



# Lived Experience Interview Report

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## Executive Summary

This project was developed as part of the Working Together for Multicultural Communities Program funded by Family Safety Victoria, the program is a partnership agreement between Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) (MIC) and FVREE (free from family violence) who have developed a co-case management model to support clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds in accessing culturally appropriate family violence support. As part of the process in developing this collaborative partnership model, the two organisations sought to embed the voices of clients with lived experience of accessing family violence support through MIC into the design of the model. Through actively listening to the voices of clients, we hope to influence the way mainstream family violence services respond to multicultural communities when providing specialist family violence support.

The design of this partnership model attempts to reflect the collaboration between services and the ongoing connection with community. This project attempts to better understand the challenges faced by migrants and refugees who have attempted to access family violence support.

We invited former clients from MIC with lived experience of family violence to share their learnings and experiences with responses from 3 out of 5 former clients accepting to participate in a telephone interview with MIC. The participants were prompted to provide a re-count of their experience through a series of open-ended questions related to their experience and were encouraged to share what was comfortable for them. The interviews were conducted by the project workers involved in the Working Together Program, with the lead agency (MIC) hosting the interview and the partner organisation (FVREE) recording the conversation.

Key themes and learnings were drawn from the interviews which covered the following topics; collaboration between multicultural and mainstream services, ongoing support requirements post exiting a family violence service, barriers and enablers of accessing family violence support, effectiveness of interpreting services in the context of family violence, and the benefits of having a multicultural service involved when providing family violence support to CALD communities.

The outcomes from this process suggest that although participants mainly reported having a positive experience with service systems, there were numerous challenges that inhibited participants from receiving culturally appropriate support. These challenges are outlined in this report, along with a list of suggestions on how services can improve the provision of support given to migrants and refugees.

## Background and Purpose

The Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) (MIC) has been funded by Family Safety Victoria for the Working Together for Multicultural Communities Program. The aim of this

program is to develop a co-case management model between MIC and FVREE (specialist family violence service), to support migrants and refugees living in the Eastern Metropolitan Region, to access culturally responsive family violence support.

The MIC is a central hub for migrants and refugees to access settlement support when they are newly arrived in Australia and living in the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. It is through this relationship with the settlement worker that some clients disclose issues such as family violence. This is important to acknowledge, as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients face significant barriers to accessing mainstream family violence services. The client/worker relationship therefore provides an opportunity for the settlement worker to advocate for the client to access mainstream family violence services with their support.

The aim of this report is to increase MIC's awareness and understanding of the barriers and enablers influencing CALD women's access to family violence support. Through deep listening and reflection, there is an opportunity to improve and transform service systems to provide a better response that is appropriate to the needs of the community. The learnings from this project will be used to improve service system responses and to enhance the collaboration process between MIC and specialist family violence services. The findings of this report will contribute significantly to the evaluation of the Working Together Project to ensure that the co-case management model is client-centred and culturally relevant.

## Objectives of this report

- Identify gaps and barriers in the provision of family violence support from both MIC and external specialist family violence services.
- Collect qualitative data on a client's experience navigating the family violence service system.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the factors influencing the likelihood of a client from a migrant or refugee background engaging with family violence services and their experience of receiving support.
- Identify some of the challenges associated with navigating mainstream service systems through a cultural lens.
- Identify opportunities to strengthen the relationship and enhance collaboration between multicultural and family violence services to provide effective support and improved outcomes for clients.
- Generate recommendations to improve the provision of coordinated service responses to better support migrants and refugees who have experienced family violence.
- Integrate lived experience into the evaluation and outcomes of this project

## Audience & Intended Use

The learnings from the report will be used by MIC and shared with specialist family violence services to promote the development of collaborative service models that respond appropriately to the unique needs of migrant and refugee clients who are seeking support for

family violence related issues. Sharing these learnings with other organisations creates an opportunity to develop a more coordinated network of responses amongst social services in the EMR who provide family violence-related support to migrants and refugees. These learnings will also contribute to the evaluation process of the broader project to reflect on any future improvements or adaptations to enhance the development of the co-case management model between MIC and FVREE.

## Methodology

### Participants

5 previous female-identifying MIC clients who were supported by MIC staff to access external family violence support services were contacted by their MIC settlement worker and asked if they would like to participate in an interview about their service experience. Of the 5 clients contacted, 3 accepted to share their experience and gave consent for the MIC worker leading the project to contact them to further discuss the details of the interview. Arrangements were made with the 3 clients to organise a time and date for their interview within the next two weeks. All 3 participants requested for their interview to be via telephone consult and requested an interpreter to be present during their interview. The three participants had all migrated from Myanmar and each spoke a different Burmese dialect; Hakha Chin, Falam Chin and Mizo, therefore, 3 different interpreters were organised for the interviews. The clients were informed that they would be remunerated for sharing their invaluable experiences with MIC.

### Setting

The project workers conducted separate telephone interviews with each of the three participants, consisting of a semi-structured interview process. The interviews were guided via a set of open-ended questions, which provided the participants with the opportunity to share additional insights and allowed the interviewer to ask more in-depth questions based on participant responses. All interviews were conducted via telephone with an interpreter as requested by the participants. The interpreters used in the interviews were from Language Loop and Speak Your Language. The interviews took place over a 3-week period to allow for flexibility with meeting times to engage with the participants at their convenience. This timeframe also allowed for rapport building and consultation prior to the interviews to ensure comfort and safety in sharing their story.

### Consultation

A week prior to the interviews, participants were contacted by the project workers from MIC and FVREE with a telephone interpreter to facilitate introductions and establish rapport with the participant. Participants were informed of what would be discussed on the day of the interview and were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the interview process. The participants were also provided information on ethical matters such as privacy and confidentiality of personal information for this project. Verbal consent for the interview was also obtained during the initial consultation.

## Data Collection

The data from the interview was recorded via a written transcript completed by the FVREE project worker whilst the MIC project worker conducted the interview. Written recordings were consented to by the participants during the initial consultation prior to the interview and re-confirmed on the day of the interview.

*Note: 2 out of 3 of participants declined consent to having an audio recording of the phone call, therefore for the purpose of consistency, written transcripts were the method of choice for this project.*

## Data Analysis

Data was analysed by the project workers who compiled the collected information into themes and categorised the data into the following eight sections: *client interaction with MIC services, working with interpreters, multi-agency service engagement, collaboration between services, ongoing supports, barriers to engaging with services, barriers during the interview process for this project and suggested improvements for service engagement.* Under each section a list of themes was documented based on spoken and inferred information provided in the interviews. These themes were then transcribed into 6 key messages outlined in this report, followed by 7 recommended actions for improvement of service delivery. Anonymous quotes were drawn out from the written transcriptions and provided sufficient evidence for the conclusions outlined in the key messages below.

## Key Findings

### 1. Effective communication and collaboration between MIC and FVREE regarding support for the client resulted in the client having good experiences and maintaining engagement with both mainstream and multicultural services.

- Participants mostly reported that MIC worked well with other mainstream organisations to support them, however there was some disconnect in communication.

**Interview Question:** Did you feel all the services that you spoke to are working together to help you?

**Participants response:** “Yes, all organisations are working together for a common goal”.

**Interview Question:** Did MIC support you when you talked to FVREE? Did the two-organisations work together to support you?

**Participants response:** “I would say yes, as everything I’ve mentioned to MIC that I needed was provided by FVREE. I feel that MIC and FVREE collaborated really well.”

**Interview Question:** Did you feel like the services involved in your support were working together to support you? Could they have done anything better?

**Participants response:** “In terms of working together, they seem to work in different ways and separate from each other but there were no problems”.

2. Clients involved with multiple services that were providing family violence support found it difficult to understand and retain all the information provided, resulting in some disengagement from support.

- Some participants found the amount of support and involvement of multiple services confusing due to having low English literacy skills.

**Interview Question:** How did you feel being involved in multiple services?

**Participants response:** “It was really helpful in terms of working with multiple organisations. However, my only concern is that I find it difficult to remember the name of the organisation, as English is my second language, I cannot remember which one is which.”

**Interview Question:** Were you given any choices about the kind of help you got and explained to you who you could talk to?

**Participants response:** “Maybe yes, but I do not speak the language, so I never contact anyone.”

**Interview Question:** Did your family violence caseworker give you choices about your support?

**Participants response:** “They give choices as best as they can but because English limitations, I didn’t understand everything, and I also had children around me which made it hard. MIC staff told me about organisations, but I find it hard because they are in English words but because of my limited English I find it confusing and hard to understand. I thought If I could improve my English skills, it would be a better outcome.”

- The parenting responsibilities and lack of childcare and/or transport also prevented some participants from accessing some support services.

**Interview Question:** Can I ask why you decided not to attend the family violence service?

**Participants response:** “I am busy caring for my children. I couldn’t go to counselling and other services as taking the kids with me would be too hard and my driving isn’t great.”

**Interview Question:** What was the experience like at The Orange Door and what support did they offer?

**Participants response:** “The Orange Door gave me lots of things in pamphlets and letters, but I don’t know where they are. I think the kids played with them. They explained their service and they said I could come into the office if the husband was at the house”.

**Interview Question:** Did The Orange Door offer another way to make counselling support accessible to you as you couldn’t attend in-person?

**Participants response:** “Only MIC gave me options to attend counselling and other programs. I was given the option to attend online but because of the kids it’s hard. I guess because my mind is all over the place with the kids, the situation and everything else, my mind was not there to engage with these things. I wanted to stay home and be with the kids”.

### 3. Having a multicultural organisation involved in the referral process for family violence support resulted in improvement in client engagement with mainstream family violence services.

- Participants reported feeling supported by the MIC SETS workers, especially when engaging with family violence support services which fostered the acceptance of support from mainstream services.

**Interview Question:** Did MIC refer you to The Orange Door?

**Participants response:** “Yes, they took me to the place you are talking about, and they talked about all the things they can help me with. It was really good because during the situation I was really stressed and having the MIC worker there took the burden off my shoulders and made it more comfortable to deal with the situation.”

**Interview Question:** When you spoke to The Orange Door did MIC support you through the process?

**Participants response:** “Yes, my caseworker at MIC referred me to The Orange Door, the worker actually took me to The Orange Door in person. This was very helpful as without the MIC worker, I did not know where The Orange Door office was, so it was really helpful.”

**Interviewer:** Did you feel more comfortable to talk to TOD with the MIC worker there?

**Participants response:** “Yes, I feel very comfortable with the MIC caseworker.”

#### 4. Giving the client options when using interpreters will help create a safe environment for the client to engage with services.

- Participants reported that they were not given options regarding the gender of interpreters which made it more difficult for them to express themselves comfortably.

**Interview Question:** Do you remember how the interpreting experience was?

**Participants response:** “Yes, they booked the interpreter. I can understand the interpreter, but it’s a male interpreter. It’s hard to get interpreters, but I prefer a female interpreter”.

- Participants expressed satisfaction with the interpreter experience when accessing services.

**Interview Question:** How was your experience with the interpreter you spoke to?

**Participants response:** “I am happy with the interpreting experience. I understood the messages coming across.”

#### 5. Some participants required more complex integrated support post exiting the specialist family violence services, due to the impact of family violence on other aspects of their life.

- Participants required support that doesn’t typically fit into what’s available at mainstream family violence services, such as driving lessons which promotes autonomy, connection with friends, family and community support services, and reduces isolation. It also decreases dependency on others, such as the perpetrator, for transport.

**Interview Question:** Is there anything that MIC can do to better support you in the future?

**Participants response:** “Not at this moment, I am all good. But in the future, I might need to learn how to drive, and I will let MIC know when I’m ready”.

- Family violence issues in CALD communities are complex and there are limits to the support that mainstream family violence services can provide such as; finding stable housing.

**Interview Question:** Did FVREE help you with accommodation? Or it is still an ongoing issue?

**Participants response:** “Yes, FVREE was helping me with the accommodation and housing and basically everything else that I needed. I am currently still looking for a house to live in. The property I am currently in is being sold, and the properties on the market are really expensive, so the housing is an ongoing issue right now. Uniting and MIC are now both helping me in terms of the accommodation.”

**Interview Question:** Did The Orange Door help with housing (emergency accommodation)?

**Participants response:** “MIC helped with 3 rental applications and knew someone in the community and that’s how we found a house. The Orange Door only gave short term accommodation options. We didn’t take up the short-term accommodation option, I stayed with relatives.”

## Recommendations

### 1. Encourage Collaboration Between Multicultural and Mainstream Family Violence Services

- By developing a working co-case management model between mainstream family violence services and multicultural services will improve client engagement and provide more opportunity for the client to access family violence support.

### 2. Prioritise Essential Information in the Initial Stage of Engagement and Follow-up with Support Options at a Later Stage.

- Focus on addressing only the immediate priorities/concerns for the client when they present to the service. Organising external support services can be completed at a later stage when the client is ready.

### 3. Offer Flexible Appointment Options:

- Offer clients the option of flexible appointment arrangements, such as online meetings or safe locations chosen by the client, providing enhanced flexibility for attendance and engagement with services.

### 4. Streamline Support Options with a Designated Service

- With the client's consent and preference, designate one service to provide comprehensive advice on available support options from various services. Assist clients in creating a plan to reduce overwhelm associated with engagement with multiple services. In this project, it was identified that clients felt most comfortable having an MIC settlement worker explain all the services and support options. This may vary depending on which organisation workers are from and their relationship with the client.

### 5. Tailor Communication to Client Preferences

- Inquire about the client's preferred method of receiving information and explore appropriate communication means, considering that pamphlets, written materials, or complicated information given verbally may not always be practical or easy to comprehend.

### 6. Simplify Language and Minimise Jargon

- Encourage family violence services to minimize the use of jargon and explain complex terms only known in the English language for better client comprehension.

### 7. Personalise Strategies for Recording Important Information

- Collaborate with the client to identify the most beneficial methods for remembering essential information. This could involve writing down service names, the designated worker's contact details, and available support offerings. Provide tools such as a diary or calendar page to assist in recalling appointment dates, times, and relevant organisations.

### 8. Inquire about the clients' preferences when using an Interpreter.

- Ask the client whether they would prefer a female/male interpreter, if they would prefer an interpreter from within or outside of the state and ask if they would like to remain anonymous when speaking to the interpreter.

## Project Limitations

1. **Recruiting Participants for the Interviews:** due to the sensitive nature of the topic and cultural attitudes, it was difficult to recruit women who were willing to participate.

2. **Phone Interview with Interpreter:** During recruitment, participants expressed preference for a telephone interview with an interpreter. The following limitations experienced in this project are outlined below. These are consistent with the challenges faced by the project workers when conducting phone interviews with the interpreter.
- **Rapport/Relationship Building:** Building rapport with the client was challenging due to the interview taking place over the phone compared to in-person interaction where it is easier to connect with the participant. This was further compounded by the addition of an interpreter.
  - **Communication:** Conducting the interview via phone consultation impacted the quality of communication between the interviewer and participants through the inability to *interpret body language* and difficulties in *interpreting information*. It was reported by the interpreter that some English terms were difficult to translate into the Burmese dialects. This caused some confusion for the client and difficulties for the interpreter to explain complex terminology such as ‘domestic violence’.
  - **Cultural Factors**– There was a possibility of personal acquaintance between the interpreter and interviewee due to the limited number of community members who speak Burmese dialects. This may have impacted the interview quality and accuracy as privacy concerns arising from potential familiarity could have led to the client’s reluctance in sharing detailed experiences and insights.
  - **Social Cues**- At times throughout the interview the participant sounded uncomfortable to continue talking about their experience, notable through a sudden change in the length of response to questions as well as a reluctance to provide much detail. Efforts were made to check-in with the participant to determine whether they would like to continue the interview, however the participants agreed to continue despite their apparent discomfort. This was later confirmed by the interpreter who was also under the impression that the participant was uncomfortable talking during some parts of the interview.
  - **Phone-line Service:** In two of the interviews the phone interpreter cut-out on multiple occasions throughout the interviews which resulted in difficulties in re-connecting with the interpreting service and the participant. This interrupted the flow of conversation between the interviewer and the participant, resulting in the participant becoming disengaged at times from the conversation once re-connected. The participants were understanding of this issue with the phone-line service, however the extent to which the phone-line cut out affected the quality of the interview.
  - **Environmental Factors:** Due to caring responsibilities of one participant, there were children making noise in the background of the phone call making it difficult to communicate over the phone with the interpreter. Some of the interpreters

took the phone call in a non-private setting and so there was also background noise coming through the phone call at their end, making communication with the participant difficult.

## Potential solutions for future interviews

1. **Consider location of Interpreters:** Inquire if the participant would prefer an interpreter from a different state to enhance privacy and minimise the likelihood of the interpreter being acquainted with the participant. It is also recommended to ask the participant about their preference of gender for the interpreter. This fosters a safer environment for the participant to openly share their authentic experiences and opinions.
2. **Explore Video Call Interviews:** If an in-person interview is not feasible, explore the option of conducting a video call with an interpreter. This method provides the interviewer with a better opportunity to observe the participant's body language and facial cues, fostering improved communication and rapport.
3. **Notify the Interpreter in advance:** When arranging an interpreter for the interview, inform them about the sensitive nature of the conversation and ask them to ensure they locate a quiet space for the session. This approach enables the interpreter to demonstrate respect and establish a safe and comfortable environment for the participant to share their experiences free from noise or interruptions.