



**Foundation
House**

The Victorian Foundation
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Resettling in Victoria– advice from people from refugee backgrounds living with disabilities

Why is this project needed?

The welcome introduction in 2012 of a waiver of visa health requirements for humanitarian visa holders has created pathways for people from refugee backgrounds living with a disability to resettle in Australia.

Access to appropriate services and supports can be complex for people living with a disability and these challenges are compounded for newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds who may:

- arrive with undiagnosed, poorly managed or not formally diagnosed conditions, which may or may not be familiar to Australian practitioners,
- be an adult presenting with a condition that is typically treated in childhood, and/or
- arrive without necessary aids and equipment (for example, a wheelchair or walking aids).

These challenges are in addition to the broader settlement challenges facing newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds, including the impact of torture or other traumatic events.

Why now?

In addition to the increased numbers of people from refugee backgrounds arriving with disabilities, there have been significant changes in service arrangements with the progressive roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the suite of aged care reforms that has accompanied the introduction of My Aged Care (such as changes to home support, including Home Care Packages and the Commonwealth Home Support Programme).

The 2018 needs analysis titled '*Service responses for people with disabilities from refugee backgrounds in northern Melbourne*'¹ interviewed a range of service providers working with people from refugee backgrounds and/or people living with disabilities. This highlighted a range of service access barriers, the need to build practitioner capacity across services and the need to better understand service access issues from a consumer perspective.

What will we do?

This project will run from 2018-19 and aims to:

- better understand and document the experiences and service access issues for people from refugee backgrounds living with a disability
- build the capacity of community advisors from refugee backgrounds who are living with a disability and/or their family or carers to advocate for access to appropriate services
- build the capacity of health, settlement and disability services to provide accessible and appropriate services that meet the needs of people from refugee backgrounds who are living with a disability.

A community capacity building approach will be used to facilitate dialogue between people from refugee backgrounds with disabilities and relevant service providers, with the aim of developing joint understandings of the needs, priorities, barriers and enablers to service access for people from refugee backgrounds living with a disability.

¹ Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House), 2018, '*Service responses for people with disabilities from refugee backgrounds in northern Melbourne*', Foundation House, Brunswick, Victoria

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The project is informed by the Foundation House Community Capacity Building Framework² and an internal project steering group will provide both strategic and practical advice for the duration of the project. The project will take a place based approach in northern Melbourne, engaging local community members as an advisory group and facilitating dialogue with service providers identified by the group.

Advisory group

Community advisors will have arrived as humanitarian entrants within the past five years and will be living in northern Melbourne. Up to twelve Arabic speaking people from refugee backgrounds who are adults living with a disability or are the parents/carers of children (under 18) who are living with a disability will be recruited to the advisory group. People with a range of disabilities, ages, genders, ethnicities and religions will be invited to participate.

Community advisors will be recruited through existing networks and the project worker will individually meet with advisors to brief them about the project, understand their needs and priorities, and problem solve any access issues to facilitate their participation in the advisory group (e.g. transport, alternative care arrangements, timing of the meeting, locations of the meetings).

Advisory group meetings will be held to build group cohesion and provide skills development where required (i.e. about meeting process, Australian service system, rights and responsibilities). The advisory group will work together to identify shared priorities, barriers and facilitators to service use, and build their own understanding of, and capacity to access, disability related services and other supports.

When the advisory group are ready to engage in conversation with service providers, local disability service providers, humanitarian service providers, disability advocacy groups and other identified services will be invited to participate in 'dialogue meetings'.

Dialogue meetings

'Dialogue meetings' will bring the community advisory group and relevant service providers together to develop shared understandings of concepts/issues such as 'what is disability and how may this vary in different cultures and contexts?', 'how do carers from refugee backgrounds view their role in Australia?', 'what services do people from refugee backgrounds with disabilities and their carers need to realise their aspirations?'. Concepts of advocacy and the skills that people from refugee backgrounds with disabilities and their carers need to access, negotiate and navigate service systems may be explored; as well as appropriate and practical service responses that support people from refugee backgrounds with disabilities to access services and advocate for their needs.

What are the expected outcomes?

This project will enable community advisory group members to improve their capacity to advocate for their needs and priorities within the early settlement period and to access/negotiate disability and other services.

The project will enable service providers to improve their understanding of the experiences, needs and priorities of people living with a disability from refugee backgrounds and contribute to improved service delivery.

Findings from the project may have broader applicability for other regions and other communities. Project findings will be documented and disseminated to a broad group of stakeholders.

² Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House), 2017, 'A framework for community capacity building', Foundation House, Brunswick, Victoria