

Co-designing research to build regional capacity for culturally safe access to supports and services for people with disability from refugee communities

Project Executive Summary

Professor Angela Dew, Associate Professor Kim Robinson, Dr Andrew Brown and project partners
Deakin University, Bendigo Community Health Service, Amicus Community Services, Lifely and Intereach

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National Disability
Research Partnership

Lead organisation: Deakin University

Partner organisations: Bendigo Community Health Service, Amicus Community Services, Lifely and Intereach

Project team

Full name	Affiliation	Role
Professor Angela Dew	Deakin University	Project Lead
Associate Professor Kim Robinson	Deakin University	Chief Investigator
Dr Andrew Brown	Deakin University	Chief Investigator
Ms Kaye Graves	Bendigo Community Health Service	Partner Organisation Lead
Ms Sarah Tarquinio	Bendigo Community Health Service	Partner Organisation representative
Mr Nido Taveesupmai	Bendigo Community Health Service	Partner Organisation Karen community lead
Mr Zahir Azimi	Bendigo Community Health Service	Partner Organisation Afghan Hazara community lead
Ms Stephanie Flynn	Lifely	Partner Organisation Lead
Ms Tamara Davis	Amicus Community Services	Partner Organisation Lead
Ms Amanda Shearson	Intereach	Partner Organisation Lead
Ms Si Blut Soe		Individual with lived experience from Karen community
Ms Paw Htoo May (replaced by Ms Cherry Sein)		Individual with lived experience from Karen community
Ms Masooma Mohammad		Individual with lived experience from Afghan Hazara community
Ms Sadia Sadia (replaced by Ms Fatima Seyedi)		Individual with lived experience from Afghan Hazara community

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Contact person: Professor Angela Dew

Contributors and acknowledgements

We acknowledge all those who contributed to this research project. This inclusive, co-designed project included individuals with lived experience of disability or of caring for a person with disability from the Bendigo Karen and Afghan Hazara communities, partner organisations Bendigo Community Health Service (BCHS) Refugee and Cultural Diversity team members including bi-cultural workers, Lifely, Amicus Community Services, and Intereach disability service staff, and researchers from Deakin University. People contributed through roles on the project management committee, Advisory Group, and co-design group. Working across three languages – Dari, Karen and English – interpreting and translating support was provided by BCHS bi-cultural workers, Nido Taveesupmai and Zahir Azimi. We also acknowledge artists, Ta Na Moo from the Karen community and Sakineh Mohammadi from the Afghan Hazara community, who developed artwork representing research findings.



Contents

The issue we explored..... 5

Why this issue matters..... 5

What was co-designed..... 5

What were our key lessons from the co-design process..... 5

What the future research could achieve..... 6

What people with disability, policymakers, advocates, services and others need to know about this project..... 6

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The issue we explored

What people with disability and family members from Karen and Afghan Hazara refugee communities living in Bendigo think makes for safe access to services and supports.

Why this issue matters

People with disability and family members from refugee backgrounds have more problems using supports and services than others in the community. These problems are partly due to lack of English-language skills which make it difficult for people to know about and get access to the supports and services they need. Additionally, many people from refugee backgrounds come from countries at war, where there are limited supports and services available. People arrive in Australia having experienced trauma and with cultural views about disability as a private family experience, with low expectations of service support. Services are also not equipped to support people from refugee backgrounds.

What was co-designed

Our co-design group included people with disability and family members from Karen and Afghan Hazara refugee backgrounds living in Bendigo, settlement and disability service providers, and Deakin University academics. The co-design group used a group model building process to prioritise issues raised in three rounds of individual interviews with 10 people with disability and family members from these communities.

Our evolving understanding of the issues was challenged and refined with the lived experience Advisory Group and the individual interview participants to expand our understanding. Through this process, we co-designed a research question and proposal focussed on addressing the knowledge, connection, and confidence of Karen and Afghan people with disability and family members, and the settlement and disability service providers who support them. Our research proposal aims to strengthen capacity across the Bendigo community to foster safe and inclusive regional service access, use and provision, for these resettled communities.

What were our key lessons from the co-design process

Our co-design group worked across three languages – Dari, Karen and English. The key lessons we learnt were how to enact practices of taking our time, building trust, valuing everyone's viewpoint, and not making assumptions based on our own cultural understanding and values. For example, one person in our Advisory Group asked "What do you mean by safety? Here in Bendigo, there are no bombs falling on us". This prompted a discussion about different forms of safety including emotional and social as well as physical safety. It changed the way we asked people in the individual interviews about their experiences of safety.

What the future research could achieve

Our future research proposal could demonstrate a model for creating accessible and inclusive regional communities through peer support groups for currently isolated people with disability and family members from Karen and Afghan Hazara refugee backgrounds living in Bendigo. The co-led peer support model involving bi-cultural workers would build the capacity of people with lived experience to support each other, to understand and connect with services and supports, and to educate and resource the wider Bendigo community. The research would contribute to knowledge about the value of peer support initiatives and their impact for individuals and communities.

What people with disability, policymakers, advocates, services and others need to know about this project

People with disability and family members from refugee backgrounds are a marginalised group who experience greater access barriers than others. To feel like they truly belong and are included and participating within their resettlement communities, they need opportunities to connect with each other and with people providing services in their communities, information in their languages, and opportunities to engage with their resettlement communities, to strengthen cultural understanding and safety.

Authorisation and endorsement

This Project Executive Summary has been reviewed and authorised by Professor Angela Dew, Chief Investigator and Project Lead; Ms Kaye Graves, Bendigo Community Health Service, Partner Organisation Lead; and Mr Nido Taveesupmai, Co-researcher representative.

Disclaimer

This Project Executive Summary represents the views of the project team and does not necessarily reflect the views of the National Disability Research Partnership or the Australian Government.

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