

Bi-Cultural Project

Evaluation Report
2018-2019

For further information, project updates, upcoming events, capacity building or to employ a bi-cultural worker, please visit:

<https://www.cohealth.org.au/bi-cultural-worker-hub/>

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Bi-cultural worker. A person employed to work specifically with people or communities with whom they share similar cultural experiences and understandings, and who is employed to use their cultural skills and knowledge to negotiate and communicate between communities and their employing agency – Centre for Multicultural Youth (2011)

Project Overview

Benefits of Bi-Cultural Workers

The benefits of employing bi-cultural workers (BCW) have been explored in various reports including; The Centre For Multi-cultural Youth's (CMY) report *'Addressing the strengths and complexities of bicultural youth and family work'* 2011. The report states that:

“Bicultural workers can bring valuable insights and a depth of cultural knowledge and experience; providing a ‘bridge’ between communities and services that can lead to better outcomes for clients”

The Refugee Health Network (RHN) *'Talking About Health Report'* states, employment of bi-cultural workers is key to better engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities' including refugee and asylum seeker communities, due to;

- The skills they possess in language and culture
- Their understanding of community perspectives

- Shared lived experience and belonging to the community
- Community trust derived from mutual understanding and shared experiences

Challenges Faced

Both CMY, the RHN and others have identified however that BCWs face certain challenges including:

- Limited organisational awareness about the complexities of bi-cultural work
- Unclear roles and expectations
- Limited available capacity building for BCWs
- A culture of volunteerism
- A heavily casualised work force
- Lack of career progression
- A preference towards western ways of knowing that privilege qualifications and academic expertise over cultural expertise and lived experience
- A general lack of diversity and cultural safety in mainstream organisations; our workforces are not representative of the communities we serve

Project Overview

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment was conducted to inform the development of cohealth's bi-cultural project.

Thirty staff from across 14 different organisations in the health, community and public sector responded to a survey about the relevance and importance of bi-cultural work.

- **100%** of respondents stated that they agree there is a need for better access to bi-cultural workers/cultural experts.
- **83%** of respondents said they would be interested in contracting bi-cultural workers once trained through cohealth's internship program, whilst **17%** expressed interest but highlighted organisational constraints.

This informed cohealth's development of the bi-cultural project and further justified the need to upskill and increase visibility of bi-cultural workers across these sectors.

Project Aims

cohealth's bi-cultural project maintains that shared language, culture, lived experience and community connections are paramount to effective engagement and community-led development work with CALD communities (including refugee and asylum seeker communities).

cohealth's bi-cultural project values the strengths and talents of bi-cultural workers. It aims to build upon their existing knowledge through the delivery of an internship program and employment opportunities for graduates, to implement community led projects.

cohealth's bi-cultural project also aims to develop capacity across the community sector, to increase overall employment of bi-cultural workers and to overcome the challenges experienced by them in the workplace.

Project Objectives

1. Develop participants skills and confidence to act as bi-cultural workers

2. Support employment readiness through professional development, information sharing and networking

3. Provide opportunities for participants to self-determine or self-represent

4. Work in partnership with bi-cultural workers to:

- Educate services and agencies about the role of bi-cultural workers and the importance of their work
- Build organisational capacity to employ bi-cultural workers in a culturally safe way

Cultural safety. An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. (Williams, 2008)

Project Evaluation

Evaluation Methods

The bi-cultural project has used a variety of evaluation methods including:

Surveys

Reflective questioning

Focus groups

Change story interviews

Network mapping

Attendance sheets

Participants

18 bi-cultural workers engaged in the bi-cultural project on a regular ongoing basis over the reporting period

12 bi-cultural workers completed the internship project

6 graduates from the first internship remained employed as casual bi-cultural workers and participated in the overall delivery of the project

Evaluation Outcomes

The project was evaluated across the four key objectives

Key participants were interviewed for their stories of change

Objective 1: Develop participants skills and confidence to act as bi-cultural workers

A total of 18 capacity building workshops were delivered to project participants. Topics included:

- Values and principles of bi-cultural work (intersectionality, strength based, trauma informed practice)
- Effective communication
- Community engagement
- Group facilitation and co-design
- Self-care
- System navigation and referral pathways
- Project planning and evaluation

When asked about their experience of the internship program and other capacity building workshops:

100%

of participants felt they had increased their skills and confidence to act as bi-cultural workers

85%

of participants felt they had increased their skills and confidence to support health and wellbeing in their communities

100%

felt they had increased their awareness of the culture and/or lived experiences of other communities and people with a refugee-like background

100%

felt the bi-cultural project is having a positive impact and that they would recommend the program to others

Objective 2: Support employment readiness through professional development, information sharing and networking

Project participants identified employment as key challenge for themselves and their communities. In response, cohealth has delivered multiple employment focused activities and facilitated employment opportunities across different program areas and with external organisations throughout this reporting period:

- Over 350 professional development, education, employment and networking opportunities have been shared with participants
- 3 employment agencies with targeted support programs for refugees and asylum seekers (Brotherhood of St Laurence, Refugee Talent and the Melbourne Employment Forum) presented to participants about their services and facilitated registration to their programs

100%

Gained paid employment opportunities either at cohealth or other organisations

90%

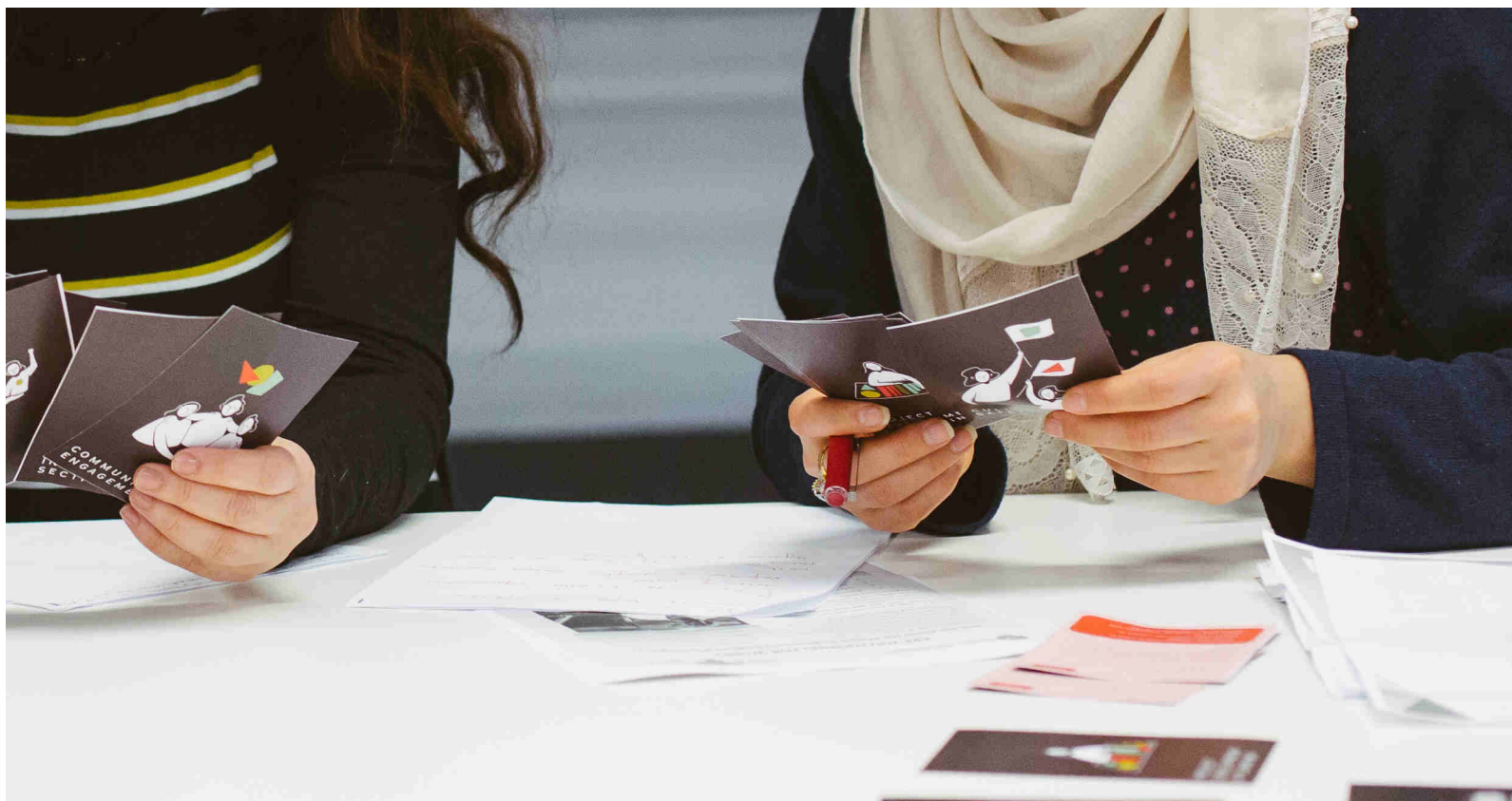
Felt they had increased their skills and confidence to find employment

Over 1000 hours of paid work was completed by BCWs at cohealth

3x BCWs received ongoing part time roles at cohealth in addition to the 1000 hours

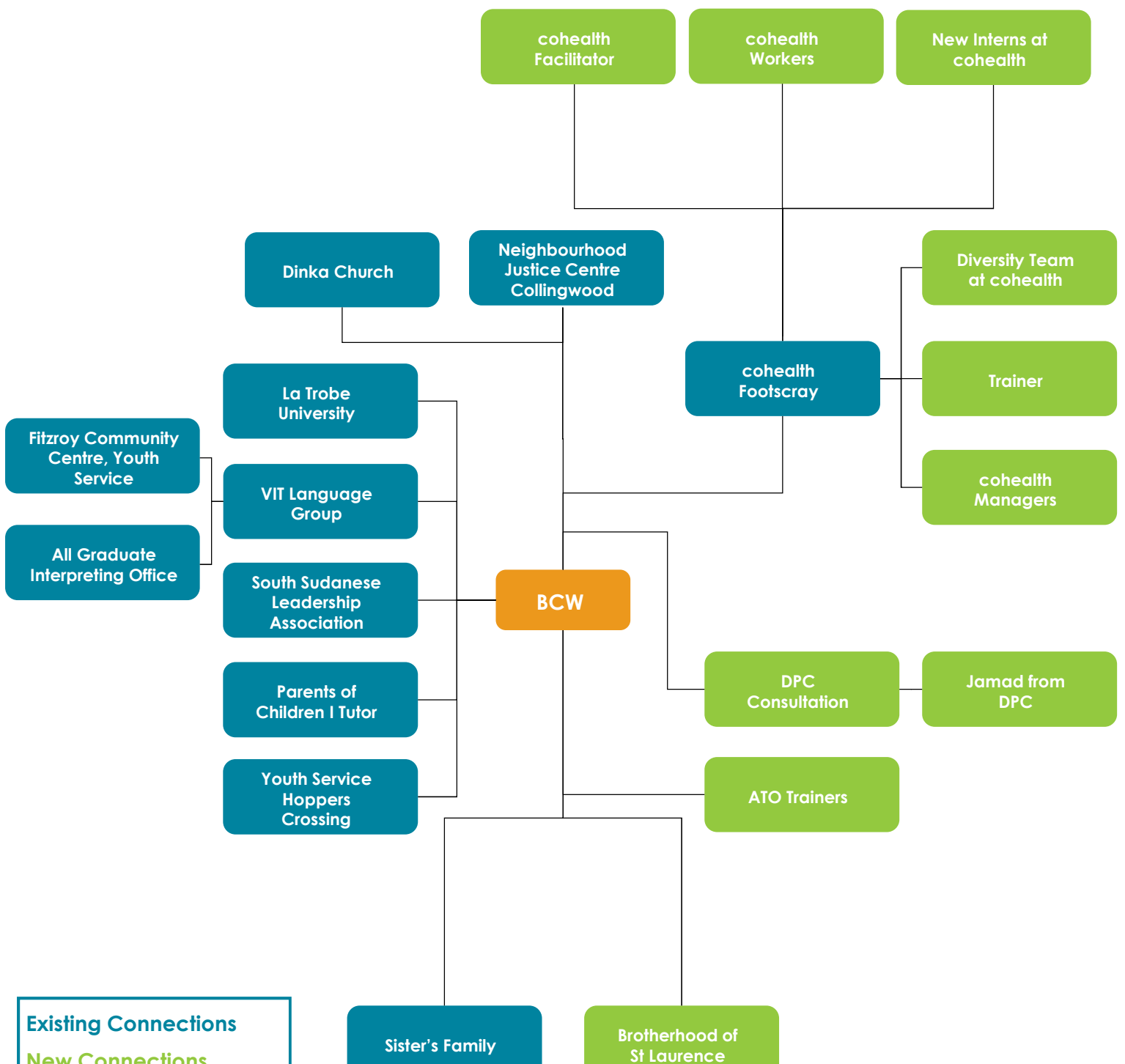
27 professional references were provided for external positions

27 external employment opportunities were gained including: 5x full time roles, 2x PT roles, 17x casual roles, 3x work experience



Objective 2: Support employment readiness through professional development, information sharing and networking

Project participants completed a network mapping activity to track changes in their professional networks as a result of their involvement in the project. 88% of participants felt they had increased their professional networks because of engaging in the bi-cultural project.



Objective 3: Provide opportunities for participants to self-determine or self-represent

cohealth's bi-cultural project aims to provide opportunities for participants to self-determine and self-represent; by speaking at events and/or meetings about issues important to them and their communities and through delivery of community-led projects. **In the final evaluation survey delivered to all participants:**

90% stated that they were given opportunities to speak about issues important to them and their communities

85% stated that they were able represent their community in positive and meaningful ways

100% of participants felt that their lived experience and cultural perspectives were valued and listened to respectfully at cohealth

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for participants to self-determine or self-represent

cohealth has supported bi-cultural workers to participate in 15 different events where they could write, speak or express themselves publicly about issues important to them and their communities.

- Events included activities such as;
- Refugee week events/festivals
- Network meetings, consultation or working groups
- Forums, conferences or training

Bi-cultural workers reached over 900 individuals across these settings.





Community Led Projects

More than 50% of paid bi-cultural worker hours at cohealth contributed to the development and delivery of community-led projects.

These projects were designed in collaboration with bi-cultural workers and their communities' therefore directly responding to community needs.

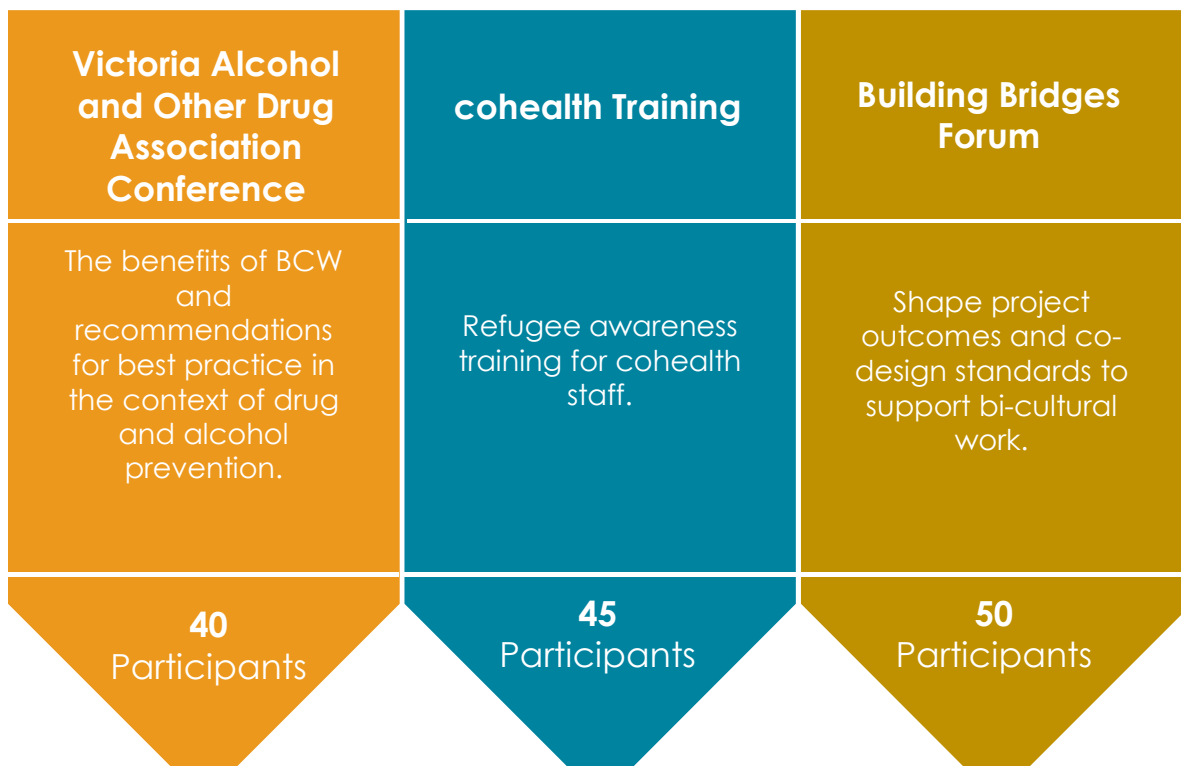
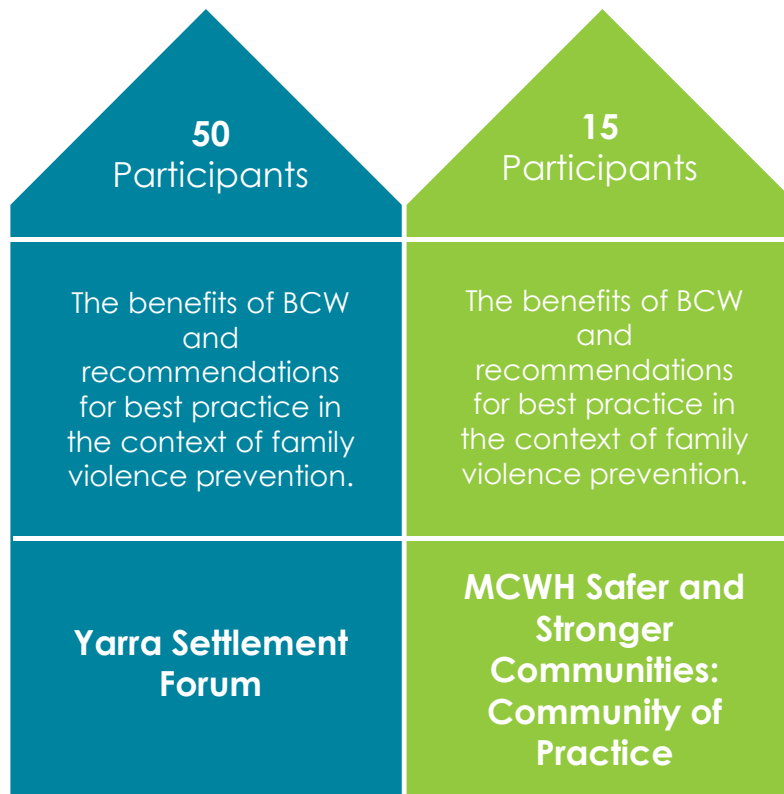
In the appendix is a table outlining the projects delivered during the reporting period, it includes the following information:

- Target audience or community group
- Project activities
- Project rationale
- Project Reach
- Overall outcomes

Objective 4: Work in partnership with bi-cultural workers to:

- Educate services and agencies about the role of bi-cultural workers and the importance of their work
- Build organisational capacity to employ bi-cultural workers in a culturally safe way

cohealth's bi-cultural staff and other project leads have presented and delivered training at various network meetings, forums, and events hosted by cohealth and other external agencies across the health and community sector.



Building Bridges Bi-Cultural Forum

In March 2019 cohealth hosted a forum to share project outcomes and co-design some standards to support bi-cultural work.

50 people from **45** different health, community and public sector organisations attended

24 people responded to the evaluation survey

96% said their confidence had increased to support bi-cultural workers in the workplace because of engaging in the forum

100% said 'I think it is important for agencies to adopt professional standards, policies, and procedures that support bi-cultural workers'.

Organisational capacity building through employment of bi-cultural workers

Organisations that employed bi-cultural workers were asked to complete a survey about their experience.

8 individuals from 6 different organisations responded and 100% agreed that because of employing bi-cultural workers trained by cohealth they:

- Improved their understanding of the role and benefits of bi-cultural work
- Improved their capacity to work with bi-cultural workers
- Improved their understanding of target communities' interests/needs/strengths/challenges or perspectives



Organisational capacity building through employment of bi-cultural workers

Drawing on their skills, knowledge and experience bi-cultural workers were also able to facilitate a range of policy, service or program change within various organisations including cohealth, the Department of Premiere and Cabinet, AMES, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation and the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity, and Health.

cohealth. Draft professional standards developed.

cohealth. Goal directed care planning tools updated to reflect BCW feedback

cohealth. BCWs worked in collaboration with RHT to deliver adapted training program across 3 cohealth sites.

cohealth/RMIT. Bi-cultural toolkit developed.

DPC. Improved understanding of the need to remunerate or reimburse cultural expertise.

DPC. Culturally safe pathways to educate CALD communities about new family violence laws.

AMES. Bi-cultural workers employed to increase CALD communities' awareness of the NDIS.

ADF. Funding to employ a BCW from the Chin community to deliver work in collaboration with cohealth.

CEH. Co-designed resource developed for newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi Families.

Participant Interviews

Overview

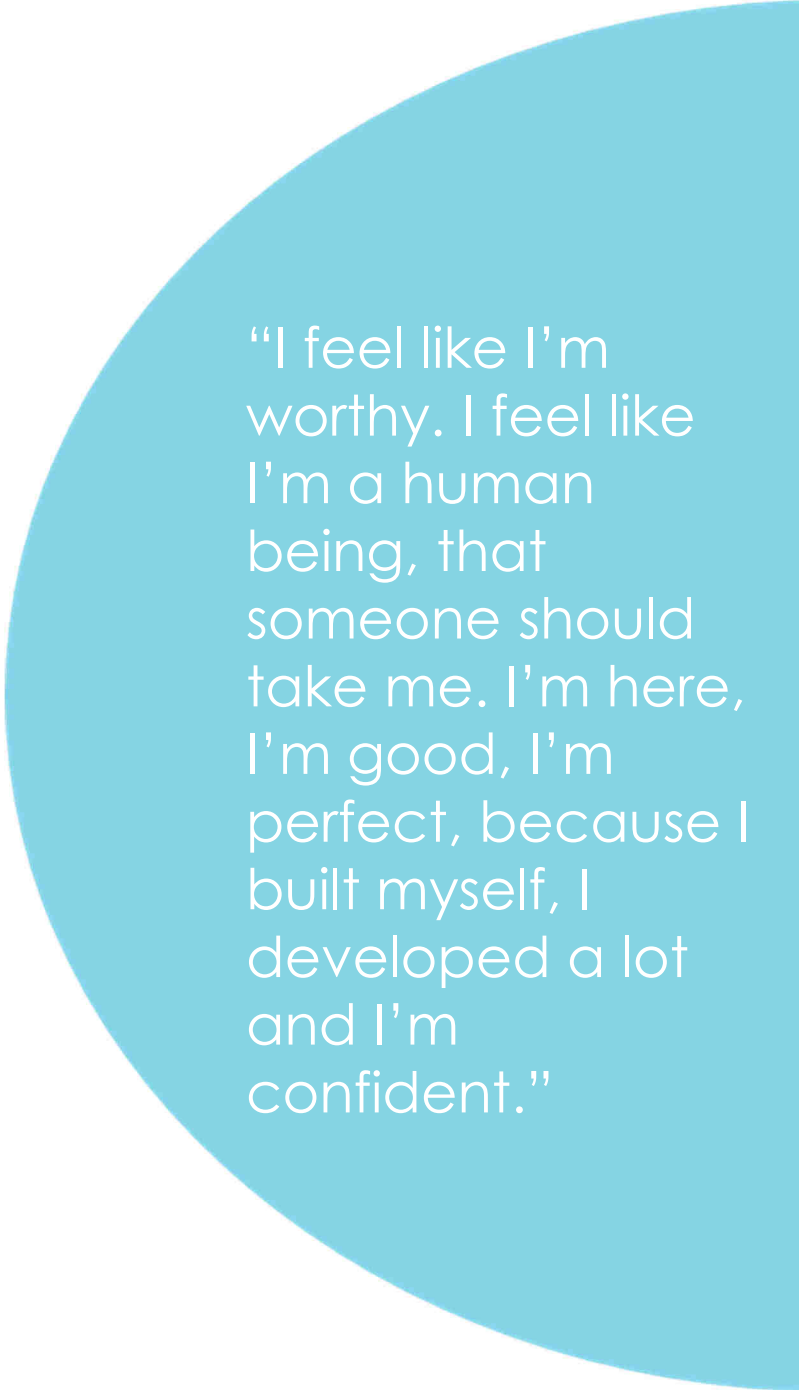
Four key participants that had graduated from the internships were interviewed.

One had participated in the first round of internships, while the remaining three had participated in the second round.

All have been involved in bi-cultural work with cohealth and other organisations, as well as in developing a range of programs for various communities.

The participants were asked about their experiences of the internship and other aspects of the project, such as their involvement in the Building Bridges Forum, as well as significant changes they encountered.

The interviews were transcribed and key themes were collected and organized.



“I feel like I’m worthy. I feel like I’m a human being, that someone should take me. I’m here, I’m good, I’m perfect, because I built myself, I developed a lot and I’m confident.”

Participant Interviews

What is bi-cultural work?

The participants saw the roles of bi-cultural workers as an important bridge between organisations and various communities. For many of the participants trust and relationship building is central to bi-cultural work. For organisations, it removes some of the difficulties in delivering projects and services, as there is better communication and less time-cost towards developing relationships

from scratch. More importantly, for many communities it foregrounds the importance of developing culturally safe practices and processes, which has run counter to the experience of many communities.

Importantly, bi-cultural work was seen as being more than just having existing relationships or knowledge of communities, it was seen as a specific set of skills that complements the lived experiences of bi-cultural workers.

“When services work with migrant or refugees communities, it's important that they understand their background and the experience of what they'd been through in their countries and things that they're facing in Australia. When I say things they're facing in Australia, I mean things that are really difficult and affecting their life and vice versa for the community also. It's important that they understand that there's someone within their community that really know different services, different organisations, things that they can access outside the community, and for that person to be able to build trust...and to be able to act as a bridge between the two.”

Participant Interviews

For some participants, this meant that whilst engaging with communities which they themselves belonged to, the skills and capacities cultivated during the project supported them in working with various other communities also.

“[Communities are] used to seeing people that don't look like me approaching the community and saying, 'We have these services to offer you. This is what you can get from it'. That's it. [There's] never someone from within. If there are people from within then it's limited....It takes a bit of time because [communities] have encountered various horrible experiences with many services.”

Outcomes for Individuals

Participants spoke of a number of important individual outcomes from the project. One important outcome was the development of practical knowledge such as how to navigate and work within the human services delivery sector, project design and management, and the social determinants of health and wellbeing. Participants also developed important insights around engaging in community based work, in particular developing culturally safe practices, and understanding the contexts of different communities, and the Australian context more broadly.

Participants also spoke of being supported in the development of important relational skills, such as empathy, patience and reflexivity. This is essential in the relationship and trust building that forms not only the foundation of community-based work, but are also valued qualities needed for effective collaboration and leadership.

Participant Interviews

“Before I participated in this internship program, I’d just go about and do my own things and don’t really think about what another person is going through...[now] I can be more understanding to other people and give them space when they need it or give them a hand when they need it.”

Closely related, were a number of psycho-social outcomes reported by participants. They spoke of being empowered to enact change within their communities: *“having had lived experience from the community, I am able to use that voice, and actually, even make a difference and give back to the community”*, and to support people within their communities: *“It built me up so then I can go out and help other people...to help them to develop as well and know their rights and go out*

and navigate in Australia”.

Participants were able to recognise their own abilities, capacities, and the value of their own lived experience in a context where devalued social identities perpetrates systemic racism. As one participant recounted:

“I used to think ...“this job is not for us. This job is not for me with my Hijab. I’m a Muslim, I’m African, they might think I don’t have a degree”... Now I will say to myself, “If I would just go apply with the experience, you have a little bit here and there certificates, you’ve got this, just try and you never know”, ...before I never even used to think about it.”



Participant Interviews

An important part of this were the opportunities participants had to practice their skills across a number of projects, including the development of workshops and forums addressing the sector, as well as the relationships they were able to build with various organisations.

Outcomes for Communities

Developing these skills and capacities supported participants in empowering their communities as they were able to build community knowledge around services. But also, it enables bottoms-up processes in the development of these services.

Bi-cultural workers do not simply convey information to communities, but can also facilitate program design and implementation that draws on both their own and the community's expertise and knowledge.

This approach was evident in the many projects participants were able to lead and engage with across a number of organisations and communities, enabling them to enact these principles of collaboration and consultation.

“Using [the] community's voice to inform their services, using their bicultural workers as a reach to get that information that they need from the community, and also for bicultural workers to get that information that they need from service providers into the community. Also, co-designing their projects, their future projects and their future services that they provide to the community, making sure that the community actually have a say in it. Not just being designed by the top guys, and their offices.”

Participant Interviews

“Even though they’re not from my own community but they have the same experience...as I had, so I always think I’m connected to them. Sometimes it’s positive and sometimes it’s negative experiences. I remember those few ladies where they had the same experience when they came to this country and they never had any support. Because of the language they couldn’t navigate the systems and they always... felt lonely, and sad, and things like that...working in this position now as a bicultural worker, I felt that these are the people that I need to target.”

As bi-cultural workers engaged with other communities and community members, opportunities also arose for the building of solidarities through shared experiences. Whilst experiences of migration or cultural identities are not homogenous (as one participant noted, there are tendencies to employ one person of African background to represent the entirety of African experiences), diverse communities often share important stories that shape their experiences in Australia.

This further speaks to both the

particular skills and experiences bi-cultural workers were supported in developing and bringing to community-based work more broadly, their ability of navigating and negotiating diverse cultural contexts, and use of relational skills in culturally safe ways.

Outcomes for Organisations

It is clear that bi-cultural workers offer multi-faceted outcomes that benefits both communities and organisations. They are able to build important relationships that support the design

Participant Interviews

and implementation of various programs and services. As one participant noted *“there's no point for them to open big organisations and the services [when] nobody will use it”*. But there are also opportunities for those engaged in bi-cultural work to draw on their skills and experience to impact on processes and policies within organisations. It is thus important for organisations to recognise that cultural safety is not the sole

responsibility of bi-cultural workers, and that important opportunities exist for bi-cultural workers to contribute to organisational learning practices. However, as previous research has found, structural factors are a significant constraint for both bi-cultural workers and organisations when advocating for change.

“Organisations need a lot of education. On a personal experience, I feel like a lot of organisations are not really aware of cultural sensitivities toward certain communities.... things you can say or can't say. These are the areas that you should improve in these other areas that you're already doing better at. It's very rare that that happened. organisations mostly see themselves as superior to the community, and that really limits what they can do for the communities. They limit their capacity really. Some of them are doing great work, don't get me wrong, but it just needs to be a little bit more than what they're doing now.”

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Participant Interviews

Program Design and Delivery

Participants overwhelmingly said that they enjoyed their involvement in the project and felt they benefited greatly from both professional and personal development. All participants said that they valued the type and breadth of the content, especially in that it moved beyond simply delivering practical information.

The way the facilitators engaged

with interns during workshops was particularly valued, the empathy, professionalism, openness and authentic connection all created an open and relational space that supported learning and sharing. Participants also valued the opportunity to build relationships and share knowledge and experiences with other interns from diverse backgrounds. For many participants this was as valuable as the planned content within the workshops and contributed to an ongoing community of practice.

“They give us lots of things, not just about the project. Maybe it's something emotional. It may be something about the general knowledge, not just to read what in the PowerPoint or they'll explain a little bit about the points in the PowerPoint. No, it's more than that. I think I feel empathy maybe. I can feel this empathy in delivering this information.”

“We've learned a lot from different backgrounds. I can tell there is the same challenges [that] can be from different communities. I can see that we're facing the same issue, then we will try to help each other to bring solutions, and ideas, and things together that will benefit all communities.”

Participant Interviews

However, some participants noted workshops were better to be delivered weekly rather than fortnightly, as it became difficult to remember and build off previous sessions with a two week gap. Participants also noted that as the internship was unpaid it could be difficult as they still had to engage in other work and study commitments.

“The only thing that concern me now with this project, is it guaranteed a job? It's not every time, they're not calling me. I have to wait. If they didn't offer me anything, that means there's no job. Yes, I am a casual bi-cultural worker, but then what? Is it going to be an ongoing salary there? I don't know. It's not guaranteed. That's the only worry for me with that.”

“We have a long way to go in terms of educating other services and the community, and whoever that wants to work with bi-cultural workers. There's no clarity in the role that this is what a bi-cultural worker does. cohealth is trying their best to do that.”

Participants did also recognise the work that has gone into developing awareness of bi-cultural workers within the sector, something which ideally will lead to greater and more secure employment outcomes. The Building Bridges Forum was an important event that was recognised as contributing greatly to this. Yet participants also noted that there is still much needed in this area.

One participant suggested that the inclusion of organisational decision makers within the internship in some capacity may be an effective step

Participant Interviews

conversations around the importance of bi-cultural work. This may offer important opportunities to share insights and knowledge, build greater awareness of bi-cultural workers, influence organisational practices and policies, and extend relationships.

Conclusion

Professional and personal development, through practical skills and knowledges and reflective practices, facilitated

significant individual changes for participants within the project. It supported them in facilitating change in their own and other communities as well as seeking change within organisations within the service delivery sector. This was evident in an array of outcomes that participants spoke of. However, there is still important work to be done in building the profiles of bi-cultural workers and enabling them to shape culturally safe organisational practices.

“I would like more of people who are in decision making in an organisation, or within cohealth, involved during the internship. During those sessions of the internship, that's where a lot of discussion happens about what is affecting the communities, what needs to be changed. People who are doing the internship are very vocal in that setting. Maybe having people who are the decision makers or people who are in contact with community through their work do the internship also...they might learn a thing or two. “

Resources

Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2011. Addressing the Strengths and Complexities of Bicultural Youth.

<https://www.cmy.net.au/publications/addressing-strengths-and-complexities-bicultural-youth>

Victorian Refugee Health Network. 2016. Talking about health and experiences of using health services with people from refugee backgrounds

<http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/talking-about-health-and-experiences-of-using-health-services-with-people-from-refugee-backgrounds/>

Health West. 2018. Workforce Mutuality Standards

http://healthwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HW_WorkforceMutualityStandards_1stedition.pdf

enliven. 2018. Bicultural brilliance 'A toolkit for working with and as Bicultural Workers'

https://enliven.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/20180607_toolkit_FINAL.pdf

Victorian Government. 2018. Recruit Smarter Report Findings

<https://www.vic.gov.au/recruit-smarter>

Appendix

Target Audience	Project Activities	Project Rationale	Number of Participants	Outcomes
Elderly women from the Karen Community	2 x workshops Mental health and wellbeing	<p>Mental health is taboo in many Burmese cultures</p> <p>Many Karen elders experience social isolation or poor mental health because of their settlement experience</p>	Workshop 1 – 26 participants Workshop 2 – 12 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of participant agreed that they increased their understanding of mental health • 95% of participant agreed that they increased their knowledge of mindfulness activities to support good mental health • 100% of participant agreed that they increased their knowledge of support services for mental health
Young women from the Somali community between the age of 13-18 years.	1 x workshop Women's health	<p>Women's health is often taboo or considered shameful in the Somali community</p> <p>Women are often uneducated about their health and do not know where to seek advice</p> <p>Topics such as menstruation and sexual reproductive health are not discussed openly</p>	15 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of participant agreed that they increased their understanding of health and wellbeing • 95% of participants agreed that they increased their understanding of available services and how to access them

Target Audience	Project Activities	Project Rationale	Number of Participants	Outcomes
<p>Udinese/ South Udinese Community members</p>	<p>1 x Forum with a panel of representatives from the ATO, Centrelink and Legal Aid</p>	<p>Many people from Refugee backgrounds find challenges in navigating Australian systems. This sometimes results in failure to meet their reporting obligations and can result in penalisation</p>	<p>20 Participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of participants agreed that they increased their understanding of Australian Taxation regulations and individual tax obligations 95% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge about Centrelink requirements and its connection with the ATO 100% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge on how to avoid or appeal a debt from Centrelink/ATO
<p>Mothers from the Iranian and Afghani communities</p>	<p>2 x Parenting in a new culture workshop's</p>	<p>Many parents from refugee backgrounds maintain that they experience challenges parenting in a new culture; especially as their children adopt the new language and culture and they do not necessarily understand parenting norms in their new environment</p>	<p>Workshop 1 - 4 people Workshop 2 – 6 people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of participants agreed that they increased their confidence to parent their children in an Australian context 100% of participants agreed that they increased their awareness of where to get help if there are struggling with parenting

Target Audience	Project Activities	Project Rationale	Number of Participants	Outcomes
<p>bi-cultural workers employed at AMES who deliver capacity building about NDIS to refugee communities</p>	<p>1 x workshop about 'living with a disability as a refugee' Working with guide dogs: The benefits and recommendations</p>	<p>Many people from CALD communities do not understand peoples' rights and responsibilities regarding service animals There is also stigma about the uncleanness or unsafe nature of dogs within many communities'</p>	<p>12 participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge of service animals and developed an understanding of the laws and regulations in Australia? 100% of participants agreed that they increased their awareness of blindness and vision impairment
<p>Newly arrived Syrian people</p>	<p>1 x workshops about small business rules and regulations in Australia</p>	<p>Unemployment is high among people from refugee backgrounds A group of Syrian men have requested information about how to start a small business for their community</p>	<p>18 Participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge of small business rules and regulations in Australia 95% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge of how to plan for a small business in Australia 100% of participants agreed that they increased their knowledge of where to get help/advice in relation to this topic