



Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the  
National Disability Insurance Scheme

Queensland's Readiness to Participate in the  
National Disability Insurance Scheme.

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## **BACKGROUND**

AMPARO Advocacy is a small non-profit community based organisation which is funded by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to provide individual and systemic advocacy on behalf of vulnerable people from a non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) with disability, between the ages of 0-65. AMPARO Advocacy assists vulnerable migrants and refugees with a disability to understand and negotiate services and systems so that they have equitable access to essential mainstream and disability specific supports and programs that they otherwise would not receive.

AMPARO Advocacy believes that language and culture are important, however current service systems do not always respond well to the needs of people from NESB with disability. Moreover, the concept of disability and the operation of Australian systems such as disability services, are often unfamiliar and little understood by people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, particularly those from new and emerging communities.

Through our work with refugees and migrants with disability we know that language and cultural differences make it much more difficult for them and their families to access and understand information and successfully negotiate what are often complex systems of support.

**Particularly when those systems are not designed to be “responsive to their needs, and deliver equitable outcomes for them regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.”<sup>1</sup>**

The majority of individuals with disability we assist are from a refugee background where they and their families are experiencing multiple and complex layers of disadvantage, not accessing mainstream or disability specific services until their circumstances reach a crisis point. They are often marginalized, isolated from their own communities and have fallen through the gaps.

**Many Queenslanders with disability are significantly disadvantaged and marginalized, however those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds frequently encounter additional barriers that restrict their access to services and supports.**

### **1. Lack information about rights, entitlements and the availability of services.**

AMPARO Advocacy’s work with migrants and refugees with disability and their families has shown that they often have limited understanding or awareness of their rights or entitlements in Australian society. Being new to Australia means they are often unaware of the services and supports that may be available, and language and or cultural differences can make it extremely difficult for them to understand and negotiate service systems. Few community or government services actively promote their services to or engage with, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, just having translated information on a website is inadequate.

AMPARO Advocacy believes that independent advocacy and case management support are often needed to assist people to negotiate and access services and supports. A report by Diversitat, the peak CALD organisation in the Barwon region, highlights the additional barriers to accessing the NDIS experienced by new arrivals from a refugee background.

***This report supports the need for intensive case management support for new arrivals to Australia to negotiate the NDIS to determine eligibility, organise diagnosis and assist with***

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. (2013). *Multicultural Language Service Guidelines for Australian Government Agencies*. Commonwealth of Australia

**preparing for the planning and assessment process**<sup>2</sup>. Diversitat cites an example of a settlement worker providing 50 hrs of support for a refugee with disability to successfully access the NDIS.

The Australian legal and social systems and their requirements are extremely complex and understanding and negotiating these systems is difficult for anyone. Language barriers and a mistrust of authority can make this a much more difficult process; challenging decisions or making complaints becomes an overwhelming prospect. AMPARO is often involved in supporting individuals and families understand and negotiate regulatory bodies, such as the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Office of the Public Advocate and Public Trustee.

## **2. Language barriers and the failure to provide access to professional interpreters.**

Language barriers and the failure of services to provide access to professional interpreters was a major concern raised by the Afghan, Burundi, Iraqi and Karen communities in our consultations in 2011. Our more recent and ongoing research with QUT also identified language barriers and the failure to provide interpreters meant that refugees with disability and their families experienced significant difficulty in finding and utilising services<sup>3</sup>

Access to professional interpreters is critical to ensuring that people who are not proficient in English are able to understand information, make informed decisions, communicate their needs, and can take advantage of opportunities to fully participate in NDIS.

**In 2011 the Qld Accessing Interpreters Working Group**, of which AMPARO is a member, surveyed **131 community organisations in Queensland**, which showed that over one third of agencies were unaware that they were entitled to access fee-free interpreting services to communicate with their clients<sup>4</sup>.

Despite a Queensland Language Service Policy commitment to the provision of interpreters, many agencies lack strong commitment to meet the communication needs of people whose English language proficiency is limited

## **3. Lack of culturally competent service provision.**

People from non-English speaking backgrounds with disability and their families confront service systems that lack the knowledge, skills and awareness to respond effectively to their language and cultural needs. High Quality Language Services that are supported by culturally responsive service systems are essential to fulfill the principles of equitable access, social justice and social inclusion for people from a non-English speaking background.

The failure of the disability service system to develop cultural competence at all levels of service delivery and to embrace the principle of substantive equality and non-discrimination has resulted in the continued disparity between the proportions of people from a NESB with disability accessing services compared to those from an English speaking background.

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<sup>2</sup> Diversitat Settlement (2014). *Diversitat Disability finding Report*.

<sup>3</sup> AMPARO Advocacy and QUT (2015). Ongoing research. *An exploration of the barriers to service and inclusion of refugees living with disability*.

<sup>4</sup> Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group. (October 2012), *Still a Matter of Interpretation*. Qld Council of Social Services.

**For people with disability from CALD backgrounds who choose to access specialist disability services, it is crucial that these services develop cultural competence at the level of the individual worker and throughout the organisation so they are able to effectively engage and communicate with the individuals they are there to serve.**

***Cultural competence service provision requires at a minimum that services:***

- Develop knowledge and understanding about a person's specific culture, values, beliefs and life experiences
- Know how to work effectively with professional interpreters and have policy and procedures in place to guide best practice
- Recognise the need to allocate additional time to work with people who may need access to interpreters
- Promote their services by undertaking outreach programs to ensure the cultural diversity of service users is reflective of the community in which they operate.
- Include a cultural competency audit as part of an annual organisational self-assessment

#### **4. Lack of educational opportunities to address issues of stigma and misconceptions that negate the rights of people with disability.**

Many of the individuals and families we assist experience rejection and isolation from even their own communities due to stigma of disability, with few, if any informal or extended family support.

Cultural explanations concerning why a disability occurs can determine how well or poorly individuals with disability are treated in any society and explanations for why a disability occurs will differ from culture to culture.

*“Prejudicial attitudes and misconceptions regarding disability that are present in the broader society are just as evident in non-English speaking background communities.”<sup>5</sup>*

This comment by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in the year 2000, that educational campaigns to promote the rights and availability of services were generally in English and that there was a lack of educational opportunities to demystify and de-stigmatize issues of disability and to raise expectations or a vision of a good life, is still very relevant in 2015.<sup>6</sup>

In 2011 AMPARO Advocacy held targeted consultations with the Burundi, Afghan, Iraqi and Karen communities and found that issues of stigma associated with mental health and disability were common among these communities. Members of these communities reported a strong reluctance to discuss issues related to disability with other community members and identified many issues that made it difficult to seek help.

According to recent and ongoing research by AMPARO Advocacy and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) (*An exploration of the barriers to service and inclusion of refugees living with disability*, 2015) many refugees with disability and their families report feeling intense feelings of shame, guilt and stigma, and unsupported and isolated from their own communities in Australia.

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<sup>5</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2000). *On the Sidelines, Disability and People from non-English speaking background communities*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Canberra.

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *On the Sidelines, Disability and People from non-English speaking background communities*, (2000).

## **LACK OF EQUITY IN CURRENT SYSTEM**

**There is strong evidence that people from a NESB with disability are significantly underrepresented in accessing disability specific services.**

The COAG Reform Council report **Disability 2011-2012: Comparing performance across Australia** showed lower and decreasing economic participation by people with disability and their carers across Australia. The report highlighted that: *“These inequalities are even more acutely experienced by people with disability who are Indigenous or who were born in non-English speaking countries.”*

**The report also cites rates of service use for people from a NESB are only 11.7%, less than half of that of the national rate of 34.9%.**

According to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) while Australia wide 25% of people with disability are from a non-English speaking background, only about 5% are accessing services for people with disability.

The NDIS Quarterly Report for December 2014 shows that only **4%** of people with disability in receipt of packages are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Given that people from CALD backgrounds are underrepresented in the NDIS trial sites there will be little information regarding how effective the scheme is in meeting the needs of its disadvantaged group.

### **In Queensland according to the Census 2011:**

- **20.5%** of population were born overseas
- **9.8%** of people speak a language other than English at home
- **10 %** of people with severe and profound disability, between the age of 0-65, come from homes where a language other than English is spoken

However according to the 2012-2013 National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) only 2.4% of Queenslanders accessing State funded disability supports speak a language other than English at home.

The **National Disability Strategy** acknowledges the significant barriers that people from a CALD background with disability experience in the following statement:

*People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – in particular newly arrived migrants such as refugees and special humanitarian entrants can be particularly vulnerable and those with disability are likely to experience multiple disadvantages, lack of accessible information, communication difficulties or cultural sensitivities and differences can create barriers to services and supports.*

## **QUEENSLAND’S TRANSITION TO THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME**

The Queensland government is currently undertaking significant work to help prepare people with disability, their families, service providers and the community for the roll out of the NDIS which will commence on the 1 July 2016.

As part of this work the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services has contracted nine agencies from the disability sector to deliver a Participatory Readiness Initiative to assist

Queenslanders with disability and their families to understand the opportunities that the NDIS will present and to know to navigate this new system to meet their individual circumstances.

**AMPARO was disappointed that given the serious issues of disparity no funding was directed to actively promoting the NDIS and key aspects of this new system to culturally and linguistically diverse communities through targeted engagement and communication strategies.**

Whilst these agencies have been advised that they are expected to include people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in their initiatives, there is no formal requirements for agencies to develop **Stakeholder Engagement Plans** with the necessary targeted strategies and key performance indicators to ensure the initiatives are effective for people with disability from CALD backgrounds. There is also no requirement for the agencies to develop **language and communication plans** that would provide a clear framework for communicating with linguistically diverse communities.

Given that people from a CALD background with disability are significantly underrepresented in accessing these same agencies, there is concern that they lack the skills, knowledge and commitment to effectively include this marginalized group in their processes.

AMPARO Advocacy believes that for participant readiness activities to engage effectively with, and appropriately meet the language and cultural needs of CALD communities, the development of tailored and culturally appropriate processes, strategies and methods is required.

AMPARO Advocacy has been contracted by three of these agencies to assist them to make their approaches more accessible to people from CALD backgrounds and to develop targeted strategies for communicating and engaging with this group about the NDIS. We believe this is a very positive first step, however more resources and additional work in this area is much needed.

While the scope of this work is limited by available funding and timeframe, it will provide valuable information, resources and a greater understanding of the challenges in building the capacity of this extremely disadvantaged group.

## **WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN**

*The implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme across Australia has enormous potential to improve the lives of people with disability; however to ensure the inequities in the current system are not transposed to the new system and arrangements under the NDIS, additional work must be undertaken.*

AMPARO Advocacy strongly supports inclusive, flexible and culturally appropriate initiatives that will strengthen and increase participation rates of people from a CALD accessing culturally responsive services, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Queensland transition to the NDIS provides a valuable opportunity to ensure that all Queenslanders are prepared for this new system of support and that those who are particularly vulnerable and currently missing out on access to disability support do not continue to do so.

It is crucial that Queenslanders with disability from CALD backgrounds and their families are well prepared for the commencement of the NDIS and fully informed about the options available under this new system of support and how to best take advantage of these options.

**The following additional measures need to be undertaken by the NDIA.**

- (i) Develop an Agency Multicultural Plan (AMP) and to engage with stakeholders from CALD disability sector to do this. As a requirement under the Commonwealth's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy this is an important tool for the agency to ensure it develops from the beginning a high level of cultural competence to meet the needs of all people with disability.
- (ii) Undertake culturally appropriate education campaigns to:
  - To de-stigmatize issues of disability in CALD communities.
  - Increase the knowledge and understanding of CALD communities about the needs and rights of people with disability and to raise expectations for a 'good life'.
  - Inform people with disability and their families from CALD communities about the availability of mainstream and disability specific services.
- (iii) Actively promote the NDIS and key aspects of this new system to culturally and linguistically diverse communities through targeted engagement and communication strategies.
- (iv) Support the development of cultural competence in service provision, including the effective engagement of qualified interpreters and bicultural workers.
- (v) Provide intensive individual case management support for individuals with disability and their families from CALD backgrounds to ensure they can access and negotiate this new national system. (See findings of Diversitat Disability Findings Report).
- (vi) *"Support the role of advocacy in representing the interests of people with disability"*<sup>7</sup> by a commitment to increase opportunities to access independent individual and systemic advocacy to represent the rights and interests of marginalised individuals from a CALD background with disability.
- (vii) Establish targets for participation rates of people with disability from a CALD background in the NDIS and undertake specific strategies to reach these figures.
- (viii) Undertake research and evaluation of the scheme and monitor the participation rates of people with disability from CALD backgrounds.
- (ix) Investigate, consult and develop specific targeted strategies in regional and remote areas to overcome barriers associated with remoteness for people from a non-English speaking background with disability.

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<sup>7</sup> The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012(P.7)

- (x) Collect appropriate data to monitor participation rates in the NDIS and to ensure effective planning and policy development in relation to the NDIS, including workforce development strategies.
  - the main language spoken at home
  - proficiency of spoken English for individual and key family members
  - preferred spoken language
  - country of origin and
  - country of birth<sup>8</sup>
  
- (xi) Implement workforce development strategies to address the lack of bicultural workers with disability awareness.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THIS WORK IS NOT CARRIED OUT**

AMPARO Advocacy is concerned that if this important work is not carried out people with disability from non-English speaking backgrounds will continue to fall through the gaps and not access important mainstream and disability specific supports, and **will not** have equitable access to the NDIS once it is rolled out in Queensland.

- Children with disability from CALD communities will continue to miss out on the important benefits of early intervention support.

AMPARO Advocacy has assisted a number of families whose children were eligible for the federally funded **Better Start Early Intervention and Helping Children with Autism Programs** but who missed out on this support as they were unaware of these programs and despite the involvement of health professionals were not referred to these program. While the Productivity Commission highlighted the importance of early intervention to “lower the costs and impacts associated with the disability for individuals and the wider community over the longer-term”<sup>9</sup> unless barriers to equitable access are addressed young children will continue to fall through the gaps and miss out on the benefits of early intervention provided through the NDIS.

*This year AMPARO has been assisting Fadil, a young boy of Ethiopian background who has been diagnosed with Down syndrome. Fadil and his family arrived in Australia eight years ago. He is currently in the upper years of primary school. Fadil's family experienced extreme physical and psychological trauma before they arrived in Australia which resulted in injuries and stresses that continue to have an adverse effect on the family's ability to develop trustful relationships, to learn English and to settle into their local community. This family have English as their second language, require the assistance of a qualified interpreter for important communication and were unaware of potential services and supports that their son could be accessing.*

*In the first few years after his arrival to Australia Fadil was eligible for funding under the **Better Start Early Intervention Program**. However despite the involvement of settlement and health services, including the family's General Practitioner, Fadil was not referred to this important program and missed out on important multidisciplinary therapy support, play equipment and other resources. The Program targets children under six years of age as intervention and support at this age is of the most benefit and has the most powerful effect on the child's subsequent growth, development and ability to fulfil their full*

<sup>8</sup> AMPARO Advocacy, *LANGUAGE AND CULTURE MATTER: REMOVE THE BARRIERS NOW. Addressing the needs of people from a non-English speaking background with a disability*, (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government (July, 2011) Disability Care and Support, Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Vol.2

*potential.*

*It is common in AMPARO's experience that many families from non-English speaking backgrounds are not informed about or referred to this important program and their children miss out on the effective support that it can provide at a crucial time in their child's development. (Extract from AMPARO Advocacy Annual Report 2013 -2014).*

- Negative perceptions of disability and the associated stigma that individuals with disability and their families experience will go unchallenged in CALD communities and people with disability will remain hidden and isolated and reluctant to seek help.

Without targeted education campaigns to address issues of stigma and to raise expectations for a 'good life' people with disability and their families from CALD backgrounds will continue to experience 'stigma, shame and guilt' and be reluctant to seek assistance until they reach a 'crisis'.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities will continue to misunderstand the needs of people with disability and be less inclusive of them and their families, as is the current situation. In short they will continue to miss out on the same opportunities that are afforded other Australians in accessing mainstream services and the NDIS.

- People with disability and their families from CALD communities will remain unaware of the availability of mainstream and disability specific services including the NDIS.

As a result people with disability from a NESB will not have equitable access to the same opportunities that the NDIS offers and will continue to be underrepresented in the NDIS as they are currently.

In the year 2000, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reported on the “**multiple layers of discrimination**”, leading to the “**exclusion, isolation and alienation of people from a NESB with disability.**” Recommendations in this report are still relevant today and many reports, including the COAG Reform Council report **Disability 2011-2012: Comparing performance across Australia**, show little has changed since this time.

The benefits of this major national reform that the NDIS represents must be shared among all Australians.

## **KEY LEARNINGS FROM TRIAL SITES IN OTHER STATES**

### **1. Learnings from the trial site in Barwon Region of Victoria:**

Diversitat Disability Findings Report (2014) suggest that the NDIS model assumes that people with disability from CALD backgrounds have an understanding of -

- ▶ Empowerment
- ▶ How to define and articulate their goals and aspirations
- ▶ Their needs and what they can expect regarding support
- ▶ The disability system
- ▶ English literacy

## **The Diversitat report also confirms what we know in Queensland and that is:**

- “The lack of literacy and translated material means people are not aware of their disability entitlements and what disability supports are available.”<sup>10</sup>
- That people from CALD are underrepresented in accessing and receiving disability specific and mainstream supports and they are unaware of the NDIS.
- There is a need for intensive case management and independent advocacy support people from CALD backgrounds to negotiate the NDIS, to organise diagnosis, determine eligibility and prepare for the planning and assessment process.
- There are workforce issues including a lack of bicultural workers being engaged and limited bicultural workers or interpreters with disability awareness.
- They also report **significant misinformation** being given about disability entitlements for people from a refugee background. The cite evidence of NDIS call staff advising potential participants that **‘new arrivals from a refugee background are ineligible to participate under the scheme’**.<sup>11</sup>
- Issues concerning interpreters not always being available or failing to arrive for appointments with the NDIA

## **2. Learnings from the trial site in the Hunter Region of New South Wales:**

The Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative (ECCFCS) in NSW is undertaking a CALD Consumer Capacity Building project to: raise awareness of the NDIS and the current disability services within 8 targeted new and emerging communities; educate service providers of the needs of people with disability from CALD backgrounds and to strengthen links between the two

### **Learnings from this work so far also support our understanding and experience in Queensland and include:**

- People with disability from CALD backgrounds are very isolated and difficult to reach. There is a need to educate and inform community leaders, workers in the multicultural sector and work with bicultural educators.
- Advocacy support and follow up was needed by many individuals and families attending information sessions.

### **ECCFCS have found it necessary to focus much more effort on working with communities around:**

- Understanding disability in the Australian context
- Understanding the needs and rights of people with disability
- Addressing stigma and negative perceptions of disability within communities and
- Explaining the role of disability services and what support is available now

## **3. Misinformation:**

- AMPARAO Advocacy has also found that misinformation is occurring in Queensland within the Participant Readiness work. Some agencies and staff are passing on information that **“refugees won’t be eligible for the NDIS.”**
- Given that the NDIA has misinformation published on the NDIS website it is not surprising that NDIS call staff and others are providing incorrect information. An example of this is the Easy

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<sup>10</sup> Diversitat Settlement (2014). *Diversitat Disability finding Report*.

<sup>11</sup> Diversitat Settlement (2014). *Diversitat Disability finding Report*

English Version of the NDIS planning workbook where information has been simplified to the extent that it is not accurate on Page 5 talks about providing support for: **“People who are Australian citizens. Australian citizens can be born here or have paper work that says they can live here.”**<sup>12</sup>The NDIA in Queensland have been advised of this.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY**

All sides of Government have recognised the importance of independent advocacy, and funded independent advocacy programs have existed since the 80's with the Federal Government establishing the *National Advocacy Program* in the same year as the Disability Services Act of 1986.

The *National Disability Strategy* commits to and promotes the importance of independent advocacy, as does the National Advocacy Framework. Article 4 of the *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* states that ‘*advocacy organisations have an important role to play in the implementation of the CRPD*’ and the General Principles guiding the NDIS also articulate a commitment to “*support the role of advocacy in representing the interests of people with disability.*”

Whilst the NDIS will go a long way in addressing the inequities of the current disability service system it will not be a perfect system, as no system can be. Inevitably some people will fall through the gaps and many will not be entitled to access the scheme. People with disability can struggle in many areas of life and as a result can require independent advocacy support to access timely and effective medical treatment, quality educational support, personal care support and so.

AMPARO Advocacy would hope to see a commitment from the Federal and State governments to increase access to independent advocacy as a means of safeguarding the rights and interests of vulnerable people with disability, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

AMPARO Advocacy works closely with migrants and refugees and their families in the Brisbane area who are experiencing social and economic marginalisation, to identify their unmet needs and to ensure they have equitable access to appropriate services and supports and to address issues of significant disadvantage. Advocacy support is provided in a way that respects and meets the language, cultural and religious needs of the person and is based on the principles of human rights, social justice and inclusion.

Our assistance enables the individuals to achieve good health and have access to employment, disability support, English language classes, appropriate medical treatment, education, safe affordable housing, and income support, and as a result enabling them to actively participate, engage and contribute to the broader community. Importantly through our work, individuals and families are able to make informed choices and decisions that set the direction for how they live their lives.

### **Independent advocacy support is a form of early intervention that also:**

- Supports timely access to important mainstream and disability services
- Improves service system approaches by increasing the capacity of community and government services to respond to the needs of people with disability from CALD backgrounds
- Prevents an escalation of the person's issues and concerns

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<sup>12</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme. Retrieved on 8 December 2014 from:  
[http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/easy\\_english\\_ndis\\_planning\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/easy_english_ndis_planning_workbook.pdf)

## **Ultimately access to independent advocacy support will make the NDIS more financially sustainable.**

AMPARO'S work is supported by our strong networks and community links with other organisations that are vital to this vulnerable group who have many complex unmet needs.

### ***The Need for Long Term Advocacy***

*AMPARO has continued to advocate on behalf of Andrea, a single mother of 2 young girls, who came to Australia as a refugee 5 years ago. Last year we reported on the significant and negative impact of mental illness on her life and that of her children and on the advocacy work we had been doing on her behalf around Child Safety, housing, Centrelink and health care.*

*Whilst no longer in crisis and having come a long way since being hospitalised due to mental illness two years ago, Andrea has continued to have a number of longer term issues to address. Our long term commitment to advocating on Andrea's behalf has resulted in a number of positive outcomes for Andrea this year.*

*Andrea had been living in a home located in an area that was causing her significant stress and negatively impacting on her mental health. Andrea had been experiencing harassment from vandals who regularly damaged her vegetable garden and outdoor equipment and wrote obscenities on the walls. The constant traffic noise and pollution from the highway at the back of the house meant she had to keep windows closed, in summer the heat was unbearable and sleeping was difficult. Through advocacy and with many letters of support, AMPARO Advocacy was able to get Andrea's housing application for transfer upgraded to 'Very High Needs' and backdated two years to the date of her original cancelled application. This led to her application being prioritised and to her being offered a suitable home in one of her preferred suburbs. The family is now happy to be living in a new home in a quiet area, away from the harassment, constant noise and pollution.*

*Previously it had been difficult for Andrea to recognise when she was unwell and this had resulted in her being hospitalised and placed on an Involuntary Treatment Order. Through on-going advocacy and support AMPARO Advocacy was able to assist Andrea to recognise and seek help when she became unwell again, negating the need for an Involuntary Treatment Order while allowing her to work together with her doctors to establish a jointly agreed treatment plan.*

*Unbeknown to AMPARO Andrea had been told some time ago that it was advisable for her to have an operation, however due to not knowing the full details of what this would entail or how long her children would need to be cared for she had advised the doctors that she did not want the operation to take place. Our involvement at specialist medical appointments and the provision of an experienced qualified interpreter allowed her to learn the full details, have the operation prioritized and arrange for her children to be cared for by friends during this time.*

*Given the long term nature of Andrea's mental illness and her isolation from family it is vitally important that she receive long term support from an appropriate agency. The two Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs) services who work in her area were approached for support and both placed her on their waiting lists. After lengthy delays attributed to long wait lists it was discovered that others were prioritised over her as management were adverse to staff working with interpreters, despite having been assured that interpreter fees were covered for the PHaMs program. Advocacy was crucial in Andrea receiving on-going support through the PHaMs program with qualified interpreters being engaged when appropriate and the transition to a second PHaMs service, now she has moved to a new suburb.*

*Andrea's mental illness acerbated her fears of being returned to the country from which she and her family had fled. Whilst she was keen to gain Australian Citizenship, her long term mental illness meant that regular attendance at English classes was difficult and her limited English together with her illness*

*prevented her from taking the Citizenship Test. Numerous letters of support were required but eventually Andrea and her children were granted citizenship this year without the need for her to undertake the examination. The security of having citizenship has done much to reassure her that she and her family can continue to live in Australia for the long term.*

*Attendance at English classes through TAFE has been a priority for Andrea, however at times when unwell this has not been possible. Whilst acknowledging that absences can be disruptive to the class and to her progress in learning English, through advocacy her teachers have gained a greater understanding and acceptance of reasons for these absences. This has enabled Andrea to continue in the program and to progress to the next level.*

*The Smith Family have come on board this year and agreed to provide financial support to assist with the children's educational expenses. The children can now fully participate in school activities including attending class outings and school camps. Their support has also made the move to the new school in the new suburb financially easier. (Extract from AMPARO Advocacy Annual Report 2013 -2014).*

**Finally AMPARO Advocacy would suggest that the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building, an important aspect of the NDIS, could include the following important activities:**

- Building the capacity of CALD communities to understand the needs and rights of people with disability so diverse communities are more inclusive and accepting of people with disability and their families.
- Delivering cultural competence training to mainstream and disability specialist services so that they are able to respond effectively to the language and cultural needs of clients with disability needing to access their services.

AMPARO Advocacy would like to thank the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme for the opportunity to attend this hearing and to submit this information for your examination.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Fordyce

Manager