



Sorting it out

A framework for culturally responsive
work and learning services for women

Dina Bowman and Loretta Mui
2012



Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Work and Learning  Yarra

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a non-government, community-based organisation concerned with social justice. Based in Melbourne, but with programs and services throughout Australia, the Brotherhood is working for a better deal for disadvantaged people. It undertakes research, service development and delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating learning into new policies, programs and practices for implementation by government and others. For more information visit <www.bsl.org.au>.

Published by

Brotherhood of St Laurence
67 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, Vic. 3065
ABN 24 603 467 024

Tel. (03) 9483 1183
Internet: www.bsl.org.au

Dina Bowman is Principal Researcher in the In and Out of Work and Through School to Work transition team of the Research and Policy Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Loretta Mui undertook a seven-month placement in the Research and Policy Centre at the Brotherhood of St Laurence as part of her Master of Social Work studies at RMIT.

Suggested citation:

Bowman, D & Mui, L 2012, *Sorting it out: understanding culturally responsive work and learning services for women*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

Note: images on the front cover are not necessarily of participants in this study.

© Brotherhood of St Laurence 2012

Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part of this paper may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.



Overview

The overall aim of the Making it Happen project was to inform the development of an innovative, gender-responsive model to address the learning and work needs of women in public housing.

- This document *Sorting it out* is part of a toolkit to encourage awareness, discussion and the development of gender and culturally responsive services. Developed in response to identified needs of women living in public housing, especially those who have a migrant or refugee background, the framework provides services staff and program developers with the tools to critically reflect on how they are meeting the needs of diverse communities.
- In *Thinking it through*, we canvass issues of gender inequality particularly in relation to learning and work for women who live in public housing. We highlight some findings of our research with women in public housing, which informed the development of the framework. We identify key aspects of gender and culturally aware services from a scan of service models.
- The third component of the toolkit provides links to additional online resources on a dedicated *Making it Happen* section of the Brotherhood's current awareness portal, BroCAP, at <<http://bsllibrary.org.au>>.

The toolkit was developed with the generous support of the Victoria Women's Benevolent Trust, through a donation from Eve Mahlab AO; and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.



Contents

Overview	iii
Introduction	1
A framework for action	2
Participation, voice and accountability	3
Empowerment	4
Valuing strengths and diversity	4
Building self-esteem	5
Counselling and support	6
Gender and culture sensitive referral	8
Support for transitions	9
Career and benefits counselling	10
Addressing injustice	11
Access	12
Costs	13
Child care	14
Multilingual, multicultural services	15
Flexible, responsive training	16
Information and outreach	17
Pathways to decent work	18
Employer engagement	19
Women's transport needs	20
Knowledge	21
Research	22
Measuring and understanding	23
Learning from others	24
References	25

Introduction

The International Labour Organization and UNIFEM (2008, p. viii) distinguish between **gender aware**, **gender sensitive** and **gender responsive** services:

- **Gender aware** services acknowledge ‘that women and men perform different roles in society and therefore have different needs which must be recognized’.
- **Gender sensitive** services are ‘aware of the different needs, roles, responsibilities of women and men’. [This includes] ‘understanding that these differences can result in difference for women and men in access and control over resources; level of participation in and benefit from resources and development’.
- **Gender responsive services** are ‘aware of gender, disparities and their causes, and takes action to address and overcome gender-based inequalities’.

Gender **sensitive or responsive services** go beyond awareness to take action to do things differently. In a similar way, culturally responsive services actively challenge racialisation and ‘race thinking’ (Gupta et al. 2007). Woolfe (2010, p 19) explains that racialisation refers to:

the systematic practices that differentiate and position groups of people (and the individuals ascribed to these groups) unequally (hierarchically) in relation to one another, on the basis of physical and/or social characteristics.

This document **Sorting it out** forms part of a toolkit that aims to encourage awareness, discussion, and the development of more culturally responsive work and learning services for women. Developed in response to identified needs of women living in public housing, especially those who have a migrant or refugee background, the framework provides services and program developers with the tools to critically reflect on how they are meeting the needs of diverse communities.

Participation, voice and accountability provide the overarching frame as they are key to all other aspects of gender and culturally responsive service provision. The elements which sit under this frame are grouped as follows:

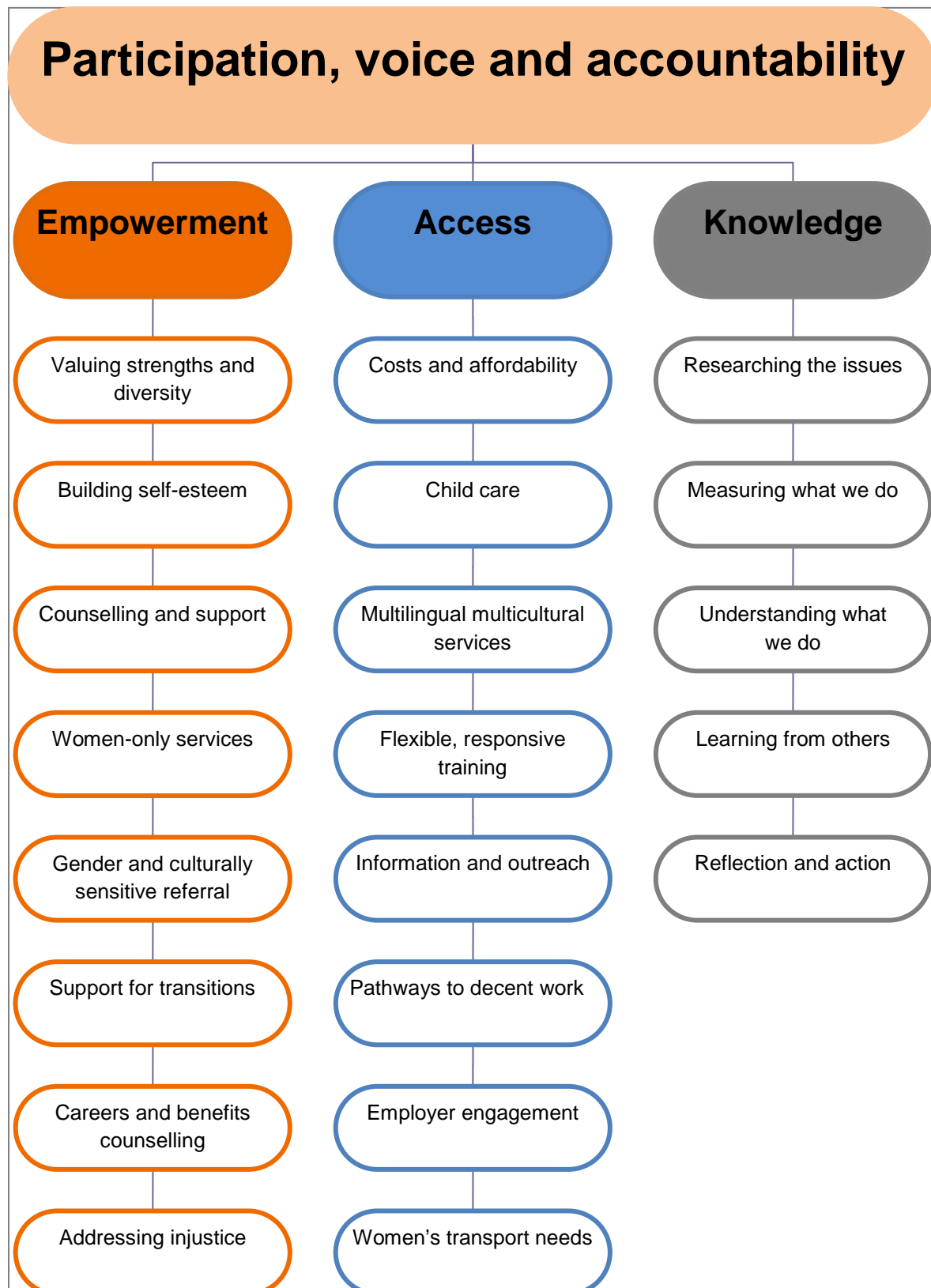
- empowerment
- access
- research and knowledge.

The chart overleaf sets out the elements which then are explored in more detail. The elements are illustrated with quotes from women (service users and workers) who contributed to our study; pseudonyms are used throughout. For each element we briefly:

- consider the issues
- pose one or more questions to inform service development
- suggest some actions.

This is just a start. The framework can be used to inform service development and reflexive practice.

A framework for action



Participation, voice and accountability

Issues

Participation and voice are fundamental to inclusive empowering services.

Often women who use services are stereotyped as being 'passive'. Through a participatory model, women can reassert their voice and values in the programs they use. As one woman said, 'Without voice no one can hear you'. But we need to listen.

Creating clear opportunities for women to shape and inform programs that affect them is an important step in challenging the disempowering narratives around service users.

Empowering services need clear ways to enable participation by service users and their communities. Importantly, as Corner and Repucci (2009, p. 9) point out 'the counterpart to voice is accountability'. Services also need clear processes to report back to service users.

Question

Are there ways for women to shape the services they use?

'It's important that the people who participate in my programs are consulted, and that things are tailored as much as possible to their interests ... not just the interest of the organisation or the funding bodies ...' Elizabeth¹

Suggestions for action

- Create clear opportunities for women's participation in the design of programs: what they want and need, and how it will be delivered.
- Develop processes to hear and address feedback, for example, feedback as a standing agenda item for service planning and management meetings.
- Be aware of what may affect women's participation (timing, transport, child care, environment, interpreters etc).
- Be open to change and regularly review participatory and feedback mechanisms.
- Consider how funding and other constraints may affect opportunities for participation.
- Be creative – don't just rely on meetings or surveys.
- Develop regular reports to service users.

¹ Pseudonyms are used in this framework

Empowerment

Empowerment starts with recognising women's strengths and providing conditions that enable women to develop confidence and support one another. Our research suggests that for many women public housing provides a sense of community and support.

Valuing strengths and diversity

Issues

Women often experience direct and indirect discrimination. Their skills can be unrecognised and devalued, their knowledge and experiences overlooked. The underestimation of women's abilities may lead to a narrowing of options. It may also lead to a loss of confidence and sense of despair. For women of colour the experience of being underestimated is often intensified.

Question

Does the service encourage women to value their strengths and experiences?

'...I'm proud to be Somali, proud to be Australian and Somali ... Am I going to throw away the abaya? No way! I don't want to forget my mother tongue or my background. But I want to learn Australian ways too.' Layla

Suggestions for action

- Start with strengths. A strengths-based approach identifies and builds on the skills, abilities and attributes that people have.
- Commit to practices that honour varied understandings and affirm the strengths of women.
- Train staff to be confident in a strengths-based framework.
- Provide opportunities for women to identify their own strengths through women-only groups.
- Women who have been educated overseas may not have their qualifications recognised here. This lack of recognition is often compounded by having to start again in fields not of their choosing: for example, a university lecturer may now work as a cleaner. Consider how women can build on their skills.
- Identify employment-related strengths. For example, women with large families may have emotional resilience, excellent organisational and financial skills in relation to the household. At the same time, avoid stereotyping women as 'strong'. Everyone needs permission to seek support when the load is heavy.
- It may be easier for women to communicate in their mother tongue. Staff with relevant languages can engage in deeper, more nuanced communication, so consider language capacity when recruiting staff.

Building self-esteem

Issues

Women who have been out of paid work for a long time to care for children and those who have not undertaken paid employment may need more support in their new roles.

Women who are newcomers to Australia may be unfamiliar with social and cultural expectations, especially in relation to employment. Delivering a service that offers 'foundational' skills development can help to address some of the tension women may experience when taking up new roles in unfamiliar environments.

Question

Does the service help women to develop confidence about their decisions and abilities?

'When I came here, women have rights, women go to school, they can do whatever they want to do, men go to work and do the housework.' Miriam

*'Now in Australia, I've got opportunities for my children to learn. In my experience, when the woman works it is not like men. Men working, they just wake up and then start work. Women especially with kids have to prepare the kids first ... it's **double working**.'* Mary

Suggestions for action

- Offer support/ discussion groups, a space for women to work through the-specific cultural challenges they may encounter in relation to formal learning and paid work.
- Provide information about rights at work and in society generally.
- Respect women's decisions even if you don't agree with them.
- Work *with* women to help them develop strategies and support together.
- When seeking to empower women, consider how men may be affected by unemployment or downward mobility. By addressing men's issues, programs for men may also assist women.

Counselling and support

Issues

Women may need support to deal with personal or emotional issues. For example, entering new environments can be anxiety provoking and affect a person's mental health, especially if they have experienced trauma.

Factoring in support systems ensures duty of care to service users and allows employment advisers or trainers to focus on other areas.

Question

Can women access counselling and/or support groups at all points of their work and learning journey?

'... where they can communicate as well ... the pressure—they talk it out.' Zahra

Suggestions for action

- Develop reliable referral networks to ensure access to the most relevant, accurate information about available support.
- Partner with other relevant agencies to provide free / affordable and culturally appropriate counselling services to service users at any point of their engagement.
- Facilitate support groups in relation to work and learning challenges.
- Women often experience work, learning and family life challenges in differing ways. Gender-specific support groups allow women to share common experiences.
- Build workers' and training providers' knowledge of the potential impact of violence (physical, emotional and structural) on women's learning.
- Carefully define the boundaries of the specific service to service users and to workers.
- Maintain up to date information about where to refer women who need specialist mental health assistance and support.

Issues

Women may prefer gender-specific services because they may feel safer and more comfortable with other women. Women-only groups may be more acceptable for cultural reasons.

Question

Are there spaces for women to meet and discuss issues in a safe environment?

'... so that they can feel comfortable, talk their way. If there's a man there ... I can't say how I feel. Give them the opportunity and space to talk to their friends.' Grace

'I think males, they just find jobs, it is easy for them to find jobs ... I think males have better opportunities with many things and finding a job is one of them.' Layla

Suggestions for action

- Offer gender-specific discussion groups, women-only classes and group learning opportunities. In women-only groups, women may feel more comfortable to raise issues and express themselves. This helps to create a more engaged learning environment.
- Remember that women-only services should avoid stereotyping service offerings. Women may feel more comfortable with other women, but may wish to study in fields that are not traditionally associated with women.
- Offer the choice of gender-specific training and mentorship in areas such as business, finance and accounting which open up career pathways.

Gender and culture sensitive referral

Issues

Navigating 'fragmented' services can be daunting for anyone, let alone for women with caring responsibilities and underdeveloped English language skills. Developing gender and culturally sensitive referrals will provide service users with the most direct and efficient path to the resources and support they need.

Question

Are there processes in place to refer women to agencies or community groups which are appropriate to their gender and cultural needs?

'We need to build relationships with services that accommodate the needs of the clients we see.' Kylie

Suggested actions

- Develop an up-to-date database of services for gender and culture-sensitive referrals, and develop processes to ensure it remains up-to-date and accurate.
- Strengthen relationships with service providers who can support the various needs of women (including housing, community groups, child care, mental health, alcohol and other drugs support services, family violence, legal advice, financial advice) with appropriate sensitivity.
- Consult service users about useful referrals.
- Ensure the referrals database includes gender and culturally-specific agencies, which have extensive experience working with issues that affect women.

Support for transitions

Issues

Not understanding how things work is a significant barrier to participation for newly arrived immigrants. Greater support and information will assist women to make more informed choices regarding their future work and learning opportunities.

Our research highlighted the challenge of not knowing how to gain work and study opportunities in a different country and culture. Services that address the practical and psychological features of cultural transitions can assist service users to manage living in a new culture.

Questions

Is there enough support and information for women to make informed decisions?

Is there support for women to deal with the pressures of living in a new culture?

'It's helping people to see a pathway and I think this is true for both men and women.' Shelley

'Women are not informed. They have been ripped off by training organisations ... no guidance.' Janet

'Everything was different of course; I was used to my country, my language ... I couldn't communicate because I couldn't speak English.' Miriam

Suggested actions

- Include transition pathways in service users' work and learning plans. Ensure that each service user has a clear understanding of opportunities and processes.
- Resource women with better understanding of the Australian education/training and employment systems through targeted information sessions. Reinforce information via individual sessions.
- Develop gender-specific mentoring for women who are studying towards or aspire to gain professional or business qualifications.
- Provide specialised counselling services that support service users with cultural transition.
- Ensure that women using the service know their responsibilities and rights and the choices available to them in a new cultural context.
- Consider sharing information about Australian parenting practices and expectations of children's education.
- Enable and encourage women to share their experiences and insights and support one another.

Career and benefits counselling

Issues

Undertaking a formal training or educational course may have immediate financial implications, and also may affect future options. Similarly, entering paid work may have serious implications for rent, concessions, and other benefits.

Clear information is essential so that people can make considered decisions.

Questions

Does the service provide accurate information about options for learning and work?

Does the service have accurate information about how employment will affect Centrelink benefits, rent, etc.?

'Everything was good except for the pay, I wasn't sure about the pay rate ... later I realised that been a trainee you didn't get paid as much.' Darya

Suggested actions

- Integrate a careers and benefits counselling service so that individuals have the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about employment options.
- Women need guidance about higher education, training and possible career pathways. It is important to consider how religious or cultural issues may affect their job options.
- Women may need advice about managing paid work in addition to their family responsibilities.
- Women may need advice about financial support to meet education costs for themselves and their children.

Addressing injustice

Issues

Gender, 'race' and cultural discrimination make it more difficult for women from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds to find and keep work. Although these are society-wide issues, services can address women's needs by recognising these factors and working to create cultural change in their workplaces and through their interactions with outside organisations.

Question

Does the service work to address racial and cultural discrimination in its everyday practice?

'When do you stop being a "migrant" or a "refugee"? I am an Australian citizen, but people see that I am a refugee.' Pia

'Some of my friends don't even try to get a job because they feel bad. They think they will get rejected.' Layla

Suggested actions

- Provide professional development in relation to gender, racial and cultural discrimination for all new employees, and refresher workshops for existing staff.
- Provide employers with information about racial discrimination and strategies for diversity management.
- Factor in time for staff to reflect on and discuss their practice, and develop constructive ways to support service users in the face of discrimination.
- Recognise the gendered nature of the refugee/migrant experience (often gender concerns are obscured by the label of 'migrant' or 'refugee')
- Check out the information about gender and cultural awareness on the web portal [BroCAP](http://bsllibrary.org.au) at <<http://bsllibrary.org.au>>.

Access

Women may ask themselves many questions about access before entering the doors of an agency:

- Can I afford this service?
- Is this a safe place for me?
- Will I be respected?
- Will my children be cared for?
- Can I communicate with the staff?
- Will there be a meaningful outcome for me from this?

Services need to be well prepared to address these concerns.

Costs

Issues

The minimum cost of training is still too high for many women, especially if there is no clear pathway to a decent job. The pressure of managing finances, paying for child care and training fees, and receiving minimal trainee wages keeps vocational courses out of reach for many women living in public housing.

Questions

Can most women afford this course/service without worrying about finances?

Does the service have affordable childcare options or can it refer women to an affordable local service?

'We have to charge a minimum fee [for training] unless we can prove [there is] severe financial hardship. It can be a lot for people on low income.' Jennifer

Suggested actions

- Advocate for changes to fee regulations so that there is flexibility for women's fees to waived or lowered.
- Develop alternative training approaches that are flexible and affordable.
- Respect the time pressures that many women with competing responsibilities experience.
- Provide women with the necessary information about costs and options for training and education, and available forms of financial assistance such as scholarships.

Child care

Issues

There is often a mismatch between the type of work that is available and its family friendliness or flexibility. Sometimes child care is not available. Even if child care is available, the costs are still too high for most women, especially women who care for many children.

Questions

Is affordable child-care available?

Is the venue child-friendly?

'They find that getting a job is not much different ... the only changes would be they don't spend time with their kids.' Louise

'Have a childcare worker, trainee, volunteer to mind the children in the centre ... user-friendly ... Open a bit later.' Sarah

'When you get the job, you have to pay child care ... It's expensive, especially on a low income. Because most of the jobs you get ... they don't pay well ... like cleaning.' Layla

Suggested actions

- Ensure there are **affordable, accessible child care** options for women who attend the services.
- Work with childcare providers to develop child care to meet the needs of service users.
- Conduct training courses within school hours to enable parents with school-age children to attend.
- Provide an environment that is welcoming for children of the women and men who use the service.
- Provide the opportunity for childcare trainees to gain experience by offering free or affordable child care to women.
- Seek funding for child care when developing new programs or services.

Multilingual, multicultural services

Issues

Learning to live in a different culture and use a new language is difficult and can be isolating. Workers who have similar backgrounds to service users can help to build trust and sense of safety. A multilingual, multicultural service will also reach more women with different levels of English and knowledge of Australian social support services.

More than one million Victorians speak a language other than English at home. In some areas of Victoria over half of the local community speaks a language other than English at home. Many of these people are not confident communicating in English when accessing government services (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2010, p. 4).

For many women low English language proficiency adds to their sense of isolation and discrimination. Training conducted in languages other than English will open up more possibilities for women whose English is not yet at a 'training ready' level.

Questions

Does the workforce reflect the gender, culture and language composition of their clients?

Does the service offer training/classes in languages other than English?

Is it easy and clear for women to ask for interpreters?

'I think [having] bilingual computer classes is raising participation... because they can grasp it.' Elizabeth

Suggested actions

- Prioritise hiring and training of staff who match service users' gender, cultural and language profile.
- Recruit a culturally diverse workforce and offer staff training in language skills.
- Make time in work schedules (team meetings, supervision, peer supervision) to reflect on cultural and gender issues in worker–client relationships.
- Keep in mind that service users may not all prefer working with staff from a similar background. However, offering choices will lead to a more responsive service.
- Offer 'fundamentals classes' (computer use, introduction to different courses) in relevant languages, to open up opportunities to women with varying levels of English. Also consider specialised English classes (for example business English, accounting English).
- Expressing work and learning needs in a second language can be difficult. If starting paid work is new to women, talking about work can be even harder. Always ask service users who are not fluent in English whether they need an interpreter. As women may feel more comfortable with a female interpreter, ask whether they prefer a male or female interpreter.
- Where there are no qualified interpreters in minority languages, offer the next best form of communication (e.g. phone interpreter service, internal staff/volunteer with language skills)
- Provide printed service information in relevant languages.

Flexible, responsive training

Issues

Vocational services can be inaccessible for many women if the hours and days of classes are inflexible, if they haven't factored in women's caring role and the cost is fixed. Flexibility is key to delivering inclusive services. Gender and culturally responsive training considers the content, and the method of delivery. Women who have not experienced the formal Australian classroom setting may benefit from an adjusted training course that recognises different ways of learning.

Bringing 'real-life experiences into the classroom setting' assists students in their learning (Calway & Murphy 2007, cited in Miliszewska 2009, p. 220).

Questions

Are gender and cultural factors considered in planning and scheduling training?

Is there flexibility to meet the needs of women?

I like to have education and I like to have a job ... the traineeship ... we have one day of classes...I am learning and also they pay me money.' Crystal

'In my country, the teacher teaches and you have to follow what the teacher wants. In Australia, you have to speak. So different!' Zaynab

Suggested actions

- Consult with women often about the training arrangements they want? Do they need child care to attend? Is the timing of classes an issue? Are courses affordable and easy to get to by public transport?
- Consider women-only classes. Note that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission allows for 'special measures' including women-only services where appropriate.
- Find out what the women want to learn. Many younger women are interested in white-collar careers such as business, finance, accounting and banking.
- Deliver vocational courses with hands-on/practical classes (learn by doing).
- Offer on-site work experience opportunities as part of vocational courses such as child care, business and administration.
- Consider delivering training in languages other than English.

Information and outreach

Issues

Women may be less likely than men to know about services and support if they are full-time carers for their children and are responsible for family duties. Outreach services and building community connections to disseminate information via informal networks are important ways of considering cultural and gender factors in publicising services.

Question

Are gender and cultural factors considered in the promotion of services?

'What's good about this place [public housing] is that they know what's going on in the community ... they are always involved in the community and share it.' Zahra

Suggested actions

- Strengthen outreach by allowing more time and resources for outreach workers to develop relationships in the community.
- Supply translated printed material regarding services in housing estates.
- Build trust in a service through informal networks as an effective method of enhancing engagement.
- Provide timely and accurate information and support.
- Provide information in relevant languages.
- Since word of mouth is powerful communication channel, ensure key individuals in communities have access to accurate information.

Pathways to decent work

Issues

Meeting women's specific work and learning needs is about supporting individual practical and strategic goals. These goals refer to their immediate needs and the skills and resources which would enable the women to change their status in society.

Questions

Does the service offer learning opportunities that address women's practical and strategic needs?

Are the job opportunities provided respectful of women's economic, social and cultural needs?

'Migration has a massive impact ... the household the way it plays, the change of roles, the loss of men's status, new expectations of women's roles. So many things to work with, needs to be integrated in what's done.' Margaret

'Finding the best opportunities and putting them into training or jobs that fit in with their culture and needs.' Zaynab

'Not just any job ... one where they will be respected.' Deborah

Suggested actions

- Design services to meet several needs at once through an integrated work and learning program. For example, see the resources listed on VU College's Learning in the Workplace and community webpage at <<http://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/LiWC/resources.html>>
- Develop services to address issues important to the women using the service—for example, an English language program with opportunities to discuss workplace issues and the rights of women.
- Consult service users to shape the decent and respectful work agenda.
- Respect women's cultural context in relation to appropriate work. For example, some women may not be permitted to provide personal care for men, or may not be able to work in venues where alcohol is served.

Employer engagement

Issues

Gender and racial discrimination in the labour market and in the workplace is widely known to affect women's work opportunities. Building stronger relationships with employers may provide a clearer pathway into employment for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Question

Does the service work with employers to create gender and culturally sensitive work opportunities?

'What we could do better as an integrated service is looking for employers who would be able to employ women in a safe environment'. Catherine

'I was thinking of working in a bar ... for males it is ok. But for us ... can't go work in a bar, because I am a woman and it's cultural ... for our culture we always have to respect the boy's decisions. And we can't disobey them. If they want to do something we can't tell them not to'. Zaynab

Suggested actions

- Build strong relationships with a diverse range of employers in both large and smaller enterprises.
- Discuss with employers the concept of a **responsive workplace**, which meets the needs of family circumstances and work arrangements, offers hours of work that can be balanced with child care and encourages a workplace culture of intercultural communication and understanding.

Women's transport needs

Issues

While women living in the inner city have better access to public transport, transport in some neighbourhoods may not be reliable and women may not feel safe travelling to and from work at night or in the early morning. Gaining a drivers licence will give women more choices in the work they can do and greater sense of independence. Yet there is little support for women living on low incomes to gain their drivers licence.

Being able to drive may also help women living in public housing to maintain relationships with their friends, families and community members who live in areas hard to reach by public transport.

Question

How are women's transport needs met?

'When we were living in Sunshine it was really far, there are no buses on Sundays. Then when we came here everything was close, there was more help around ... It's good that public housing is near the city, there is transport everywhere. Layla

'Driving licences ... they will become more confident ... drop their children off at school ... it may even make their chances of working better.' Louise

Suggested actions

- Run a volunteer and/or mentoring driving school program that provides low-cost driving lessons for women.
- Consider tailored driver training for older women with children to help them gain their drivers licence.
- Consider creative ways of addressing transport needs—for example, car pooling or electric bikes.
- Develop driving training programs to build a network of volunteer driving instructors who speak community languages.
- Ensure that women can choose a driving instructor of preferred gender and language.

Knowledge

Building the knowledge of workers and organisations about gender and culturally responsive service delivery does not necessarily mean attaining 'cultural competence'. Furlong and Wight emphasise the importance of continuously strengthening 'critical awareness' in one's practice. This means working towards

the 'principles of curiosity' and of 'informed not knowing' ... this orientation establishes a context for practice that regards 'the other' as a mirror upon which the practitioner can see the outline of their own personal, professional, ideological and cultural profile. (Furlong & Wight 2011, p. 39).

Research

Issues

Research about gender, migration and refugee issues can help community organisations to design more effective programs that are sensitive to the needs of women.

Question

Does the organisation undertake research about gender, migration and refugee issues?

'Not ... having a researcher specialising in refugee and migration ... we miss the knowledge of how to work with migrants and refugees, [who] are the majority of our clients here, and probably a large proportion of people living in public housing.'

Sally

Suggested actions

- Collaborate with researchers who are expert in gender, migration and refugee issues to develop research projects that strengthen practice knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting women using the service.
- Check out resources on gender and culturally responsive services on the [BroCAP](http://bsllibrary.org.au/) web portal <<http://bsllibrary.org.au/>>.

Measuring and understanding

Issues

Measuring what we do is an important part of understanding practice, how effective it is, and how it can be improved. As Corner and Repucci point out: 'The effective use of indicators is integral to good governance mechanisms, including voice and accountability' (2010, p. 9)

Gender-neutral language and categories can obscure gender inequality. Collecting gender-disaggregated data helps to identify the particular issues experienced by men and women. Because gender intersects with other socially ascribed categories, information about age, family responsibilities, primary language, disability or ill health, education and employment status may be useful in better understanding the women and men we serve and how to more effectively deliver services and support.

Questions

Are data collection processes clear and relevant?

How is collected data used?

Suggested actions

- Ensure that data collection is relevant and timely. Data collection should comply with the national privacy principles: see <<http://www.privacy.gov.au/materials/types/infosheets/view/6583#npp1>>
- All data collection for research purposes should be approved by the relevant ethics committee. For information about the Brotherhood of St Laurence ethics approval process see <<http://www.bsl.org.au/Research-and-publications/Research-and-Policy-Centre/Research-ethics.aspx>>
- Data should always be disaggregated by gender to make gendered patterns visible.
- Consider existing research before developing a research proposal. Find out what is already known. Identify gaps in knowledge and share research findings.
- Consider participatory research methods, involving service users in the project design and the collection and analysis of data. This can provide important insights for researchers and service providers and also develop useful skills for participants.

Learning from others

Issues

The learning and work needs of women are affected by many things, including health, culture, family, community. Offering a service that can support women's multiple needs will help their chances of success in work and learning. Often knowledge at a service level about sources of assistance resides with individuals; when a staff member leaves this valuable knowledge may be lost.

Question

Do workers share knowledge and information?

Suggested actions

- Encourage mentoring and peer support so that more experienced staff members share their knowledge with less experienced colleagues.
- Develop clear processes for referral and support across the areas of settlement, family, employment and training and community services.
- Build a referral database and ensure it is kept up to date.
- Make professional development a priority for all staff.
- Host regular information/discussion seminars on practice knowledge.
- Encourage a culture of critical reflection and discussion in team meetings.
- Develop debriefing processes for staff to deal with stress.
- Ensure staff have clear understanding about boundaries concerning what they can and should do and when they should refer to specialist services.

References

- Bay, U 2007, *What can Hannah Arendt's theorising add to critical social workers empowerment practice?*, Australian Sociological Association's Conference 2007, University of Auckland, 4–7 December.
- Corner, L & Repucci, S 2009, *A user's guide to measuring gender-sensitive basic service delivery*, United Nations Development Programme, Oslo, Norway.
- Furlong, M & Wight, J 2011, 'Promoting "critical awareness" and critiquing "cultural competence": towards disrupting received professional knowledges', *Australian Social Work*, vol.64, no. 1, pp.38–54.
- Gupta, T, James, C, Maaka, R & Andersen, C (eds) 2007, *Race and racialization: essential readings*, Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., Toronto.
- Hochfeld, T & Bassadien, SR 2007, 'Participation, values, and implementation: three research challenges in developing gender-sensitive indicators', *Gender & Development*, no. 15, pp. 217–29.
- International Labour Organization & UNIFEM 2008, *Guidelines for gender-sensitive employment creation for district councils*, International Labour Organization, Tanzania.
- Longwe, SH 1999, 'Two different voices on education for women's empowerment', in C Medel-Añonuevo (ed.) *Learning gender justice through women's discourses*, UNESCO Institute For Education, Hamburg, pp. 7–16.
- Miliszewska, I 2009, 'Incorporating community-based learning in a first-year computing unit', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, no. 10, pp. 217–27.
- Victorian Multicultural Commission 2010, *Using interpreting services: Victorian Government policy and procedures*, Victorian Multicultural Commission, Melbourne, viewed 26 September 2012, <http://ezispeak.com.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Vic_Government_-_BestPractice-InterpreterServices.pdf>.
- Victoria University, Learning in Workplace & Community (LiWC) resources, viewed 21 March 2012, <<http://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/LiWC/resources.html>>.
- Woolfe, RR 2010, *Working (in) the gap: a critical examination of the race/culture divide in human services*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Yamanaka, K. & Piper, N 2005, *Feminized migration in East and Southeast Asia: policies, actions and empowerment*, UNRISD, Geneva.