

Issue #22, June 2009

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VICSEG Refugee Family Resource and Mentoring Program

VICSEG is currently piloting the Refugee Family Resource and Mentoring Program which works with newly arrived Assyrian/Chaldean, Karen/Burmese and South Sudanese families with young children aged 0 to 5 years in the North & West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

The program provides information about children and family services to families and direct support so that families may access these services. The Refugee Family Resource and Mentoring Program has a team of Refugee Family Resource workers who are available to:

- Provide information to parents and parenting groups about services for families with young children.
- Assist individual parents to access services by providing referrals and one on one support.
- Assist children and family services with cultural and strategic advice to make services culturally inclusive, responsive and accessible to refugee

families. Support to services is available through professional development and training for staff and individual requests from service providers for advice and specific support.

The program will build understanding of and confidence in the service system on the part of families from a refugee background primarily through direct experience, such as visits to services, face to face meetings with service personnel and participation in developmental activities.

It will enable newly arrived families to access services with the support of family mentors who share the same culture and language. The family mentors will encourage communication and trust and assist with cross-cultural adjustment over time.

The family mentors in turn will have the support of an experienced early childhood practitioner, able to both advise on the interactions with parents and children and facilitate meetings with or referrals to specific service providers.

It is envisaged that the family mentors will relate to families on both a one to one and small group basis as the circumstances require. They will utilise existing informal group settings such as support groups for mothers or playgroups where appropriate, or on occasion work with others, such as Maternal & Child health Nurses to have these established.

This proposed model of engaging bilingual/bicultural workers is a distinct approach that parallels the use of interpreters by practitioners working with

families or individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This approach has been used successfully over many years by organisations assisting people from CALD backgrounds to engage with and become familiar with the Australian service system. It is an approach that is used by settlement services to support people from refugee backgrounds, and the approach may also assist early intervention and crisis support initiatives.

LDC Group has been engaged to evaluate the program over the next two years. The evaluation will include extensive consultation with families, service providers and other stakeholders. The knowledge and experience of the VICSEG team, other organisations and the families participating in the project will assist to further develop the program in the future and may also assist other organisations with the development of their services.

Opportunities for continuing the program into the future and supporting families in the best possible way are important considerations of the evaluation. A review of relevant national and international literature will also inform the evaluation of the program.

A message from the coordinator of the 'Diversity and Disability' program

My name is Christian Astourian and I am coordinating a program called Diversity and Disability.

Diversity and Disability (DnD) has the aim of supporting people with a disability

from an ethnic background to speak up for themselves and know their rights in society. It is also about empowering people with a disability to believe in themselves and in what they can achieve in their life. We run this program at the Migrant Resource Centre in St Albans.

For this purpose, we have support groups with a facilitator and guest speakers coming to talk about important issues to our participants. We also provide self advocacy training for people with a disability from ethnic background to learn to advocate for themselves and others.

We are also running a new support group which provides the opportunity to participants to tell their life story. Participants can decide to tell their story within a group or on a one to one basis with a writer. The idea is in the future to make a book and publish people's extraordinary lives.

We also run disability and ethnicity awareness training for organisations' staff and individuals, with focus on different types of disability and best way to communicate.

For support and more information call Chris at the Migrant Resource Centre North West on (03) 9367 6044 or email on dnd@mrcnorthwest.org.au

By Christian Astourian

The Most Significant Change Technique

The most significant change (MSC) technique is a way of monitoring and evaluating programs that is participatory. It involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The aim is that project stakeholders will identify changes that have had a significant impact. People involved in the project sit down together, read the stories aloud and have discussions about the value of these reported changes.

Project stakeholders participate by deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. Monitoring occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program. The MSC technique contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the program as a whole. The MSC technique was developed by Rick Davies in 1996 to meet some of the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development program in Bangladesh, which had diversity in both implementation and outcomes.

The full implementation of the MSC technique involves ten steps. These are:

1. How to start and raise interest
2. Defining the domains of change
3. Defining the reporting period
4. Collecting Significant Change (SC) stories

5. Selecting the most significant of the stories
6. Feeding back the results of the selection process
7. Verification of stories
8. Quantification
9. Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring
10. Revising the system.

The first step in MSC generally involves introducing a range of stakeholders to MSC and fostering interest and commitment to participate. The next step involves identifying domains to monitor such as 'changes in peoples lives'. The third step is to decide how frequently to monitor the changes. SC stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are then analysed and filtered up through the levels of authority typically found within an organisation or program. Every time stories are selected, the criteria used to select them are recorded and fed back to all interested stakeholders, so that each subsequent round of story collection and selection is informed by feedback from previous rounds. The selected stories can then be verified by visiting the sites where the described events took place. The next step is quantification, which can take place at two stages. When an account of change is first described, it is possible to include quantitative information as well as qualitative information. It is also possible to quantify the extent to which the most significant changes identified in one location have taken place in other locations within a specific period. The next step after

quantification is monitoring the monitoring system itself, which can include looking at who participated and how they affected the contents, and analysing how often different types of changes are reported. The final step is to revise the design of the MSC process to take into account what has been learned as a direct result of using it and from analysing its use.

The essence of the MSC process is a question along the lines of:
'Looking back over the last month, what do you think was the most significant change in [particular domain of change]?'

A similar question is posed when the answers to the first question are examined by another group of participants:
'From among all these significant changes, what do you think was the most significant change of all?'

This process provides a simple means of making sense of a large amount of complex information collected from many participants across a range of settings.

MSC is best suited to monitoring that focuses on learning rather than just accountability. It is also an appropriate tool when you are interested in the effect of the intervention on people's lives and keen to include the words of non-professionals. In addition, MSC can help staff to improve their capabilities in capturing and analysing the impact of their work.

Adapted from The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to Its Use By Rick Davies and Jess Dart (2005)

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