

CASE STUDY

Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS)

CASS supports elderly people by navigating language barriers and building social networks through their Senior Activity Groups. During COVID-19, CASS has continued this important work to provide social support for newly arrived migrants and their families.

About the program

Living in a foreign country is challenging, especially for elderly migrants, who often face additional challenges with language barriers and having to adapt to a new environment. Elderly people often find it more difficult to settle into a new country and can feel more socially isolated.

To provide social support for elderly migrants, CASS runs Senior Activity Groups, which bring together elderly migrants from different cultural backgrounds, including Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Indonesian backgrounds. There are several Activity Groups, and each of them operate activities weekly to cater for the different needs of seniors from different cultural backgrounds. The Activity groups support elderly migrants to build social networks and connect with others, and support them to navigate the mainstream community.

At each time, there are 10 to 20 Activity Groups, which are grouped by their interests, language or cultural background. Some of the interests include dancing, singing or learning English. Each group has around 50 to 100 members, depending on the capacity of the venue where they regularly meet.

The groups are self-run and managed by their members, but they strongly rely on the support provided by CASS. This support includes organising venues to host Activity Groups, usually different halls or rooms provided by local councils, as well as the CASS' aged care centres. CASS has organised for the venues to be located across a range of Sydney suburbs, so that elderly migrants are able to easily access them by walking or using public transport.

AT A GLANCE



Target Participants

Older migrants from CALD backgrounds



Aim

To increase connection and support elderly migrants



Organisations Involved

CASS, local councils



Location

Sydney



Funding

Australian Government, Local councils in Sydney, self-funded.



Senior activity groups play a crucial part in many elderly migrants' settlement journeys and for most of them become a long-term place of connection and friendships, especially within their own communities. CASS workers support the Senior Activity Groups to organise preferred activities, which often includes settlement information sessions, covering topics such as road safety, taxation, community safety, health issues and navigating the health system, and how to apply for pension. Through these sessions elderly migrants have opportunities to learn and understand parts of Australian mainstream society that may be different than those in their home country.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Activity Groups were no longer able to meet. However, CASS adapted to move Activity Groups online and over zoom, so that elderly migrants were still able to meet each other and connect, reducing isolation during this difficult time, particularly for older people.

Senior Activity Groups have been important places for sharing crucial information on the COVID-19 pandemic in different community languages, both through online meetings and through strong social media platforms provided by CASS. CASS workers have found that group members have mostly been able to quickly adjust to the new way of connecting online. As the pandemic has not yet eased, communicating online has since been the preferred way, however since July there have been about 10 to 15 members of each group that have resumed socialising personally in different venues, following health and safety guidelines.

Outcomes

1. Elderly people get opportunities to connect with other migrants within their communities; new migrants form long-term friendships, overcome language barriers, escape social isolation and educate themselves on how to settle in Australian society.
2. Elderly people have been able to reconnect with their friends and feel supported, even in the difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges

1. One of the major challenges has been finding and securing appropriate venues to be available for senior activity groups on a long-term weekly basis.
2. During COVID-19, a key challenge was to adapt the activities to an online format and to support communities during COVID-19.

Key Learnings

This experience has generated two key learnings for CASS:

1. The value of applying for different small community grants especially from local councils which enable running of the groups' programs.
2. The importance of adapting to COVID-19 pandemic by moving groups' activities online and thus enabling elderly migrants to stay connected and informed.

More information

For more information, visit <http://cass.org.au/home/>

