Advance Diversity Services – LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Practice

Settlement Council of Australia

AT A GLANCE

Target participants: LGBTIQA+ clients from CALD, migrant and refugee backgrounds

Aim of program: To make ADS services more accessible and inclusive for the LGBTIQA+ community

Organisations involved / partnerships: Advance Diversity Services, ACON - Pride In Health + Wellbeing

Location: Head Office, Hurstville NSW – office locations in Bexley, Rockdale and Sutherland

Funding: This work has been delivered within existing service delivery funding and resources. Additionally, grant funding was received from the Settlement Innovation Fund, Mental Health Association NSW, the Bayside Council and Pride Foundation Australia for training and various associated project activities.

Mardi Gras Film festival- Advance Diversity Services x Queer Screen, 2022

INTRODUCTION

We started our work in 1981 as a not-for-profit organisation focusing on migrants and refugees, people from CALD backgrounds, and with a focus on older persons, community development and disability.

Our work expanded as we aimed to improve our inclusive practice to support migrant and refugee clients from the LGBTIQA+ communities. Outside of ADS some of our staff have helped clients living with HIV in the community through a volunteering program, helping them to manage their daily living and providing other practical assistance and support.

The success and importance of this volunteering work, led to the executive of ADS developing a strategy to strengthen the organisation's overall capacity to become a more inclusive and effective service for LGBTIQA+ clients.

ADS approached ACON for practical assistance and advice. ACON is the peak body for the LGBTIQA+ community, particularly in the areas of health and community inclusion and development.

ADS also invested in ACONs 'Pride In Health + Wellbeing' program, and in ongoing advice and support from ACON as it went through the journey of strengthening organisational capability in the area of inclusive practice.

In 2019 ADS led an LGBTIQA+ forum to educate and inform the community services staff who work with CALD communities. Over 50 staff attended the forum which hosted a panel of five LGBTIQA+ people with lived experience, which had strong and positive outcomes for building social buy in and support.

From this, we sought EOIs for organisations to join the LGBTIQA+ Working Group to assist us with our access and equity programs. People from ACON, local organisations and NSW Health were all involved. This was vitally important to share learning as we jointly developed local community initiatives. The group meets frequently throughout the year to discuss LGBTIQA+ service provision and community capacity building activities/events, including information sharing.

Featured- Loc Nguyen with the Multicultural LGBTIQA+ Support Directory

Other key events and activities:

- ADS rolled out a targeted marketing campaign "BE YOU WITH US" to ensure our inclusivity is visible to all members of our community.
- ADS launched Pride in My Faith – a video which offers insights into the struggles faced by LGBTIQA+ people of faith from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds as they try to reconcile their faith, culture and queer identity, and to find service providers that understand the complexity of their predicament.
- We participated in Fair Day 2020.
- ADS partnered with the University of Wollongong to enhance the ability of the settlement and community services sectors to serve the needs of CALD LGBTIQA+ communities.
- Migrants and refugees who identify as LGBTIQA+ will find it easier to locate support thanks to an expanded Multicultural LGBTIQA+ Support Directory we produced with other leading service providers across Sydney and NSW.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Many organisations providing services to CALD communities have swept this area of work under the carpet, simply placing it in the too hard basket for cultural and religious reasons, and sometimes fearing ruining relationships with stakeholders and clients. Through genuine and open discussions with staff, in which the reasoning is provided why we must operate as inclusive environments (not just culturally), we can turn on the lightbulb for staff and start changing our work environments to operate more inclusively – this is how we approached it at ADS. There are also legal requirements that we must adhere to – for example, Aged Care standards require specialised service delivery for LGTIQA+ communities.

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CHALLENGES

- While hugely rewarding, there were multiple challenges associated with the move towards organisational change. For example, there were some financial costs involved for a small organisation, to sign on to programs and to elicit expert advice and support during the process.
- As with all change, this transformation has been slow and has created a lot of additional work and reflection by the whole organisation.
- Huge amounts of time and internal work was needed to review all organisational documentation, approaches, policies and procedures.
- Garnering broad community support and buy-in has been a critical element of success, but this always takes time, and it is an ongoing journey.

OUTCOMES

- We have updated all our intake forms, policies and procedures including staff training to ensure our services are more inclusive of all people. This was supported by ACON's Pride in Health + Wellbeing program.
- A Champions program to support ADS LGBTIQA+ staff and client-based service delivery has been developed.
- We were chosen as an HWEI Gold Tier provider in the Australian LGBTQ Inclusion Awards for two years running (in 2019 and 2020). Further details for our 2019 award here.
- ADS is more equipped to provide service provision to LGBTIQA+ clients
- ADS is more aware of referral services – we developed the ADS Multicultural Support Directory
- As a result of training, staff are more aware of the issues and concerns facing newly arrived and CALD LGBTIQA+ communities including their intersectionality.
- We are becoming more known as an LGBTIQA+ inclusive organisation through the work we have done and how we are marketing and promoting ourselves.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Becoming a more accessible and inclusive organisation takes a lot of time, effort, resources, good will and hard work.
- Using effective marketing and media to make the work more visible and recognisable to the LGBTIQA+ and other communities is very important.
- It is vital to see that this is a journey, and that quality improvement requires ongoing training, learning and determination to embed inclusive practices across the whole organisation for it to be effective.
- Having community support and buy has been a key element of success.
- Making your organisation more inclusive and accessible is hugely rewarding for everyone.

Visit Advance Diversity Services at https://www.advancediversity.org.au/ **for more information.**