



NATIONAL ETHNIC DISABILITY ALLIANCE

This is my Home

Belonging, Disability and Diversity

August 2009

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Disclaimer

This report presents the results of work carried out from March to May 2009. The information presented was the best available to the knowledge of the consultant at the time of the evaluation. Every effort has been made to present the diverse range of perspectives of people in the focus groups undertaken for this project.

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Foreword

Social policy researchers have taken an increasing interest in moving beyond traditional measurements of poverty and disadvantage (such as income deprivation) to a focus on social capital and cohesion, and wellbeing as measurements of broad participation and community resilience.

It remains unclear whether current understandings of social cohesion and wellbeing are comparable across all cultural and linguistic communities. Because of the subjective nature of responses to surveys seeking information on cohesion and wellbeing, answers can differ due to the cultural, religious or linguistic background of the respondent: for example, understandings of volunteering, caring or community safety will vary dramatically as a result of cultural factors.

Further, it is not clear that understandings of the nature of “wellbeing” or “social cohesion” as concepts are universal. Thus Robert Putnam’s recent findings that “the greater the diversity in a community, the fewer people vote and the less they volunteer, the less they give to charity and work on community projects” may only reflect that measurements of cohesion only take into account *one view* of what constitutes community, rather than capture the views of different culturally and linguistically diverse groups.¹

In February 2009, NEDA released a report entitled *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture*, which explored the definitions and measures of social exclusion, social inclusion and social cohesion through an analysis of literature and indicators from Australia and the United Kingdom. It also explored how measures of cultural diversity can be included in current policy debates on social inclusion in Australia.

This report follows on from the literature review through exploring the perceptions of what home, belonging and social connection mean for people with disability from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB).

NEDA wishes to acknowledge and thank all the people who participated in the focus groups by sharing their stories as well as the organisations who assisted in organising the focus groups. In particular NEDA acknowledges the support of Diversity and Disability Victoria, the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre and the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association in making this report possible.

NEDA acknowledges the support of the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in enabling NEDA to produce this report.

¹ See

http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/08/05/the_downside_of_diversity/.

Contents

	Page
FOREWORD	3
Acronyms	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
Belonging and Social Inclusion	7
Barriers to Belonging, Acceptance and Participation	8
Findings	9
ABOUT NEDA	10
BACKGROUND	11
Project Overview	11
Methodology	11
Limitations of Methodology	12
WHAT DOES BELONGING MEAN?	14
Belonging and Social Inclusion	14
Having a Voice and Being Heard	14
Having a Valued Role	15
Belonging and Identity	16
Belonging, Family and Friendship	18
Belonging, Religion and Spirituality	19
BARRIERS TO BELONGING, ACCEPTANCE AND PARTICIPATION	20
Belonging and Social Exclusion	20
Community Attitudes	22
Discrimination and Racism	23
CONCLUSION AND KEY MESSAGES	26

Acronyms

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
NEDA	National Ethnic Disability Alliance
NESB	Non English Speaking Background

Executive Summary

In February 2009, NEDA released a report entitled *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture*, which explored the definitions and measures of social exclusion, social inclusion and social cohesion through an analysis of literature and indicators from Australia and the United Kingdom. It also explored how measures of cultural diversity can be built into policy debates and analysis in understanding and measuring social inclusion in Australia.

The literature review highlighted that social inclusion can be viewed on a continuum between social inclusion and social. The factors that contribute to social inclusion are multifactorial and can include economic, social and political factors which are heavily influenced by cultural and linguistic diversity. Social connectedness and social inclusion may be formed differently within and between people and communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. There can be conflict and consensus both within and between communities which can affect how people experience social exclusion or social inclusion. It is also heavily influenced by government policy.

This report follows on from the literature review to explore the meaning of belonging, home and social connection for NESB people with disability. NEDA facilitated three focus groups in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth between March and April 2009 with NESB people with disability. There were 32 people who participated in the focus groups, some of which included parents of children with a disability from NESB. This report attempts to document their stories and descriptions of what it means to belong, to be accepted and to feel socially included and connected.

This report is not designed to represent all people with disability from NESB background. NEDA acknowledges that accurately capturing the views of all people from NESB with disability on community and belonging would require a large scale social survey. However, this report uses a small focus group methodology to highlight some key themes and promote further discussion on social inclusion for a range of diverse Australians, including for people from NESB who have a disability. It is further clear that the findings have broad implications for building a culturally and linguistically diverse picture of social inclusion in Australia.

Belonging and Social Inclusion

Focus group participants said that having a voice and being treated with respect and dignity was a key component of belonging. This included being afforded the same rights as all people to having a job, being able to undertake meaningful activities, being connected to friends and family and making a contribution to society.

The need to navigate multiple identities was also described in the focus groups. People described the challenge of the dual identities of being a person with a disability and person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. The

experience of discrimination because of disability and cultural background was also described by many focus group participants.

The importance of religion and spirituality in people's lives in creating meaning, social connectivity and belonging was also highlighted. Many people described feeling connected into a community through their involvement with faith organisations or groups. These groups were important in supporting people in their day to day life, particularly during difficult times.

The role of family in supporting social inclusion and connection was also described. Some people described their family as being an important part of their support network which contributed to their sense of belonging.

Other people described how their family were not supportive of their disability. Rather than relying on their family, people described their friends as being a strong source of support.

For some people who did not have close or supportive relationships with family, their friends provided an important support and social network. Some people described how their friends became like family in providing social connections and support. Friendship is an important component of belonging.

Barriers to Belonging, Acceptance and Participation

The barriers to belonging were also identified by focus group participants. This included the attitudes of people and society towards people with disability as well as people from NESB. Attitudes and how people were treated worked to make people feel excluded and not belong.

Many people in the focus groups described experiences of being treated without dignity and respect because of their disability as well as their cultural and linguistic background. This included being subject to racism and discrimination because they look physically different (either because of their disability or their cultural background). The experience of being discriminated against was common and made people feel like they did not belong. People described incidents of being verbally harassed and abused because of their cultural background and being a person with a disability.

People identified the importance of having a valued role either through work and employment or doing meaningful activities. A key component of feeling accepted and participating in society was having paid employment and being given opportunities for training to develop skills in getting paid employment. Many people described the barriers for people with disability in getting appropriate training and support, which can affect their employment options. People also described barriers in utilising government agencies and accessing income support, particularly through Centrelink: it was clear that poor interactions with support agencies could have the effect of making people feel like they did not belong.

The importance of people having a voice and connecting through a range of community based organisations was also highlighted as important. Organisations such as advocacy providers offer opportunities for people to come together and share stories, connect and explore opportunities to feel socially included.

Understanding how people with disability from NESB feel connected and socially included is important for government policy in terms of developing initiatives and programs to facilitate social inclusion for groups that might experience marginalisation on many fronts.

Findings

This report has 5 key findings. The findings have important implications in relation to how we might understand social inclusion in Australia, and future directions for improving the sophistications of the national social inclusion agenda:

1. Religion, faith and spirituality are an important component of social connectivity and belonging for many people from diverse backgrounds. Measures of inclusion must adequately value the role of faith in building inclusion and connectivity for many Australians.
2. Discrimination has an impact upon opportunities and social inclusion outcomes. A social inclusion agenda must address systemic and individual discrimination, including racism.
3. Family and friends are important gateways to social participation and belonging. Friendship networks in particular are worthy of further investigation as an enabler of social inclusion.
4. The ability to be to have a voice and be heard is a key component of feeling included. Linking social inclusion with human rights frameworks and support for advocacy provides a direction for giving people opportunities to be heard.
5. Creating more positive interactions between support agencies and customers can have the benefit of a stronger sense of belonging and connection for people who face social exclusion.

About NEDA

The National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) is the national peak organisation representing the rights and interests of people from non-English speaking background (NESB) with disability, their families and carers throughout Australia.

NEDA is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to provide policy advice to the Australian Government and other agencies on national issues affecting people from NESB with disability, their families and carers.

NEDA actively promotes the equal participation of people from NESB with disability in all aspects of Australian society. It manages a range of projects relating to NESB and disability communities and works closely with its state and territory members to ensure that its policy advice reflects the lived experiences of people from NESB with disability. In states and territories where no NESB-disability advocacy agency exists NEDA undertakes development work to establish a structure that can support people from NESB with disability, their families and carers.

NEDA estimates that one in every four people with disability is a person of either first or second generation NESB, representing approximately 1 million people across Australia.

Background

Project Overview

In February 2009 NEDA released a report entitled *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture*, which explored the definitions and measures of social exclusion, social inclusion and social cohesion through an analysis of literature and indicators from Australia and the United Kingdom. It also explored how measures of cultural diversity can be built into understanding and measuring social inclusion in Australia. This project builds on this report and explores the meaning of belonging, acceptance and social connectedness for people with disability from NESB.

In March 2009 NEDA initiated a project to:

- Conduct three small focus groups comprising of people with disability from Non English Speaking Backgrounds;
- Record responses to questions on home, belonging and social connection, based upon an agreed survey template.
- Evaluate responses and report on findings with respect to the directions established in *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture*.

Carrie Hayter Consulting was contracted to assist with conducting focus groups, recording responses and report compilation.

Methodology

The key themes from the literature review, *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture* was reviewed and broad questions for discussion with participants of the focus groups were designed. The questions asked at the focus groups included:

- Do you feel like you belong?
- Do you feel accepted by your communities?
- Do you feel secure in your home as well as when you are out?
- Are you happy with the life you are living now?
- How could your life be improved?

The questions were designed as far as possible to avoid applying a formula to what inclusion or belonging might look like, and allow participants, in their own words to describe their experiences.

Three small focus groups of approximately 10 people from NESB with disability were held between March and April 2009. Focus groups were organised through NEDAs member organisations in:

- Perth, with the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC)
- Melbourne, with the Disability and Diversity through the Migrant Resource Centre North West;
- Sydney, with the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA)

There were 31 people with disability from NESB, and one parent of a child from NESB with disability, who participated in the focus groups. This included people from a diverse range of ages and different cultural backgrounds.

The focus groups were facilitated by NEDA staff and the project consultant. The questions asked at the focus groups were broad and designed to promote debate and discussion. Focus group discussions occurred in English. The focus groups were small to support the maximum participation of all members in the group.

All focus group discussions were recorded and all participants were asked permission for sessions to be recorded. The sessions were recorded to assist in the transcribing of interviews and identifying key themes from the consultations.

Limitations of Methodology

A limitation of the methodology for this study is the small number of people who participated in the focus groups. This research is not designed to be representative of all people with disability from NESB. Further research is needed to scope the issues for people with disability from different communities to understand how people's experience of social inclusion may be different both within and between different communities.²

Interpreters were not used in the consultations. By default English only focus group discussions excluded people with no English proficiency, and limited the participation of people with low English proficiency in focus groups. However, it was acknowledged as part of this research that measures of social inclusion through large scale social surveys (such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey) often require participants to translate experiences of belonging into the English language, even if this is not their first language, as translators are not used. Part of the aim of this research project was to allow participants to translate concepts into English in their own words, and test whether basic ideas would emerge (such as "family," "friends," "church," "work").

² . It should be noted however that even large scale surveys, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey and the Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers typically survey small numbers of people born in non English speaking countries with disability: the challenge for statisticians in this area is to create an adequate sampling methodology to adequately capture the characteristics of diverse communities.

Despite the above challenges, feedback from participants was that the focus groups were useful in sharing stories and for people to connect and understand how people's experience of having a disability and being from a culturally diverse background influences their sense of belonging.

What does belonging mean?

Belonging and Social Inclusion

The literature review *Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion? Literature Review on Social Inclusion, Cohesion and Culture* highlighted that social inclusion is closely connected to belonging. Feeling socially included is about being connected to family, friends and community participation.

The report also identified that a sense of social inclusion and belonging may vary significantly both within and between different communities. Conflict and consensus may coexist within and between different culturally and linguistically diverse groups. NESB people with disability are not a homogenous group and understanding the differences both within and between groups is important. The key themes of the focus groups on belonging and social inclusion are described below.

Having a Voice and Being Heard

The focus groups highlighted that a sense of belonging was connected to people having a voice and being heard in the community and society. Some people reported they had more freedom to voice their opinion in Australia than in their country of birth

I belong in Australia because I feel safe, free, democratic ... I love my country but I can't say my opinion

Having a voice is connected to having rights and choices that are respected which support people to make informed choices.

What makes me feel I belong is that I have rights and choices. That's when I feel like I'm contributing to society

I feel like I belong if people need me and if I am part of the social life and government treat me with respect.

Some people reported difficulties in having a voice because of language barriers or information not being provided in appropriate forums. Having a voice was closely connected to being able to get information in accessible formats.

Having a voice and being heard was also related to acceptance. It was reported that acceptance can only occur when people are treated as equals. This was reflected by the following comment.

I feel accepted when I am equal in society, I have the same rights as any other person and am treated with dignity, respect, loyalty and

integrity. I believe these elements are the key ingredients to make a person feel accepted.

One person suggested there should be more dialogue between people with disability and people who do not have a disability including people from a range of cultural backgrounds. Multicultural organisations were seen as an important part of this process.

I need people that listen to my story and to not judge me and for people to help me. [Advocacy provider]... has helped me significantly. I need opportunities to talk, to share my story and to have a voice

I feel like I fit into this group because I feel heard and respected for what I'm saying. If I say something in an Australian group, they think I'm off the planet. I'm talking about additional things that they don't understand. I feel equal to everyone in this group.

A number of participants highlighted the importance of advocacy organisations for people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in providing a space for people to have a voice. Participants were clear that without these organisations, some of the people would struggle to have a voice and be heard, as well connecting with people from with a disability from NESB.

It should be stressed that the positive experience with support organisations was not universal amongst all participants. A few focus group participants also described the challenges of navigating the internal politics of different groups. For example one participant expressed frustration that some ethnic organisations refuse to assist people from other ethnic groups as they are not able to leave behind the politics of their homeland.

They have their own hidden agenda and lose track of what they're funded to do ... They put barriers at the very beginning of your communication with them.

Having a Valued Role

The focus groups highlighted the importance for people of having a valued role. This included: having a job or meaningful activities; being respected by their families and society; and being connected into society either via friends or through other connections (such as faith organisations or groups).

Some people described how they had to fight for acceptance and to have a valued role because of their disability. This included getting access to education.

When I went from a special school to a normal, I was questioned by a group of people to assess me if I was ready to go to a normal school. It was a physio that decided I go to a normal school because

I told her I wanted to be a chemist and she realized I couldn't do that if I stayed in special school. Getting into a normal school was a big fight and my mum was illiterate and Dad had little education. The Catholic school thought I could only be in hospitality.

People described how it was important to keep busy either through work or hobbies and interests. One participant said she forgets all her troubles when she is working. People reported having individual needs and interests which varies significantly depending on a person's cultural and linguistic background.

The importance of having meaningful work which gives people a sense of self worth and value was also clearly highlighted. One participant, for example, said her job keeps her happy and the feedback she receives from people keeps her going during difficult times. She said she would be happier if her job was more regular. One person spoke about the value of undertaking training and how this made her feel accepted.

I'm doing training and they make me feel included and I feel normal for the 4 days of training that I'm there. They don't treat me like I'm different and have a disability.

Despite the importance of employment to concepts of community belonging, they should not be overemphasised. Work was also a site of marginalisation and discrimination for workshop participants, as discussed below at 4.1.

Belonging and Identity

People reported the importance of being able to maintain their own cultural identity, to speak their own language and express their opinions and to have these rights and opinions respected.

The thing I like about Australia is that it's a melting pot of many different languages and cultures. I belong because I come from a melting pot myself. Here I can appreciate diversity. It is very important for me to fight for what I want. My family supports me. I have the opportunity to live my life as I want to and be accepted by the community.

The sense of belonging was also related to having dual or multiple identities, for example, being a person with a disability as well as from NESB background. The process of living with these dual identities created some challenges in understanding how these multiple identities can co-exist alongside each other.

I'm confused about where I belong. I migrated from Hong Kong. I did not have the feeling of belonging. Eventually I got to learn English because I look normal and people did not realise I had hearing problems. This was not identified in Hong Kong and people labelled me as arrogant before I knew I had a hearing problem. Knowing I have this problem, I studied and got on with my life. Now I feel included in one sense. In the area of disability, I am

disappointed about how people behave. They tell me you don't have that quality of disability. Fortunately I met some people in the local area and realized I can be accepted as having a disability.

My family is very multicultural. I'm Maltese and married to a Croatian. In my husband's family, they speak Croatian but I can't speak it and am excluded. They won't speak English.

I went from a special school to a normal school and was excited. In the special school people looked at me because of my legs, in mainstream school I was identified as Italian.

Some people described that the attitudes, services and support they could access in Australia was very different to what would be available in their country of birth as reflected by the following comment.

I'm very grateful I'm in Australia. In my country I will not get this kind of support. You get a lot of help. I'm a totally different person since I've been here 18 years ago. I've learned a lot of things and pushed hard to get here. In Mauritius I will not walk by myself, I will always have company. Here I can go everywhere myself. I can ask for help and get the information.

Some participants at the focus groups shared stories of not appreciating their multiple identities until they had left Australia.

I was 1 when we migrated here and got polio soon after we arrived. Most of my life was spent in hospitals and institutions so I was distanced from my family. I knew I loved them and them me but I felt like a nomad. I was happy that I could speak several languages. I was in my 20's and living overseas, I realised how Australian I was. When I got back to Australia, I felt European again. Whenever I go to functions, I'm asked where I'm from. I say I'm Australian.

In Australia I was raised with a whole mob of children with disabilities. When I went overseas, I had no interaction with people with disability.

The importance of being socially connected to people from similar backgrounds and interests was also an important part of people's identity and their sense of belonging. This could include being connected to people from similar cultural backgrounds, other people with disability or people with similar interests.

Some people described not having a peer group of people with disability that they could connect with which made them feel isolated. For some people, it was the process of developing these networks and connections that built a sense of belonging as well as addressing some of the attitudinal barriers of society to people with disability.

The importance of being accepted for who people were including having a disability as well as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background was highlighted throughout the focus groups. A key part of being accepted was having a valued role and that people were active contributors and participators in their own lives, in their community and in broader society.

Belonging, Family and Friendship

There were some differences between people in terms of feeling belonging in the broader community and belonging at home. People spoke about the importance of family. For some people, their family were an incredible support but for others, their family was a source of disappointment and non acceptance. Some people felt happier with their friends than their family.

Some participants, for example, described their families as being extremely supportive and accepting of their disability and situation highlighted by the following comments.

My family have been great. They support me. My mum says I'm inspirational and tells me I make her happy. I told her that it's because this is what she taught me.

I feel trusted by my family.

Others described not being accepted within their family because of the influence of their culture on how people react to people with disability.

Not all people have supportive families. I was brought up by my family and my neighbourhood but they did not treat me well and I don't feel like I belong.

One participant said her family were ashamed of her because of her disability. She felt very excluded from her family and described her family making her feel like a burden. Friends were the people who helped rather than families.

Some people described the fear of disability within some cultural and linguistic groups. People described how some cultural groups do not have regular contact with people with disability in public life, and thus shy away from anyone who has disability. This can work to make people with disability feel different and not belong within their CALD community.

Some people described feeling a sense of belonging within their family but not in the wider community. This was described as a potential form of double discrimination where people could be discriminated against because of their disability and their cultural background.

Other people described not having a sense of belonging in their families but having belonging within faith organisation or group or with other people with disability. This was about creating communities of acceptance and belonging,

particularly if a person's immediate family are not understanding and supportive of the person with a disability.

Some people felt happier with their friends than their family. Friendship was seen as very important. Friends were described as a source of support and independence. For some people their friends were like their family in providing a social support network.

Belonging, Religion and Spirituality

Many people described their faith and spirituality as an important part of social connections and belonging. People connected through being part of a faith based groups and communities:

At church, I see some family members, share problems and have the freedom to express myself

I have my church family that I interact with. I feel closer to them than my biological family.

I had an accident which has affected me. I go to church and I pray and the combination of prayer and support from my church has been important for me. The people at church helped me and made me feel like I belonged. They were committed to helping me and that made me feel like I belong.

At first I felt so isolated having a child with a disability. I had no social life and had to become the full time carer for my son. What helped me was my faith in god and the people from my church who made me feel like I belonged. The prayers, encouragement and strength that I got from people at church gave me strength and supported me in the community.

Connecting with people through religion and faith provided people with a strong sense of belonging. It provided an important role particularly when people were experiencing difficulties and challenges in their life.

Not all people reported a sense of belonging in being part of a faith community. One participant described wanting to be part of a religious group but there were some difficulties participating because of her disability.

Sometimes it is harder to be part of a group if you have a disability and are within a church group. Because I could not physically do things I found it harder to belong in the church group. I felt like if I did not physically contribute and because I was from a culturally diverse background, I had 'double discrimination' because of my disability and being from a NESB background.

Barriers to Belonging, Acceptance and Participation

Belonging and Social Exclusion

People described many examples of the barriers that can be in place for people with disability from NESB background which made people feel like they don't belong which could potentially lead to social exclusion. This included: lack of employment opportunities, community attitudes, racism and discrimination.

Many people described feeling socially excluded because of a lack of employment opportunities. Participants spoke at length about the difficulties of finding employment because of their disability and or their cultural background. People described being discriminated against because of their disability.

A person with disability is either unemployed, underemployed or taken advantage of. They get less pay, work longer hours and do unfulfilling work. It is difficult for a person with a disability to afford specialised equipment on low wages.

Employers won't give you work because they don't think you can do this work. There are barriers everywhere that you have to battle.

Another participant described the experience of going to a disability job placement service who explained they would not be able to place them in employment because of their disability. This was despite the fact that previously they had worked while living overseas, and they were very keen to work in Australia. The attitudes of the employment service worked to exclude this person from getting appropriate support to find work.

A number of people described how they have experienced discrimination from other work colleagues because of their disability. One participant said people use his disability to negate his views and opinions.

They say things like "you didn't have your medication, that's why you're behaving like this". If something goes wrong in the factory, I am the first to get blamed.

Other people described the fact that they do not get access to training. One participant reported that she is missing out on employment because she does not have adequate skills and has difficulty in getting access to finding work.

People who had acquired a disability later in life said that not being able to work and the way they were treated by Centrelink made them feel socially excluded as described by one focus group participant.

I arrived in this country healthy as a migrant and now I have a disability. Because of this I cannot work and got referred to Centrelink. When I was working I earned about \$2,500 per week and now I survive on \$350 per week. I paid taxes and worked all my life. I have worked to raise my adult children. After 2-3 months, I received a letter from Centrelink that I was eligible to work and I cried. I can't work because of my disability and I have suffered so much. I felt like I belonged when I could work and had a job. My children all work and pay taxes. Because of my disability I cannot work and I know that working is much better than being on Centrelink payments.

The difficulty in getting help and support was raised consistently. The combination of having a disability, not having access to informal support (via family and friends) and not being able to get formal support services (despite many attempts to access help) lead to a feeling of being socially isolated and excluded as described by one participant.

I worked here for 15 years and had a baby and then developed some serious health problems. When my baby was born I could not find any help, I rang so many people and there was no-one who helped me. I did not find help in the church, because I had limited ability to be physically active and could not help in the church this made it difficult for me to be accepted in that community. I felt like I was going to die and I should take my baby with me because I could not get any help. I finally was provided a Korean speaking volunteer and she was a god send. She saw how depressed I was and she visited me in the community so I could get some help. I am of mixed race with multiple identities and this Korean woman saved my life.

I was so depressed and also had some difficulties accessing Centrelink payments and could not find anyone to help me. I had serious heart problems and no family and no one to help me. I thought I would die in the house and I all I could think of was what would happen to my daughter. I had to train my daughter in an emergency situation to survive on milk and food.

My fear was I would die and no-one would know or know about my daughter. I could not get my daughter to school because of my heart condition and all I wanted was to get my daughter to school. I even went to my local MP who told me that if I could not get my daughter to school then perhaps I needed to put her in foster care. But all I wanted was to get my daughter to school and to get some people to help me. The system is what lets you down. You are so disabled and you cannot get out of the house and I could not get my daughter to school and I was told to put her in foster care.

For some people, their experience with government agencies (particularly Centrelink) was extremely frustrating in getting the information and support that they needed. Many people gave stories of having to repeat the same story over

and over again and being frustrated by the bureaucratic nature of the system. The way the system treated people often made them feel socially excluded as reflected in the following comments:

I had a social worker who helped me access services but is very confusing and it is like going on a merry go round to get the help that you need sometimes. It is difficult to trust the government because to get help you need to talk to 10 different people and tell your story ten different times. You speak to many case workers who don't care because they are overloaded and overworked – the problem is with the system.

I have had the same experience with Centrelink and trying to get information about helping me with my son who has a disability. I worked full time before I fell pregnant and was very exciting about having a child. I feel like I ended up on another planet or country through this experience.

I have two mild disabilities both of which are permanent and I am currently on Centrelink payments because of my disability. I am often reviewed by Centrelink and have to fill out multiple forms and it takes a lot of time to fill out the forms and provide all the information that is required to Centrelink. The case workers are not the same in Centrelink and sometimes tell you different information which can be very frustrated. They keep asking me the same questions over and over again. My disability is permanent but I have to tell the same story over and over again. They transferred me from one section to another and all around the different places. It took me two weeks to collect all the documentation and information that they requested. You write a letter to Centrelink and it takes ages for them to answer you. I got some help from the Migrant Resource Centre from the social worker but sometimes it feels like Centrelink are bordering on harassment of me.

It is very difficult to obtain information about disability concessions and allowances, suitable equipment and services.

Community Attitudes

In all of the focus groups, the attitudes of people to people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were raised as a major barrier for participation and inclusion.

People reported that there needed to be more disability awareness programs in schools and communities. People reported that they should be run and delivered by people with disability who have direct experience of what it is like to have a disability. This was reflected by the following comments:

They should teach kids about disability awareness much earlier on.

Disability awareness training should be done by people with disability. No-one will know better than them.

People gave many examples of what it was like not to feel accepted in their family, society and the broader community. Some participants talked about how broader society creates attitudinal barriers for people with disability. They said it is the attitudinal barriers that are the problem not the person with a disability:

My mum and dad acknowledged my disability but made me do everything that is done normal. But society doesn't accept me as I am. Even today people will see me on the street and assume I don't have a brain because I can't walk.

I'm comfortable with my disability. It's normal for me but the society doesn't accept it.

Other people described how people's attitudes to their disability often placed limitations and restrictions on what they could do. One participant described how she had to fight to be allowed to study teaching because of her disability. She was advised at school that she could not become a teacher because of the physical limitations of her disability. Despite this she became a teacher and reported that it was a rewarding career choice which could have been restricted to her because of people's attitudes.

One participant described the challenges of having a visual impairment and that it can be difficult to access premises and this can make you feel like you do not belong. This was highlighted by the following comment.

I am visually impaired and sometimes it is very difficult to access premises. Often buildings are not accessible and need to be accessible as it makes it difficult for me to access these buildings.

Along with attitudinal barriers to people with disability, participants also described the difficulties of services not being culturally sensitive. One participant said she was ignored by her teacher when she was undertaking some training. She tried to tell the teacher that she needed certain equipment but the teacher simply did not listen. She felt this was due to her being from a different country and speaking with an accent.

Participants also described the difficulty that having inadequate English can have on people. Other people reported that language barriers can also be a problem.

Discrimination and Racism

Many participants described being actively discriminated against largely because of their cultural background. People described being called names, or being asked

where they come from because they are physically visibly different. This was described by one participant.

We don't belong here. People always ask me where do you come from because my skin colour is different. Some African people do not know how to describe where they come from because of constant changes in your country.

For me, I feel constantly like I am different and this is reinforced by the migrant and refugee services. We don't belong in all areas including: housing, education, employment and politics. There are no African people who work in Centrelink and it is nearly impossible to get someone to speak my language.

I find there is discrimination everywhere. I go to a real estate and they say no black people and no refugees. Lots of applications for things are rejected because I am black. There are problems at school because African kids are black and visibly different. People keep on calling us refugees which in another country we would not be called this. There is a negative label with the word refugee and it is used to keep you apart from the rest of the community. When people call people refugees they use this as discrimination. We are all Australian (even if I am black) but this is used as a form of discrimination to keep us separate. In my country there is war, women are raped and I don't belong there even though it is my country. But I don't feel like I belong here either.

This person described the difficulties in coming to Australia and the discrimination they had experienced. Another person reported finding some sense of belonging was through their local church, however, they often experienced discrimination in many aspects of their daily life.

People described being discriminated against because they looked physically different. This was also compounded by people in Australia not understanding some of the geo-political differences both within and between countries, for example, countries in the Middle East highlighted by the following comment:

People call you a wog because you are Lebanese. Not all people from the Middle East and Lebanon are the same. This make you feel like you do not belong in this country. You come from Lebanon and the Middle East but you do not feel safe here and in the community. Every Lebanese person or wherever people come from are entitled to feel like they belong but often they do not.

Australia is a rich country and sometimes people discriminate despite people being from all sorts of different backgrounds. I have been more distinct from my own nationality because I cannot speak my language.

People gave examples of being discriminated against because of both their disability and their cultural and linguistic background. One participant described their experience of taxi drivers.

I have had some bad experiences with taxi drivers harassing me and being abusive because I have a disability. It is a combination of having a disability and being from an NESB background

Conclusion and Key Messages

The people with disability from NESB who attended the focus groups shared many stories of what it means to belong at home and in the community.

People described what it means to belong which includes feeling valued, respected, having a valued role (through employment and doing meaningful activities) and connecting with family and friends. All people with disability from NESB have their own needs which are influenced by their culture and their experience of living with a disability.

Faith

The role of religion, faith and spirituality was an important social connector for people. The connections made through involvement in a church or faith based group provided opportunities for people to be accepted and to feel connected. While the significance of faith was not universal, it was clear that this was an important factor in belonging for many participants.

Arguably social surveys fail to adequately capture the role of religion, faith and spirituality in building social connections and inclusion, particularly for people from diverse backgrounds for whom faith is deeply connected to the culture of everyday life: work, recreation, family, friendships and support. Improving the way we measure the role of faith in social and community connection will be an important step towards improving our understanding of social inclusion and exclusion.

It is also important to emphasise that people with disability may also face barriers to participating in faith practices: for example some survey participants reported not belonging in church groups because of their disability.

1. Religion, faith and spirituality are an important component of social connectivity and belonging for many people from diverse backgrounds. Measures of inclusion must adequately value the role of faith in building inclusion and connectivity for many Australians.

Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination and racism were shared by many people with the potential of this leading to social exclusion.

Discrimination, either on the basis of race or disability, has an impact upon social participation. This was highlighted in the area of employment, where people gave detailed accounts of the difficulties in finding employment as well as the barriers for people in terms of attitudes of the broader community to NESB people with disability. People also reported discrimination in the workplace. People reported being the first person to be blamed if something went wrong in the workplace. This made people feel like they were not accepted and socially excluded. This can

make some people with disability feel like they do not belong and are different or separate from the mainstream workforce.

The experience of discrimination is common for many people with disability and people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and there are arguably demonstrable effects of this discrimination in terms of social and economic opportunities and outcomes. Responding to discrimination as part of a social inclusion approach (for example through anti-racism strategies) will assist to reduce barriers to exclusion.

2. Discrimination has an impact upon opportunities and social inclusion outcomes. A social inclusion agenda must address systemic and individual discrimination, including racism.

Family and Friendship

Family and friend networks are key forms of connectivity which build belonging and inclusion. Indeed, the research highlighted that families were often important mechanisms of support for people from NESB with disability.

However, the research also emphasised that friendship networks were as important; and in some cases were more effective enablers of participation. While family can provide support to people, for others families are not accepting of their disability because of cultural beliefs which can make people feel isolated. Some people reported that their friendships and social networks were far more important than family in providing important social connections.

In many respects, this is not a surprising finding: the ability to form and sustain friendships outside of a family context, and share values, culture, language and opportunity with like-minded peers, is a challenge for many people with disability *and* many migrants and refugees. Indeed a lack of ability to form friendship networks might be considered a defining component of the social isolation that some people with disability and people from diverse cultural backgrounds face.

Families have arguably received a significant degree of attention in terms of understanding of social inclusion and within social policy directions in general. However, this research has highlighted that more attention needs to be paid to friendships and friendship networks as a concept for understanding social connection and belonging.

3. Family and friends are important gateways to social participation and belonging. Friendship networks in particular are worthy of further investigation as an enabler of social inclusion.

Advocacy

Providing opportunities for people to have a voice and to share their stories was important. Organisations such as multicultural advocacy providers and multicultural resource centres played an important role in connecting people and providing a vehicle and opportunity for people to have a voice. Advocates and self

advocacy can support people with disability from NESB to build social connectivity, participate and feel socially included. Information and advocacy services can assist individuals in accessing appropriate information. For example people reported that advocacy assisted them in navigating frustrating and bureaucratic systems in order to gain services or entitlements.

Access to services and support is to some extent measurable within a social inclusion context. However, there appears to be limited means within Australia's social inclusion approach to measure the capacity of individuals to express their opinions, and feel that their views matter. Measuring community involvement in terms of the capacity of individuals to have a say about their lives and their communities could be an important evolution of what social inclusion means in Australia. It is worth noting that this would link the social inclusion agenda with other Australian Government policy initiatives, such as the move towards a human rights framework.

4. The ability to be to have a voice and be heard is a key component of feeling included. Linking social inclusion with human rights frameworks and support for advocacy provides a direction for giving people opportunities to be heard.

Government Agencies and Income Support

Services that can support people with disability from NESB to be included in all aspects of life are very important. This is particularly relevant in terms of providing training and employment opportunities for people with disability. The experiences shared by many of the people in the focus groups highlighted significant barriers for people in finding employment as well as getting access to training to develop skills to find employment. Focus group participants also reported difficulties in trying to access appropriate services to support them from government agencies.

While the research did not seek information specifically on experiences associated with living on government income support, it was clear that poor servicing by government agencies was a common experience which had an effect on social inclusion outcomes. In particular, the experiences of people in getting information and support from Centrelink were not positive. For example people reported barriers in getting information on their entitlements, and having to repeat their story over and over again before they got the information that was needed.

Frequent interaction with agencies such as Centrelink is a reality for many low income people, unemployed people, and some people with disability and people from a migrant or refugee background. Positive steps have been taken by the Australian Government to improving the way Centrelink and other agencies deal with customers; however the research has highlighted that interactions between government agencies and clients can still be a cause of marginalisation and exclusion.

5. Creating more positive interactions between support agencies and customers can have the benefit of a stronger sense of belonging and connection for people who face social exclusion.

The stories in this report from people from NESB with disability highlight significant diversity in how people experience belonging and feel socially included. While this research focused only on one group (ie people from NESB with disability) who face significant barriers to participation, the results are broadly applicable in so far as they highlight some of the deficiencies in measurement and approach to building social inclusion in Australia.

Any government policy initiatives developed to tackle social inclusion for people with disability from culturally diverse backgrounds needs to understand the diversity both within and between different communities. A starting point is to engage people with disability from NESB communities in discussions on how initiatives could work to build social inclusion.