Care, Diversity Health Institute, Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> Mo Yee Lee, 2003, 'A Solution Focussed Approach to Cross-Cultural Clinical Social Work Practice: Utilizing Cultural Strengths', Families in Society

### **Developing culturally competent organisations**

There are a number of steps that organisations can take in order to facilitate the development of cultural competence within their staff and to address the needs of CLD families in their communities including:

- Provision of training to all staff to increase their cultural competence.
  - Equal employment opportunities for CLD workers and provision of staff training and supervision to assist their professional development.
  - Consideration of the needs of CLD young people and their families in program design and development.
  - Review all agency policies to ensure that they take into account the needs of CLD young people and families being serviced by the agency and that the policies are inclusive and responsive to the cultural values of all communities being serviced.
  - Development of partnerships with CLD organisations to assist with staff training; ensure clear referral pathways; provide secondary consultation services if/when required.
  - Active promotion of programs to CLD families and communities using translated materials as required, ensuring increased knowledge of and access to services.
  - Collection of relevant data to measure the level of access to services by CLD young people and their families and the quality of service delivery to them.
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### Ideas from this Help Sheet

- Culturally competent workers aim to be non-judgemental and flexible in their work with CLD young people and their families.
- Organisations should actively facilitate the development of worker cultural competence through: cultural awareness training, supervision and arranging access to secondary consultations with cultural consultants and ethno-specific workers.
- Agency policies and programs should be inclusive and responsive to the needs of CLD young people and families.



### Related Help Sheets

#### Worker Help Sheets

- Engaging Families from Other Cultures
- Agency Guidelines

#### Parent Help Sheets

- Settling into a New Country
- Adolescent Development



### Suggested Reading

- Sawrikar, P and Katz, I (2008), Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, No.3.
- Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (2006), Cultural Competence Guidelines and Protocols, Victoria.



### Other Useful Links

- Centre for Multicultural Youth  
[cmy.net.au](http://cmy.net.au)
- Northern Migrant Resource Centre  
[spectrumvic.org.au](http://spectrumvic.org.au)
- Parenting and Child Health  
[cyh.com](http://cyh.com)
- Diversity @ Work  
[diversityatwork.com.au](http://diversityatwork.com.au)
- Multicultural Mental Health Australia  
[mmha.org.au](http://mmha.org.au)
- Foundation House  
[survivorsvic.org.au](http://survivorsvic.org.au)



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