

## A commitment to social inclusion

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) has been providing relationship support services to the Victorian community for more than 60 years.

During that time, the makeup of the population has changed dramatically as a result of progressive Australian Government immigration policies, which have encouraged the development of a vibrant and cohesive multicultural society.

As the community has become more complex and diverse, so have its needs. This has required community service providers to respond.

For our part, RAV has evolved from an organisation delivering primarily 'marriage guidance' services to a largely 'Anglo' client base, to one that offers a diverse range of services that aim to help all members of the community regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

We strongly support the Australian Government's vision to create a multicultural society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to fully participate.

We have a comprehensive program to:

- reinforce our commitment to diversity and social inclusion
- build our capacity to meet the needs of people from all cultures.

This report highlights some of the initiatives we are undertaking.

Andrew Bickerdike  
Chief Executive Officer

## Building our awareness and understanding of other cultures

The key elements of RAV's diversity and social inclusion program are engagement, participation, and staff training.

We have established strong relationships with multicultural groups and agencies, members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community, other community service providers and relevant government departments and agencies.

These relationships are building our awareness and understanding of other cultures and the sensitivities involved in working with people who have differing values and traditional family structures.

We have established a team to:

- facilitate delivery of culturally appropriate services
- improve our community engagement, and

- build cultural awareness among staff across the organisation.

RAV is investing in organisation-wide cultural awareness training.

Our social inclusion program was initiated with a professional development day for all staff, centred on the topics of:

- working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- cultural differences, and
- the migrant/refugee experience.

The Koorie Heritage Trust is delivering the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander component of our training.

## Centre activities meet local needs

Our client centres are the frontline of RAV's social inclusion program, working to meet the needs of their local communities with activities such as:

- **family relationship programs** for Vietnamese, Sudanese and Afghan men in Melbourne's south east
- **seminars** on strengthening family relationships, for Spanish speakers in the western suburbs - being conducted in partnership with the Latino-American Women's Association of Victoria
- **an art program** for Koorie women in the Shepparton region, funded by a grant from the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy
- **workshops and seminars** with the Somali community in the northern suburbs, to build cultural connections and enhance intercultural understanding
- **behaviour change groups** for Vietnamese men in the western suburbs
- **a Sudanese women's sewing group** in Morwell, being conducted in partnership with Latrobe Community Health Service and Gippsland Multicultural Service
- **an information session** on the impact of torture and trauma on families - run in partnership with Foundation House.



## A DVD to help migrant families

A major project in 2010 was the production and launch of *Building Strong Families*, a DVD for newly arrived migrants.

The DVD offers a candid, yet positive perspective on the challenges of settling in Australia.

It is presented in the words of migrants who have already settled here and the agencies that helped them.

*Building Strong Families* was produced in partnership with Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, Adult Multicultural Education Services, Springvale Indo-Chinese Mutual Assistance Association and Darebin African Resource Centre.

We also worked closely with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and other service providers in the community sector.

The DVD is being used by migrant resource centres and community-based services to assist families as they settle in Australia.

DIAC also uses the DVD as part of its Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) for refugee and humanitarian entrants.





### Reaching out through partnerships and events

RAV has produced many resources in different languages to ensure members of CALD communities have easy access to information about our services and centre locations.

We are also developing a website and promotional materials specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, featuring imagery that reflects the community's culture and connection to family and the land.

We have sponsored and taken part in a wide range of events, including:

- the 2009 biennial conference for the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils (FECCA)
- the 2010 Harmony Day Cup
- Diversity in Health Conference 2010
- the 2010 FRSA Conference - Diversity: Everyone Benefits
- Game On! A forum with the Australian Sports Commission to promote cultural diversity in sport
- The Yarra Settlement Forum, and
- White Ribbon Day.

This year, in recognition of the importance of celebrating and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity, and the cohesive and inclusive nature of Australian society, we boosted our involvement in the annual Harmony Day celebrations

In collaboration with a number of partner organisations, we hosted Harmony Day events in Dandenong, Ringwood and Reservoir, with the purpose of bringing together the local Aboriginal and CALD communities through a sharing of knowledge and understanding.

Key partners included the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place and the African Resource Centre Inc, as well as both local and State Government.



### Building bridges with Indigenous communities

RAV continually focuses on developing services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

This important work is in response to an Indigenous audit we undertook in 2008, which showed there were some gaps in our service offering to this community.

RAV is working with Aboriginal organisations and community groups to develop our capacity to deliver appropriate services. These relationships will build on our existing partnerships with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC), the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative, and the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GEGAC).

Other initiatives we have undertaken in this area include:

- **sponsoring** the Life is Foundation 'Healing through Ceremony' workshops, presented by Dr Lewis Mehl-Madrona, of Lakota and Cherokee heritage. Dr Mehl-Madrona was invited to GEGAC to speak about

traditional healing methods and their potential use within the Aboriginal community

- **the formation** of the Aboriginal Women's Consumer Group, in partnership with the Maya Healing Centre, and Aboriginal women from Melbourne's northern suburbs
- **sponsoring and participating** in the Sisters Day Out workshops, held by the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service. RAV supported events in metropolitan and regional areas. The workshops provided a safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to discuss the serious topic of family violence
- **contributing** to a Women's Wellness Day at Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place
- **sponsoring** 11 Elders from the Shepparton region to attend 'Pecan Summer', an Aboriginal opera depicting the Cummergunga Walk Off from an Aboriginal mission.

### Increasing our capacity to respond

By building a solid base of knowledge and experience, RAV is increasing our capacity to respond more effectively, in a culturally sensitive manner, to the relationship support needs of multicultural and Indigenous communities.

For more information about our social inclusion program, please contact:

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Funded by the Australian Government.



# A state of inclusion.

How Relationships Australia Victoria is helping diverse communities.

