



"Developing Communities, Developing Needs, Khmer Research 2003"

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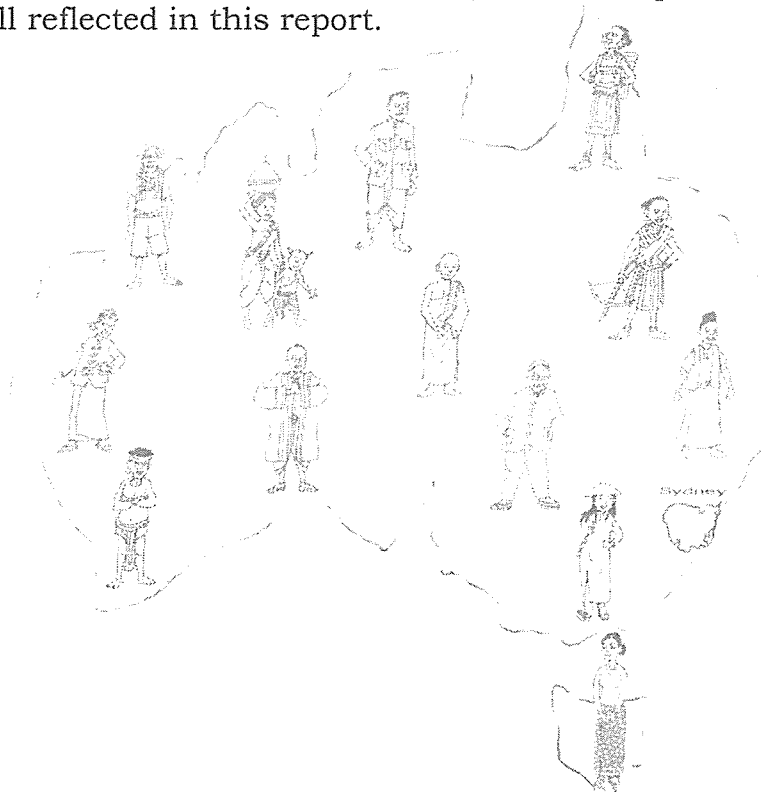
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1. INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the project was:

Provide an updated client profile and needs analysis of Khmer and other Cambodian born ethnic groups (Khmer, Rural Khmer, Khmer Kampuchea Krom, Khmer Chinese, Khmer Korla, Khmer Leur, Khmer Cham, Thai Dam, Kuy, Phong and other such groups as are shown to be living in NSW).

This report builds on the needs assessment conducted in 1998 – ‘*Old and New Generations of Khmer Settling in New South Wales*’. *Cambodian Profile*. It presents a picture of a community growing in complexity and diversity as migration patterns change. It identifies both on-going needs and emerging needs within the communities in NSW and places these within the context of community capacity building over the next 3 years.

Community capacity building is an approach aimed at developing independence and sustainability within communities. It incorporates the idea of a shared responsibility for this between Governments and communities, and particularly works to redress social exclusion, inequality and vulnerability in the community.

The first part of the report outlines the methods used in assessing needs. Four main methods were used:

- Developing a ‘snapshot’ of the communities through data from the 2001 Census.
- A number of focus groups with a very wide range of members of the communities.
- Interviews with key individual informants who were either leading members of the community or working to provide services for Khmer in NSW.
- A review of literature that could place the findings in current thinking about community capacity building and the provision of services.

The second part presents the ‘snapshot’ developed from the Census. Comparisons are drawn between the 1998 snapshot and that in 2001, and between data on Khmer speakers in NSW, the general NSW population, and the Australian population as a whole.

The third part reports on what those consulted value about living in Australia. Often needs assessments are only lists of problems experienced. It is important to also identify what is working well for members of the communities.



The fourth part is a discussion of issues of identity, leadership and community priorities. This is a rich and rewarding discussion being conducted within the communities, a sign of healthy and maturing communities. It is here that the concept of community capacity building is briefly outlined.

The rest of the report presents a series of issue areas identified as of broadest concern by those consulted. Each section reports on the experience of those consulted, identifies what service provision there is already to address the concerns raised, and makes recommendations for the future.

Snapshot at the 2001 Census

- Around 8,500 Khmer in NSW.
- Virtually all Khmer live in Sydney, and the majority of them live in Fairfield/Cabramatta/Liverpool
- The majority of Khmer are Buddhist.
- It is on the whole a younger population than that for all of NSW or all of Australia.
- There has been significant growth in the numbers of Khmer 0 – 24 years.
- The number of elderly remains much smaller than that for all of NSW or Australia.
- Khmer are more likely to be divorced or separated than the general NSW and Australian populations.
- Less than two-thirds say they speak English well or very well, and women are less likely to say this.
- About a quarter of the population say they have never attended school. Those who do attend school to secondary level are staying in study longer.
- Khmer's obtain Post Graduate qualifications at about half the rate of the rest of the Australian population. The number of those with Bachelor qualifications is similar to that generally in NSW.
- Khmer are less likely to own their own homes and are more likely to be renting than the general NSW and Australian populations.
- Khmer households are more likely to be made up of a husband and wife couple with children than the general NSW or Australian household.
- Khmer looking for work are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the general Australian population.
- Khmer are much more likely to be in blue collar and clerical work than the general NSW or Australian population.
- The median household income of Khmer is lower than that of the NSW population, but similar to that of the median household income for all of Australia.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That the Khmer communities in NSW be funded to develop and implement a Community Capacity Building Program (CCBP) over 3 years. The framework for this could be the Capacity Building Framework as developed by NSW Health. The specific strategies in the Program should include the Recommendations made in this report together with additional strategies that emerge over the course of implementation of the CCBP.

Recommendation 2

That significant elements in the CCBP should be:

- Developing a strong Khmer-Australian identity.
- Examining models of community leadership that are appropriate to the developing needs of the community.
- Developing structures and processes for training community members, particularly women and young people.
- Engaging the communities in discussion aimed at guiding the priorities for community development and fund-raising.
- Training and support for management committees and workers in community organisations providing services to the communities.

Recommendation 3

That CAWC continue to be funded as the agency responsible for developing and implementing the CCBP.

Recommendation 4

That Federal and State Government, local businesses employing Khmer Australians, and community organisations providing services to Khmer develop a comprehensive project aimed at maximising the opportunities for Khmer Australian adults to become proficient in English. The project focus should be on embedding language learning within information and service delivery, in the workplace and in existing and future social events and activities.

Recommendation 5

That Federal and State Governments and the Khmer communities enter into discussions on options for further training and deploying of bilingual/bicultural workers within the communities. That priority in these discussions should be given to addressing the needs of Khmer Kampuchea Krom.



Recommendation 6

That initiatives aimed at developing the Khmer language proficiency of young people in the Khmer communities should be supported by Governments and through community fund-raising ventures.

Recommendation 7

That Federal and State Governments and the Khmer community jointly develop a comprehensive family intervention and support program. Elements of this program could include:

- Early childhood services (playgroups, motherhood classes, infant home nursing, family day care, effective parenting courses) conducted at decentralised sites that are easily accessed by walking.**
- Out of school care programs attached to community organisations such as temples.**
- Culturally appropriate family therapy and adolescent support services.**
- Enhanced bicultural/bilingual services to support women victims of domestic violence.**

Community education focussed around the development of a Khmer Australian identity that integrates the positive elements of Khmer traditional family practices with the positive elements of Australian family practices.

Recommendation 8

That a comprehensive age services plan for the Khmer elderly be developed between the Federal and State governments and the Khmer communities. Elements of this plan could include:

- Day centre programs building on existing social networks centred on temples.**
- Home care services pairing volunteer visitors from within the Khmer communities with professional staff to address client concerns about privacy and safety.**
- Enhanced community transport services.**
- Aged persons accommodation within easy access to temples.**

Recommendation 9

That CAWC be funded to conduct a more detailed study of housing need within the Khmer community.

That the NSW Office of Community Housing, CAWC and other community organisations meet to consider the options for increasing the number of Khmer families housed through community housing programs. Consideration should be given to funding a cooperative



housing program similar to those funded for other CALD populations such as Vietnamese, Islander and Tamil.

That CAWC enter into discussion with tenant organisations with a view to developing community education for Khmer renters on their rights and means of redress.

Recommendation 10

That Federal and State governments address the need for bilingual/bicultural health and allied health professionals in the Khmer community.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Health Department work with the Khmer community to develop strategies for better access to drug and alcohol detoxification services.

Recommendation 12

That Federal and State governments provide enhanced resources to Government and community services for the Khmer communities to enable these services to provide outreach programs to smaller Khmer communities outside of the Fairfield/Cabramatta area.

Recommendation 13

That the Khmer Kampuchea Krom community be supported in accessing training in interpreting.

That the Federal Government support the Khmer Kampuchea Krom in their lobbying of the United Nations to continue to recognise them as an ethnic minority within Vietnam and to ensure the protection of their human rights, particularly those of freedom to practice their beliefs and freedom of movement.

Recommendation 14

That CAWC, the University of Western Sydney, the NSW Department of Agriculture and Fairfield Council meet with the Khmer Farmer's Association to draw up a comprehensive development strategy for the Association which can address the issues raised in this needs assessment.



2. METHODOLOGY

Four methods were used to collect information for this needs assessment.

- Statistical data collection.
- Key informant interviews.
- Focus groups.
- Literature review.

2.1 Statistical data collection

Data was collected from the following sources.

- Review of relevant data from the Australian Census of 2001.
- Supplementary information on Khmer migration for the period 1/1/2001 – 31/12/2002 provided by DIMA.
- Relevant data on a range of social and health indicators provided by Government Departments and Federal and State levels. This data is reported on at different levels corresponding to the most accessible level at which the data is initially collected. The data is not presented in a profile, but is presented in the section of the Findings to which the data relates. For example, available data on child protection notifications is presented in the section in the Findings in which there is discussion of perceptions of abuse within Khmer families.

2.2 Key Informant Interviews

This information was collected from a wide range of individuals in existing Government and non-Government services to the communities. The services contacted included:

- Centrelink
- NSW Department of Community Services
- NSW Department of Education
- NSW Department of Police - Ethnic Liaison Officers
- NSW Department of Health
- The principal of the Khmer Community School
- Mimosa Women's Refuge
- Community Settlement Service workers with the Khmer Community of NSW Inc.
- Members of the Cambodian Australian Welfare Council.
- UnitingCare Burnside
- Hume Community Housing
- STARTTS

2.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with different population groups within the communities. The groups conducted included:



- A group of the elderly centred on the Stuart Street temple in Canley Vale (20 women, 8 men).
- A group of students from all years at Cabramatta High School (6 boys, 13 girls).
- A group of newly arrived Khmer adults attending English classes with ACL (19 women, 6 men).
- The Khmer Community Interagency (12 agencies represented, both Government and NGO).
- Khmer Women attending a group auspiced by CAWC and conducted at Uniting Care Burnside (8 women).
- A group of men from the Khmer Farmers Association (13 men).
- Members of the Campbelltown Khmer Community Association (3 women and 6 men).
- Members of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Association (2 men and 1 woman).
- A group of young adults from an emerging Khmer youth organisation (3 women and 5 men).
- A group of Khmer living in the Campbelltown area and accessing the services of Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre (12 women and 3 men).

2.4 Literature Review

Literature reviews were conducted in two areas.

a) Profiling and needs assessment of Khmer communities

This was not a fruitful area of data collection. As there had been an extensive use of literature in the 1998 report, this search concentrated on trying to locate studies that have been conducted into Khmer emigrant communities since 1998. An extensive search was done on two fronts:

- A broad Internet search which identified a range of potential sites. These included research bodies with an interest in Asian and multicultural studies, and Khmer associations and organizations. This search was unsuccessful. The literature identified here was of little use in taking the discussion of the issues for Khmer communities much beyond that canvassed in the 1998 report, still largely focussed on refugee re-settlement and torture and trauma issues.
- A targeted search in health and welfare indices. This identified some lines of investigation and is reported on at appropriate areas in this report.

(b) Contextualising the findings

The literature collected here was that which presented theoretical frameworks and models within which to analyse the findings in a way that can suggest effective future intervention.



3. CENSUS 2001 PROFILE

In this section, significant demographic features of the Khmer communities are described statistically. Where possible, the data is compared with two other data sources:

- 1996 Census data as reported in the 1998 profile of the community, which gives a picture of the changes in the population over the five years from 1996-2001.¹
- 2001 Census data for all of New South Wales, which gives a picture of how the Khmer communities compare to the overall profile of people in the State, where that information is relevant and available.
- 2001 Census data for all of Australia, which gives a picture of how the Khmer communities compare to the overall profile of people in the country, where that information is relevant and available.

3.1 Snapshot at the 2001 Census

- Around 8,500 Khmer in NSW.
- Virtually all Khmer live in Sydney, and the majority of them live in Fairfield/Cabramatta/Liverpool Local Government Areas (LGAs)
- The majority of Khmer are Buddhist.
- It is, on the whole, a younger population than that for all of NSW or all of Australia.
- There has been significant growth in the numbers of Khmer 0 – 24 years.
- The number of elderly remains much smaller than that for all of NSW or Australia.
- Khmer are more likely to be divorced or separated than the general NSW and Australian populations.
- Less than two-thirds say they speak English well or very well, and women are less likely to say this.
- About a quarter of the population say they have never attended school. Those who do attend school to secondary level are staying in study longer.
- Khmer people obtain Post Graduate qualifications at about half the rate of the rest of the Australian population. The number of those with Bachelor qualifications is similar to that generally in NSW.
- Khmer are less likely to own their own homes and are more likely to be renting than the general NSW and Australian populations.
- Khmer households are more likely to be made up of a “husband and wife with children” grouping than the general NSW or Australian household.
- Khmer looking for work are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the general Australian population.

¹ Khmer Community in NSW Inc & Ettinger House, 1998



- Khmer are much more likely to be in blue collar and clerical work than the general NSW or Australian population.
- The median household income of Khmer is lower than that of the NSW population, but similar to that of the median household income for all of Australia.

3.2 Number of Khmer in NSW

The Census gives people three ways to describe their cultural/linguistic background – by birthplace, by language and by ancestry (a category not used in the 1996 Census).

Table 1. Number of Khmer in NSW

| | Birthplace stated as Cambodia | Language spoken at home stated as Khmer | Ancestry stated as Khmer |
|-------------|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1996 Census | 9318 | 7564 | N/A |
| 2001 Census | 9709 | 8239 | 8020 |

The figure for those stating their birthplace as Cambodia is higher in both Censuses as it includes a large number of ethnic Chinese, some Thai, and also some people of European and English background. The figure for those stating their language as Khmer includes some people who were born in Vietnam but identify as Khmer. The figure for those identifying with Khmer ancestry is closer to that of those who speak Khmer at home. For these reasons, it was agreed that the purposes of this needs assessment would best be served if further census data collected was based on the 8239 people who stated their language as Khmer.

Additional information supplied by DIMIA indicates that 272 Khmer speakers settled in NSW during the period 1/1/2001 – 31/12/2002.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this:

- The total number of Khmer in NSW as at the beginning of 2003 is around 8,500 people (allowing for deaths and births not accounted for in the census and DIMIA figures).
- Between 1996 - 2003 the proportion of those in the community born in Cambodia and who also speak Khmer has grown.

On these figures, the Khmer population is 0.5% of the population of all people in 2001 in NSW who were born overseas.

3.2 Place of residence

The data on place of residence shows that Khmer in NSW live in a very small geographic area, a picture unchanged since the 1996 Census:

- 99% live in Sydney (98% in 1996).



- 98% of those who live in Sydney live in Western Sydney (Census sub-divisions of Canterbury-Bankstown, Fairfield-Liverpool, Outer South Western Sydney, Central Western Sydney, Outer Western Sydney and Blacktown).
- 82% of all Khmer in NSW live in the Fairfield-Liverpool census subdivision.
- Of those who live outside Sydney, no census subdivision has more than .5% of the total population of Khmer in NSW.

These percentages are steady across gender and age divisions.

3.3 Religion

There has been an increase in the proportion of people in the Khmer community who state their religion as Buddhism from 65% in 1996 to 87% in 2001. There has been a corresponding decrease in the proportion of those who state their religion as Western Christian of some kind.

3.4 Gender and age

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the Khmer population by age and gender. Percentages for male and female indicate percentages for that age group. Percentage figures for persons indicate percentage of that age group compared to all ages.

Table 2. Gender and age

| Age | Male | Female | Persons | NSW | Aus. |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| 0 - 14 | 902 (50%) | 902 (50%) | 1804 (22%) | 21% | 21% |
| 15 - 24 | 863 (49%) | 895 (51%) | 1758 (21%) | 13% | 13% |
| 25 - 34 | 674 (46%) | 805 (54%) | 1479 (18%) | 30% | 30% |
| 35 - 44 | 707 (49%) | 746 (51%) | 1453 (18%) | | |
| 45 - 54 | 495 (50%) | 491 (50%) | 986 (12%) | 23% | 23% |
| 55 - 64 | 185 (49%) | 195 (51%) | 380 (5%) | | |
| 65+ | 136 (38%) | 224 (62%) | 360 (4%) | 13% | 13% |
| Total | 3962 (48%) | 4258 (52%) | 8220 | | |

These figures indicate the following:

- The Khmer population in NSW continues to be a young population, with 61% being aged 0 – 34 years (53% in 1996). This is a younger population than that of all of NSW and all of Australia.



- There has been a very significant shift in the proportion of those aged 0 – 14, with only 7% of the population in this range in 1996 and 22% being in this range in 2001. The bulk of these are most likely Australian born children. This population is now proportionally comparable with the general population in NSW.
- The Khmer population for those 15 – 24 (21%) is higher than that for NSW and for Australia as a whole (13%). Similarly, the Khmer population of those 25 – 44 (36%) is higher than for the NSW and Australia as a whole (30%).
- The elderly continue to be a small percentage of the Khmer settlers, with only 4% aged 65+ years in 2001, and here females continue to substantially outnumber males. Also, the Khmer population over 65 years (4%) is proportionally only third as great as that of those over 65 in the NSW and the Australian populations (13%)
- The proportion of male to female in most categories does not vary much from 1:1, and this was also the case in 1996.
- In both Censuses, there are noticeably more females than males in the 25 – 34 age group in the Khmer population. This is different to the general state population where the proportions of male to female are around 1:1.
- There are many more females proportionally in the Khmer 65+ population than there are in the general state population.

3.5 Marital Status

The 1998 profile did not consider marital status. However, as early consultations for the 2003 needs assessment suggested that there was a concern for a perceived high level of family breakdown, 2001 Census data is included here.

Table 3. Marital status and age

| | 15 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65+ | Total |
|---------------|------------|------------|---------|------------|------------|-----|-------|
| Never married | 1536 | 443 | 144 | 48 | 8 | 18 | 2197 |
| Widowed | 9 | 24 | 33 | 62 | 66 | 154 | 348 |
| Divorced | 9 | 109 | 133 | 72 | 22 | 17 | 362 |
| Separated | 6 | 85 | 78 | 60 | 23 | 10 | 262 |
| Married | 195 | 817 | 1070 | 743 | 260 | 173 | 3258 |

These figures indicate the following:

- Of those of marriageable age, 34% have never been married, of which the majority are 15 – 24 years old, as could be expected.
- Of those who have been married at some time (excluding widows), 16% are either divorced or separated. This is higher than the rate in the general population in NSW where 10% of those who have been married are either divorced or separated, and also the general Australian population where the figure is 11%. In the Khmer population, 20% of those aged 25 –34 who have been married are



now either separated or divorced, and 16% of those aged 35 – 44 who have been married are either separated or divorced.

- When we look at a gender breakdown (not shown in Table 3), females make up the overwhelming proportion of those who are widowed in the age groups 45 – 54 (94%), 55 – 64 (95%) and 65+ (89%). For those 65+, female widowed make up nearly half their total population.

3.6 English Language Proficiency

The Census asks people to identify whether they speak English very well, well, not well, or not at all.

Table 4. English language proficiency

| | Male | Female | Total persons |
|------------|------|--------|---------------|
| Very well | 1393 | 1290 | 2683 (33%) |
| Well | 1285 | 1051 | 2336 (29%) |
| Not well | 1020 | 1332 | 2352 (29%) |
| Not at all | 190 | 517 | 707 (9%) |

From this information we can conclude the following:

- There has been a drop since 1996 in the proportion of people stating they speak English not well or not all – 49% in 1996 and 38% in 2001.
- There continues to be a greater proportion of females who are less proficient in English at all levels than are males. This is most noticeable for those who say they do not speak English well or do not speak English at all – 44% for females but 31% for males.

3.7 Education

Two sets of data are presented below. The first indicates participation in secondary schooling past Year 8 or its equivalent, Year 8 being the highest level of compulsory schooling in New South Wales. The second looks at the achievement in non-school based qualifications. The figures are for all of those in the Census population aged 15 years and over. The percentage figures for males and females for a category of participation indicate the proportion of males or females for that category compared with males or females across all categories of participation in schooling.

**Table 5. Highest level of secondary school participation past Year 8**

| | Male | Female | All persons |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Did not go to school | 621 (22%) | 975 (31%) | 1596 (27%) |
| Year 8 or below | 253 (9%) | 431 (14%) | 684 (11%) |
| Year 9 or equivalent | 94 (3%) | 122 (4%) | 216 (4%) |
| Year 10 or equivalent | 394 (14%) | 354 (11%) | 748 (12%) |
| Year 11 or equivalent | 209 (7%) | 146 (5%) | 355 (6%) |
| Year 12 or equivalent | 1084 (38%) | 879 (28%) | 1963 (33%) |

From this material we can say the following:

- The proportion of those who have never attended school is higher in 2001 (27%) than in 1996 (18%), and males are much more likely to have never attended school.
- The proportion of those who left school around the age of 15 is lower in 2001 (11%) than in 1996 (17%), though females are more likely to have left early than are males.
- The proportion of those who have attended school to Year 12 or its equivalent is similar in 2001 (33%) to 1996 (34%), but females are much less likely to have completed Year 12.
- Overall, more people have remained longer at secondary school in 2001 than did in 1996.

Table 6. Non-school qualifications

| | Male | Female | All persons | Khmer | NSW | Aus |
|---|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------|-----|-----|
| Postgraduate Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate | 25 (4%) | 3 (1%) | 28 (3%) | | 9% | 7% |
| Bachelor Degree | 177 (32%) | 89 (22%) | 266 (27%) | | 28% | 40% |
| Advanced Diploma, Diploma, Certificate | 353 (65%) | 309 (77%) | 662 (70%) | | 63% | 53% |

From this material we can say the following of those who have continued into tertiary education

- Over two-thirds of the Khmer population (70%) with non-school qualifications have only attained Diploma and Certificate level qualifications compared with 63% for the NSW population and 53% for the Australian population.



- The proportion of Khmer with a Bachelor's Degree is similar to that of the NSW population, both of which are much lower than the Australian population as a whole.
- The proportion of the Khmer population (3%) with Post Graduate/Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificates is a third that of the NSW population and less than half that of the Australian population.

It is difficult to establish a figure for participation in tertiary education by all those who could participate in it, as entry into some kind of tertiary education is possible as early as Year 10, and many students in Years 11 – 12 pursue tertiary level vocational subjects within their secondary curriculum under the present flexible learning pathways in New South Wales.

3.8 Housing and household composition

There have been some changes in the pattern of housing tenure since 1996.

- The proportion of those who fully own their own homes has remained the same - 31 % in 2001 and in 1996. Of these, the majority were separate houses (88%).
- However, there is a higher proportion who say they are purchasing their home in 2001 (27%) than in 1996 (19%). The majority of these also were separate houses (87%).
- The level of ownership or purchasing in the Khmer community (58%) was less than that for the NSW population (64%) and for the Australian population (66%).
- 42% of those in the Khmer community live in rented housing of which less than half were separate houses (41%). This is a much higher level of rental than in the NSW population (28%) and the Australian population (26%).

The 1996 profile did not consider household composition. The figures for 2001 show the following:

- 58% were a couple family with dependent children and 5% were a couple family with non-dependent children. This total of 63% of couple families with children is much higher than the NSW population (48%) and the Australian population (47%).
- 12% were a couple family without children.
- 20% were a one parent family with dependent children, and this is also higher than the NSW figure (16%) and the Australian figure of (15%).

3.9 Employment

Employment data shows a different picture in 2001 than in 1996 in a number of areas.



Table 7. Employment figures by age and sex

| | 15 - 24 | | 25 - 34 | | 35 - 44 | | 45 - 54 | | 55 - 64 | | 65+ | | All | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| Employee | 214 | 260 | 431 | 285 | 385 | 145 | 229 | 88 | 47 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 1315 | 797 |
| Employer | 7 | 3 | 46 | 30 | 49 | 35 | 32 | 18 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 141 | 86 |
| Own account worker | 7 | 5 | 34 | 18 | 57 | 18 | 40 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 143 | 56 |
| Contributing family worker | 7 | 13 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 22 |
| Unemployed looking for full time work | 81 | 58 | 55 | 32 | 83 | 49 | 65 | 27 | 24 | 14 | 5 | 0 | 313 | 180 |
| Unemployed looking for part time work | 48 | 43 | 7 | 17 | 8 | 24 | 7 | 16 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 73 | 106 |
| Not in the labour force | 492 | 507 | 89 | 401 | 117 | 466 | 115 | 325 | 100 | 157 | 121 | 208 | 1034 | 2064 |



What these figures show is the following:

- 20% of those who are in the labour force are unemployed, with the majority of them wanting full time work. That figure is similar whether we are considering unemployed females as a proportion of all females in the labour force or unemployed males compared to all males in the labour force. The figures show an improvement on those of 1996 where 26% of males and 36% of females were unemployed. At the time of the 2001 Census, however, the unemployment rate in the general state population was just 7.2%.
- 30% of those aged 15 – 24 who are in the labour force are unemployed (35% of the males in the labour force and 31% for females in the labour force).
- Almost twice as many males than females are looking for full time work, while more females than males are looking for part time work. This is consistent with the pattern for all of NSW and Australia.
- Of all the males and females looking for work, more are looking for full time work (81% of males looking for work, and 62% of females looking for work). This is consistent with the pattern for all of NSW and Australia.
- Females make up a significant proportion of those who state they are employers (37%) and own account worker (28%)
- Very few people over 15 years say they are a contributing family worker, that is, working in their family business (.5% of the workforce).
- Males make up a significant proportion of those who are not in the labour force between the ages of 34 years and 64 years.
- For females over 24 years of age, 46% do not participate in the workforce.

Table 8. Occupations by gender

| | M | F | All | NSW | Aus |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Managers and administrators | 110 (7%) | 40 (4%) | 150 (6%) | 9% | 9% |
| Professionals and associate professionals | 249 (16%) | 150 (16%) | 399 (16%) | 31% | 30% |
| All clerical services (including sales) | 193 (12%) | 437 (48%) | 630 (24%) | 17% | 17% |
| Tradespersons and related workers | 307 (20%) | 47 (5%) | 354 (14%) | 12% | 12% |
| Labourers and related workers | 374 (24%) | 186 (20%) | 560 (22%) | 8% | 9% |
| Production and transport | 335 (21%) | 70 (8%) | 405 (16%) | | |

These figures tell us the following:

- Two thirds of all males are involved in traditional 'blue collar' labouring jobs. A significant proportion of females are also involved in these areas (33%). Overall, just over half (52%) of all those in



employment are involved in these areas, and this has changed little since 1996. This is significantly different to the NSW and Australian figures.

- Nearly half of all females are in clerical services. When this category is broken down further (figures not shown in Table 8) few of these females are in advanced clerical positions (14% of all females), with most in the category of elementary clerical and sales (23% of all females). The overall percentage of those involved in advanced clerical has fallen by between 1996 (2%) and 2001 (1%). Again, these rates are higher than in the overall NSW and Australian populations.
- The proportions of males and females in the professional category are the same within their own genders (16%), but men make up 62% of professionals overall. The proportion overall of those in this category - 16% - has not changed little between 1996 and 2001. These rates are significantly lower than in the NSW and Australian population overall. The situation is similar for those classed as managers and administrators.

3.10 Household Income

This was not considered in the 1996 profile, but is included here as background to later discussions about poverty in the Khmer communities. In the 2001 Census the following is shown:

- 11% of all households earn less than \$300 per week.
- 22% of all households earn between \$300 - \$599 per week.
- 17% of all households earn between \$600 - \$799 per week.
- 6% of all households earn between \$800 - \$999 per week.
- 29% of all households earn between \$1000 - \$1500 per week.
- 15% of all households earn over \$1500 per week.

The median household income, (the level at which 50% of households earn under the amount and 50% earn over the amount,) is \$800 per week. The median household income figure for all of NSW is in the income bracket of \$800 - \$999, so Khmer households are generally more likely to be earning less than comparable NSW households. This may be explained by both the large numbers of Khmer in labouring and clerical employment and by the greater proportion renting their accommodation at a high proportion of their household income. The Khmer figure is comparable to that for the Australian population generally (\$700 - \$799).



4. DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES

It is essential to understand that the Khmer communities in NSW are as diverse as the general communities of NSW. That is, the communities are not homogeneous when it comes to their background nor their experience of living in NSW. This is not only a matter of sub-ethnicities within the Khmer, but also matters of class, gender, age, and circumstances of entry into Australia.

It is also essential to understand that the individual experience of Khmer and their families is also as varied as the experience of individuals and their families within the wider society. That is, while the needs assessment identifies broad issues of concern it cannot be assumed that any individual Khmer person or their family will necessarily be affected by the issue identified. For example, it would be wrong to characterise all relationships between parents and children as ones of cultural conflict and so marked by tension. The capacity of a family of migrants to adapt to their new society will depend on their prior experience of adapting to change of this magnitude and on the fit of their values and aspirations with that new society.

Finally, much of what is identified is not particular to the Khmer communities, but is common to other culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and indeed at times to mainstream Australian society as a whole. Many of the issues facing the Khmer communities are characteristic of the evolution of immigrant communities in general in the Australian setting over the past 50 years.

What emerges is a picture of a maturing community with all its strengths and weaknesses, its risks and its challenges.



5. WHAT KHMER COMMUNITIES VALUE ABOUT LIFE IN AUSTRALIA

The consultant believed that it was important to ask what it was that Khmer community members consulted valued and/or enjoyed about their life in Australia – both what attracted them here and what they have come to value subsequently. The answers here speak to the expectations Khmer migrants and long-term residents have – whether they came as refugees or under spousal and family reunion programs. Understanding this provides a context in part for the needs as expressed. It is also important to recognise that what is valued sometimes has its downside from the view of the community members. Where this is so, both what is valued and what is of concern are identified. This means that sometimes the issue of need is ‘a question of balance’, as a key informant put it.

(a) Education

Success in education is highly valued. The system of education in NSW is seen very positively. In this context, education means primary and secondary schooling (generally in the public school system) and tertiary education through TAFE and university. For the primary and secondary years, it is valued because of the following:

- It is free till the end of Year 12 (school uniforms and other administrative fees excepted).
- The comprehensiveness of the subjects covered, though there is concern that education in Khmer is not generally provided in secondary schools.
- The quality of the teaching staff.
- The willingness of school to bring matters of concern to the notice of parents before the school takes disciplinary action.

At the same time there is a concern among many adults that the education system gives children and young people too much information about their rights fails in adequately disciplining their children. There is also sometimes concern for the influence of non-Khmer peers on their children, particularly non-Asian children. The issue here comes back to perceptions that school and peers encourage or support children questioning the authority of parents and promoting values that are seen to be antithetical to Khmer cultural practices and norms.

Adults value their access to further education through TAFE or University, but are concerned at cut-backs to TAFE Outreach in particular and to the imposition of fees for tertiary education. Many of them will not be able to afford to undertake the skills development they believe they need to secure better paid employment.



(b) Health care

Again, health care is valued because it is free (most of those consulted use general practitioners who bulk bill and the public hospital system) and comprehensive. They value the principles of universal minimum standards of health cover, coming from a system where the quality of health care depended on what you could afford.

The safety net on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme is valued as it offsets the impact of high costs in other areas such as rent. Community members also value the hygiene and environmental standards of Australian society, or at least their experience of Sydney, to which much of their experience is confined, is 'clean'.

There is concern at the lack of Khmer-speaking health professionals and the limited access to on-call interpreter services.

(c) Income

Generally, those who work are pleased that they are able to earn more than they could in Cambodia. However, for many, this is off-set by the kind of work they engage in (labouring and low level clerical) and the costs that eat into the mostly single family income, particularly housing and food. Farmers have concern for the capital costs of their farms and for the uncertainty of financial return.

(d) Income Support

The presence of a range of income support is valued – sickness allowance, pensions, unemployment benefits, AusStudy, Family Allowance (particularly for new families with young children). The elderly appreciate having the Seniors Card and other concessions.

However, income support for young people who leave home and that available to women who are separated are both areas that come in for criticism as encouraging the break-up of families.

(e) Housing

Most adults consulted were in rental accommodation. They are overwhelmingly positive about the standard of the accommodation – it is cleaner, sounder, roomier than that in Cambodia, in their experience. However, rents are reportedly high relative to household income, and tenants lack the knowledge and the language to enforce their rights. Few say they are able to save enough to be able to afford a deposit on a house in the near future.



(f) Law and order

Adults almost universally say they value this aspect of Australian society. This is both support for policing and also more generally for the presence of laws that give community members a sense of safety and security. They also frequently say that they value the absence of 'corruption'.

The corollary to this support for law and order is a male perception that women have too many 'rights' and parental perceptions that children similarly have too many 'rights'. The perceived impact here is the loss of respect for husbands on the one hand and parents on the other and the breakdown of the family unit as a result. The perceived 'freedom' of young women in particular concerns them.

Women on the other hand value their rights here, seeing them as human rights they have been denied in Cambodia. Young people also value having rights, but recognise that some young people can use these aggressively in some families.

Many of the women consulted report being robbed or having their bag stolen, but they see this as part of urban living.



6. COMMUNITY PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

In May 2003, CAWC held its annual State Conference. The theme of the Conference was *'Seizing Our Future'. Australian-Khmer: reflecting on our cycle of life and creating a positive destiny*. It is a measure of the maturity of the community that many of the presentations at the conference considered the questions of leadership within the community, the role of emerging community organisations, and the priorities of the community, particularly in relation to community fund-raising.

These issues were also the subject of discussion in the interviews and focus groups conducted for the needs assessment. Three areas are reported on below:

- Community identity.
- Leadership and succession.
- Group needs versus community needs.

6.1 Community identity

There is considerable discussion within the communities about the nature of Khmer Australian identity. There is a belief that forging a strong identity which integrates the positive elements of the pre - Pol Pot identity with elements borrowed from the Australian experience will play an important role in shaping the future of the community and of the individuals within it.

Emerging theories of individual and community development support this view. These models – so-called *'risk factor/protective factor'* approaches – emphasise the importance of identification with community (its values, culture, language, aspirations) as a factor in preventing the development of problem/risk behaviour in individuals and families (crime, family disintegration, abuse of drug and alcohol etc.). These are the models that underpin recent Federal and State Government programs that aim to address early intervention with children, families and young people, and community rebuilding.²

There is a perception that a first step in this will be for the community to move beyond a 'refugee mentality'. That is, that there is a need to put the Pol Pot years behind and to build identity instead on the positive characteristics of the Khmer people which has enabled their survival and growth both in Cambodia and in Australia. The way forward that is most consistently proposed is two-fold:

- A revival of 'the spirit of Angkor', by which is meant a revival of pride in one's people and their accomplishments, including a revival of a sense of capability and strength to replace what is seen to be a

² See for example Centre for Community Child Health, 2000; Victorian Department of Human Services, 2000; Attorney General's Department, 1999.



current acceptance of self-defeat and powerlessness. The latter is seen to be the result of the years of colonialism compounded by the Pol Pot period, ones in which the Khmer people were taught to see themselves as inferior.³

- Placing Buddhism and its precepts at the centre of community values and accepted behaviour. There is much discussion at the anomaly in recent years of Western societies turning towards Buddhism as an alternative set of guiding values and what is seen as Khmer communities' investing in the very values being criticised by these Westerners. At the same time, there may be aspects of Buddhism that will not sit well with aspirations and expectations that Khmer in Australia are exposed to. For example, an emphasis on individual self-expression may be in conflict with a Buddhist belief that self-assertion is to be challenged where it leads to attachment to the illusory allure of material benefit. This idea is explored later in the discussion on Family, particularly on the exercise of power within it.

Young Khmer adults (those in the 20 – 30 year age group) expressed an interest in working with younger members of the community. Their experience is more closely that of these younger members, particularly in their experience of negotiating the cultural to-and-fro. They are themselves looking for ways to reconnect and/or deepen their sense of identity as Khmer Australians.

The discussion of identity moves into a re-evaluation of the kinds of community organisations and processes that will most effectively support this community identity. There is some discussion of the need for community development and community education practices to balance welfare models of meeting individual and community needs. CAWC is currently working on re-drafting its Model for Working With Minority, Emerging and Refugee Communities in Australia. In this model, CAWC identifies itself as a community development organisation.⁴

6.2 Leadership and succession

Discussion about community identity leads naturally into discussion on community leadership. The CAWC 2003 State Conference heard a number of presentations on this issue.⁵ One view sees the tradition of Cambodian leadership as derived from a model of kingship which did not have constitutional or regulated legitimacy, with chieftains' loyalty being only to the king at the time. The legitimacy conferred on any rule was embedded in a religious belief in the kings as heavenly ordained and that from dynastic succession. This is seen as leading to a highly politicised form of leadership, subject to power plays and instability.⁶

³ Crowe, Muntha, 2003

⁴ Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council of NSW, 1999

⁵ Crowe, Muntha, 2003; Henry, M & Randall-Mohk, N, 2003; Ang, C H, 2003.

⁶ Crowe, Muntha, 2003



From its first days in the period of refugee settlement, the Khmer communities have produced leaders. They have had varying degrees of skill and experience and authority and they have seen their role and carried it out differently. The question asked at the CAWC Conference was what kind of leadership is appropriate for the next years of the development of the communities.

There is also concern that there are few opportunities for leadership training, particularly for women and young people. Women in traditional Cambodian society have been discouraged from participating as leaders. The CAWC Board provides one opportunity for women in the community to develop leadership. Schools offer one avenue through their Student Representative Councils, their Captain and Vice Captain positions and other representative positions for various school and community related functions. CAWC has dedicated positions for young people on its Board to provide the opportunity for them to develop community leadership within a community organisation.

6.3 Group needs versus community needs

The Khmer community is large enough now for a community politics to have emerged. This is expressed through its multiple leadership (both secular and spiritual) and through the forming of sub-groups within the community based around extended families or sub-ethnic identification. These call for allegiances from members within the community that can align different visions of what the nature of the community and its institutions ought to be. They are fluid, as are the politics of the wider community. As with any other community with a growing set of organizations and institutions there is at times a sense that particular institutions may be owned by and/or own particular groups within the communities. For example, some identify this as the way the existing community temples operate and others see this as true of some of the present NGOs. There is concern that this situation leads to a waste of effort and resources, and that it can also leave some groups entirely isolated. There are questions asked of the priorities being set by some with money and influence. Are community-raised funds being put to the best use? There are questions within the community of whether there is the will to move beyond these allegiances in assuring the needs of the community are met.

That the questions are being asked and that the debate is public, for example through the CAWC State Conference, is a healthy sign of a maturing community. The questioning and discussion should be encouraged and supported.

6.4 Capacity building in the community



All of the issues discussed above fall under the general head of community capacity building as it is currently promoted by Federal and State governments. Capacity building is a framework or approach aimed at developing independence and sustainability within communities.

‘Coupled with a new notion of shared responsibility, and the building of new coalitions with common goals and a common purpose, capacity – building is a key ingredient in redressing social exclusion, inequality and vulnerability in our community’, Robert Fitzgerald, (NSW Community Services Commissioner)⁷

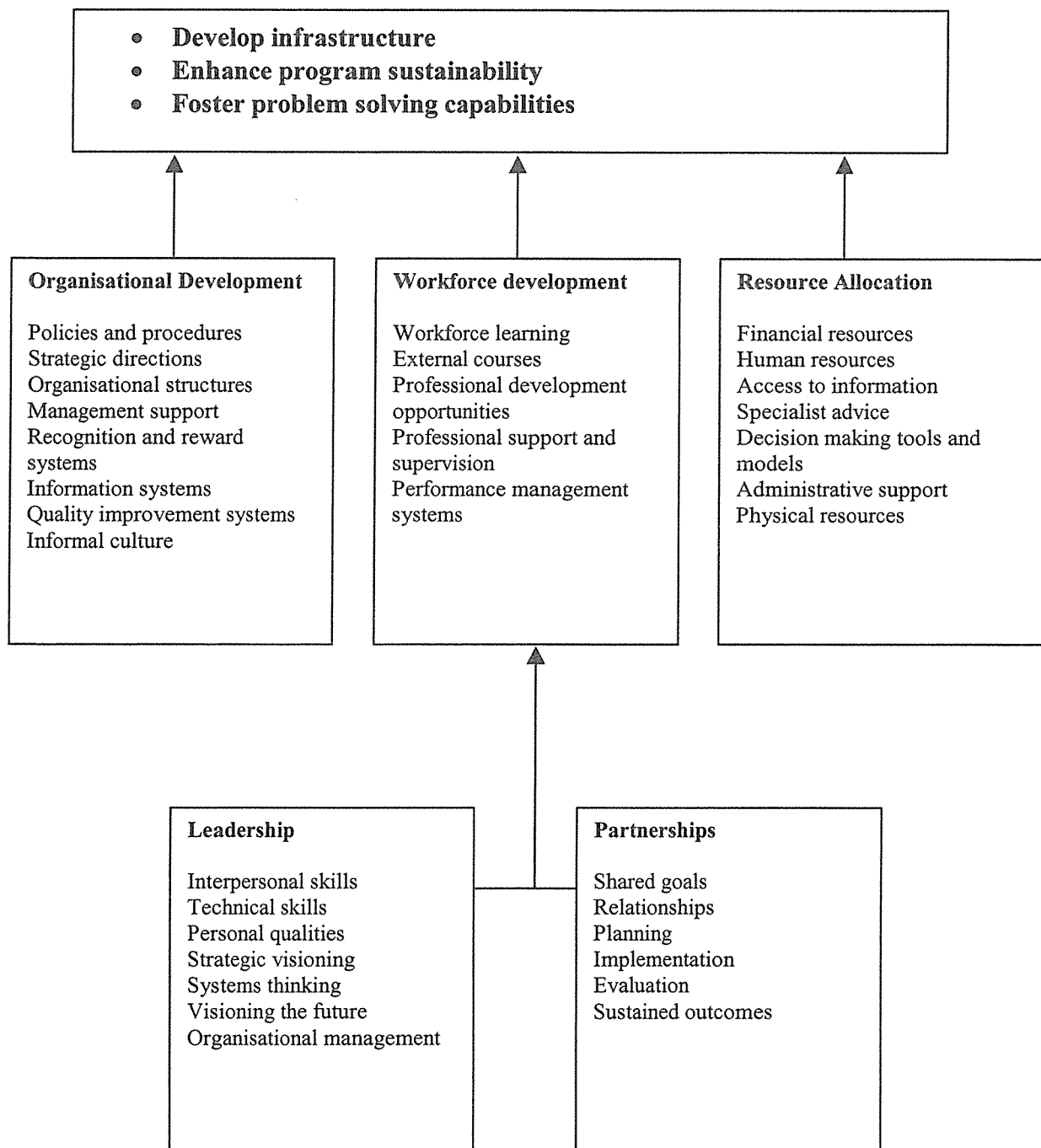
The NSW Department of Health has developed a useful Capacity Building Framework which can be used to guide a coherent strategy for the Khmer community which can address needs identified in this report.⁸

⁷ Fitzgerald, 1999

⁸ NSW Health, 2001



The diagram below outlines the main elements of the framework.





The NSW Health document goes on to consider specific strategies within each of these areas. These are not detailed here. The recommendations made in subsequent sections of this report, however, can be developed within this overall framework.

CAWC has been funded for a Community Support Settlement Services Development Worker through DIMIA. The job description for this is:

- Liaise with professional workers and service providers on the needs of recently arrived Khmer migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants, as a means of providing Khmer with equitable access to services
- Facilitate and improve communication between existing and emerging Khmer organisations and workers by assisting in the establishment of appropriate organisational infrastructures
- Enhancing workers and management committee members' skills.⁹

This job description corresponds well to the role of capacity building though it has not been defined in that way.

Recommendation 1

The Khmer communities in NSW be funded to develop and implement a Community Capacity Building Program (CCBP) over 3 years. The framework for this could be the Capacity Building Framework as developed by NSW Health. The specific strategies in the Program should include the Recommendations made in this report together with additional strategies that emerge over the course of implementation of the CCBP.

Recommendation 2

Significant elements in the CCBP should be:

- **Developing a strong Khmer-Australian identity.**
- **Examining models of community leadership that are appropriate to the developing needs of the community.**
- **Developing structures and processes for training community members, particularly women and young people.**
- **Engaging the communities in discussion aimed at guiding the priorities for community development and fund-raising.**
- **Training and support for management committees and workers in community organisations providing services to the communities.**

Recommendation 3

That CAWC continue to be funded as the agency responsible for developing and implementing the CCBP.

⁹ CAWC brochure 2003



7. Language Proficiency

Language proficiency continues to be of major concern at all levels in the communities. There are a number of aspects to this:

- The low level of English language proficiency.
- The lack of bilingual/bicultural workers and limited access to interpreters, with specific reference to the needs of Khmer Kampuchea Krom.
- The lack of opportunities for young people to learn Khmer.

7.1 English language proficiency

Data from the 2001 Census indicates that there has been a significant improvement in the level of English language proficiency since 1996. In 1996, the proportion of Khmer people in NSW stating they speak English not well or not all was 49%. In 2001, the proportion was 38%.

However, there continues to be concern within the community about the impact of the lack of English proficiency on members of the community. Earlier studies have highlighted these implications for employment, education, family communication, access to services, and legal issues, among others.¹⁰ The present needs assessment confirmed that these are on-going issues.

- Proficiency in English is recognised as essential for access to basic services, particularly health and transport.
- There continues to be a greater proportion of females who are less proficient in English at all levels than are males. This is most noticeable for those who say they do not speak English well or do not speak English at all – 44% for females but 31% for males.
- Low English proficiency leads to social and economic isolation and financial abuse for women. Women say they are less able to get jobs, particularly those where their language skills can be enhanced and with reasonable wages. This leads to financial dependence on the male income earner in the family, a dependence that can lead to their being emotionally and physically abused. The lack of language also means that women are less able to make independent entry into the social life of the community. Again, this puts them in a position where they can be abused.
- Low English proficiency leaves the Cambodian spouses of Khmer Australian residents open to emotion and financial abuse. This can be true for both women and men who enter Australia under spousal sponsorship. Lack of language leads to their social and economic isolation, and makes it less likely that they are going to be able to access information about services and their rights to protection from abuse.

¹⁰ See Henderson, S, 1993; Stevens, C.A, 1995; Khmer Community in NSW Inc & Ettinger House, 1998



- This situation is similar for the elderly, where again the lack of proficiency in English can lead to their isolation from information and services, and hence lead to their abuse within the family. For the elderly, low language proficiency is also a significant barrier to them accessing what public transport there is, so keeping them housebound or dependent on their family for transport to even the most basic services.
- Both parents and children see the low English proficiency of parents as a significant barrier to positive relationships between parents and their children. They particularly see it as a barrier to adequately communicating their needs, aspirations and values to each other, communication that is fundamental to successful relationships.
- Parents with low English proficiency feel alienated from their children's schooling. They do not understand what is being taught and so often misunderstand important aspects, and they are unable to support their children with homework. Two areas particularly here are appropriate means of discipline and emerging discussions about the rights of the young person. It is clear that low English proficiency leads to misunderstandings by parents here, leading to conflict within the family.
- Children are placed in a position of having to act as interpreters for parents when dealing with services. Children say they are often not able to play that role properly for lack of a good enough grasp of the English concepts and terms being used. There is also concern at the impact of the potential for children using these situations as a means of exercising control within the family.
- Low English proficiency is seen as a significant barrier to securing better paid employment and to access to employment generally. This is reflected in the high levels of Khmer males and females in traditional 'blue collar' jobs and the high number of women in low level clerical jobs. For some, it can mean that getting employment means depending on Khmer-run businesses for positions, sometimes by members of their extended family.

Some report that in these circumstances they are subject to exploitation by their employer. The Khmer Outworker project has recognised this and provides language classes to those within its network through TAFE Outreach. Members of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom community also say this is a problem for them.

Recent arrivals say that the current quota of free English language lessons does not prepare them to adequately participate in Australian society. Data available for 2002 indicates that Khmer speakers made up 1.4% of all those in New South Wales accessing AMEP classes in that year. Data also shows that these students are less likely to quit the program early when compared with all students in NSW (13% for Khmer, 20% for all of NSW). This suggests that Khmer students are committed to developing their English language proficiency.



Increasing the number of hours available through AMES is a limited strategy. It does not address the needs of those who are ineligible for AMES programs or who are prevented from accessing them for financial reasons or through control of their mobility by their family. When asked why they leave the classes in the early semesters, former Khmer students say that the pressure to find work and earn an income was the most significant factor. Others say that it is hard to juggle the limited time available to them to deal with the multiple issues they have to deal with during resettlement - work, housing, schooling for children etc.

It does not address the needs of isolated women and the elderly. Women, for example, comment that getting to language classes provided by TAFE is difficult as they are conducted at a distance from where they live. They want classes near to where they live so they can be there for their children before and after school. Others would go if they could be assured of child care on-site. Some also say that they need language classes just to get them to the stage where they can cope with the level at which TAFE is pitched.

The elderly also cannot access TAFE. The pace of learning there is too fast, they say and they lack access to transport to take them there. Their child minding duties also have to come first often.

Moving beyond the current situation will require a concerted effort from Government agencies, the business community and local service providers to investigate other opportunities through which to make language learning a part of the everyday lives of Khmer Australians.

Language learning needs to occur in the workplace, in social groups, in the temples, through community education around services and rights.

Recommendation 4

That Federal and State Government, local businesses employing Khmer Australians, and community organisations providing services to Khmer develop a comprehensive project aimed at maximising the opportunities for Khmer Australian adults to become proficient in English. The project focus should be on embedding language learning within information and service delivery, in the workplace and in existing and future social events and activities.

7.2 Lack of bilingual workers and limited access to interpreters.

The impact of low proficiency in English in Australian migrant communities is offset to some extent by access to interpreters or the presence of bilingual/bicultural workers within Government and community services. The Khmer communities see themselves at a disadvantage here in both areas.



There are few bilingual/bicultural workers in the health, housing, employment and community services sectors. A number of these workers are no longer employed specifically as workers with the Khmer community. Their positions have been generalised as ethnic liaison or multicultural positions. This has reduced the access to these workers as and when they are needed by Khmer Australians using these services.

At the same time, the Khmer communities experience the same frustration as other communities with the current delays in accessing Government interpreter services. Again, this can mean that interpreters are not available at the critical time for the Khmer client.

This has a number of consequences:

- Those needing services are reluctant to approach them and so their needs remain unmet.
- The particular issue for which information or support is sought becomes exacerbated through time delays in getting service.
- Information can be controlled by family and community members who are called in to act as interpreters.
- Children (some still at primary school) take on inappropriate roles as interpreters for the family and this can lead to tensions and conflict within the family. In many instances, children are being asked to interpret at conceptual and technical levels that are beyond them.

The problem is heightened for Khmer Kampuchea Krom. Their Khmer dialect and grammar have developed within the context of Vietnamese society. It borrows words from Vietnamese, and its inflexions reflect Vietnamese patterns. This means that other Khmer speakers often have difficulty in understanding Khmer Kampuchea Krom. There are currently no trained Khmer Kampuchea Krom interpreters or bilingual workers. While many Khmer Kampuchea Krom can speak Vietnamese, there are deep societal barriers to Khmer Kampuchea Krom using Vietnamese services. These are discussed later in this report.

There is considerable support for the effectiveness of employing bilingual/bicultural workers in the literature of interpersonal therapeutic methodologies.¹¹ The thrust of the argument is that 'in talking therapies, the issue of culture and other diversities are similarly communicated between the therapist and the client, if only the two parties concerned operate at the same wave length' and culture is mostly transmitted through language.¹²

There are a number of Khmer speaking workers in Government Departments and community organisations providing services accessed by members of the Khmer communities. However, few of these within

¹¹ See Beutler and Bergan, 1991; Bhattacharyya, 1997; Dwivedi, Dr K N, 2003

¹² Bhattacharyya, 2003.



Government Departments are specifically identified as Khmer targeted positions. They are multicultural or ethnic liaison positions that happen to be filled at present by Khmer speakers. A targeted Khmer position at Campbelltown funded through NSW Health is scheduled to become a general multicultural position.

Many of the Khmer speaking workers are also concentrated in offices in the Cabramatta/Fairfield area. This presents problems for Khmer living outside of these areas. Khmer in Campbelltown express concerns that area services of the State Departments of Health, Housing, and Community Services, Campbelltown Court and Centrelink do not have any Khmer speaking staff who can act both as interpreters and as advocates for them. They believe that the quality of service they receive is degraded as a result. Their concerns are discussed in more detail later in this report.

To date, TAFE has been able to offer training for interpreters as long as there were sufficient persons interested to meet TAFE guidelines. The Liverpool College of TAFE has provided classes for Khmer interpreters. The training has been aimed at achieving NAATI certification.

Recommendation 5

That Federal and State Governments and the Khmer communities enter into discussions on options for further training and deploying of bilingual/bicultural workers within the communities. That priority in these discussions should be given to addressing the needs of Khmer Kampuchea Krom.

7.3 Opportunities for learning Khmer

Discussion above has highlighted community concern for the need to re-invigorate the place of Cambodian identity within the Khmer Australian communities. Community identity is considered to be a major protective factor in preventing the development of risky behaviour in individuals and groups such as families. The connection between language and identity is long established. It has been the basis of literacy programs, community development programs and social action programs for the past 40 years growing out of the work of Paolo Freire.

This is because culture is transmitted through language. Bhattacharyya gives the following example.

When we say, "John is drowning", a Hopi Indian may say, "The water is overwhelming John", denoting an inherent belief in the supremacy of natural elements over man. Here an important lesson of



culture is being transmitted and can remain totally abstruse to an outsider.¹³

Young people consulted for this needs assessment recognise that their lack of proficiency in Khmer is a barrier to them communicating to their parents their understanding and response to their experience of Australian culture. Concepts of filial respect, rights, discipline, adulthood are difficult enough when used by English speaking children with English speaking adults. When these concepts are subject to different meanings within cultures, the possibilities for misunderstanding and conflict grow. Young people want to be able to use the culturally appropriate Khmer terms to mitigate parents' fear and resistance to Australian cultural practices.

At the same time, Khmer adults recognise that proficiency in Khmer is an integral part of the forging of a Khmer identity, again because language transmits culture.

The opportunities for young people to learn Khmer are very limited. There are some school-based programs at some of the primary schools. The introduction of Khmer as a language area for the Higher School Certificate is seen as a good step forward. There is support for the continuation and expansion of the Saturday Khmer community school.

Recommendation 6

Initiatives aimed at developing the Khmer language proficiency of young people in the Khmer communities should be supported by Governments and through community fund-raising ventures.

¹³ Bhattacharyya, 2003



8. Family

Relationships within the family unit and the consequent impact on its integrity are concerns expressed almost uniformly amongst all those consulted. There are a number of elements here:

- Gender expectations.
- The distribution of power within families.
- Lacks in parenting skills.
- The absent parent.
- Parent/adolescent conflict, particularly around discipline and control.
- Violence and abuse within the family

8.1 Gender expectations

Both men and women agree that the shift in gender expectations from a traditional Cambodian culture to that in a post-feminist Australian culture place strains within many families. The place of women in the traditional Cambodian family is that of wife and mother with all that entails, mainly the responsibility for the bulk of domestic labour and child rearing. Women were not encouraged to pursue education or employment after marriage. Women are not expected to take an active life in community leadership.

This is at odds with present Australian overt cultural beliefs and practices. Khmer Australian women are exposed to this alternative through education, health, welfare and employment sectors, mass media, and a range of social contacts they have. Some Khmer men are critical of the exposure their wives and female children have to information about their civil and political rights as women when they interact with these structures, services and organisations. Women, on the other hand, embrace these new rights and freedoms. They want the independence and autonomy that is fostered in Australian society.

As discussed previously, women's capacity to become independent and to enjoy their rights is hampered by their lack of proficiency in English and the control of their mobility by male income earners in the family.

It is not unexpected that those Khmer Australian men who experience a loss of their power and status within Australian society – through their lack of language proficiency, low income, unemployment or marginalisation into labouring and trades work – look to re-establishing that power and status within the family. One of the main means they have is to reinforce the traditional gender roles.

There is an observable practice among some men who reject marriage with Khmer Australian women and instead return to choose a bride from Cambodian communities where they hope to find old gender roles still



operating. The wives in these marriages are placed under considerable control when they migrate to Australia.

These expectations of traditional roles extend to the place of female children in the family, with fathers seeking to direct them toward their future roles as wives and mothers.

Women are critical of the lack of respect they get from their husbands for the work they do in the domestic sphere – “Although I am at home I have a full time job!”

These attitudes are not class bound. They are a reflection of male upbringing, or in many cases the lack of it. For men whose childhood and adolescence were disrupted through the Pol Pot years and their subsequent life as refugees, there is an understandable grasping after what they understand as traditional roles of men and women both for the stability these provide and also in the absence of any experience of alternatives during their growth.

8.2 The distribution of power within families

The primary issue raised here is that of the power relations between husbands and wives. Gender expectations and their relationship to power have been discussed above. The exercise of financial power is also a matter of concern to many. Women in families will either have no independent income – being occupied with their domestic roles or being unemployed for lack of skills and English proficiency - or will have less of a contribution to make to family income because of the inequities in female/male wages in Australia and the level clerical and labouring jobs many of them get.

In these circumstances, the male income earner can exercise power through control of the family finances, and does so according to many. The power is exercised through limiting the mobility and independence of women and children in the family, or through controlling the purchasing of goods and services for the family. Who controls the money can also control the flow of information to the family. If women cannot leave the home, they are unlikely to be accessing points of information distribution.

It is not surprising that there is some criticism from men of the support available to single mothers or separated women. Some see it as an incentive for women to leave the home.

The exercise of financial power also has an impact on some elderly, where again their lack of independent income reduces their capacity for independent activity. Where they have entered Australia under family reunion categories they are particularly vulnerable as the power here can be the threat of returning them to Cambodia.



Some parents say that older children also exercise financial power within the family. They are critical here of schemes such as Youth Allowance and AusStudy, seeing them as encouraging children to leave home or to use this possibility as a threat to get what they want while still living at home.

Some parents also are critical of Australian legislation in schools or child welfare which they see as limiting their capacity to discipline their children. Again, they perceive that children's rights here are used at times as a way for their children to exercise power within the family to their advantage.

Those with English language proficiency are seen to be able to exercise power, often in contradiction to the traditional role they are expected to play in the family. This is particularly so for children.

There is also a traditional cultural proscription against the expression of what can be seen as self-centred individuality within Cambodian society. Cambodian culture is integrally framed within Buddhist teachings, as are many South East Asian cultures. Central to this is the idea of transcending 'self-cherishing', that is, attachment to the self that is expressed as self-assertion, autonomy and independence. Attachment to self is seen as illusory and something that needs to be continually fought. Cherishing and nurturing the extended family and the community is one way of doing this and so becomes valued above cherishing oneself.¹⁴ In the Australian context, this cultural norm is very much at odds with a fundamental belief within Australian society in the desirability of the individual being self assertive and independent. The appeal to traditional Cambodian and in particular to the religious basis for denial of self can become a powerful tool for control of the expression of independence by women and children.

8.3 Lacks in parenting skills

There is agreement that many parents of adolescents and younger children lack effective parenting skills. There are a number of reasons given for this:

- Most of these adults have had seriously disrupted childhoods themselves. Those who arrived as young refugees often came without parents or with broken families. Their parents focus during the refugee years and the early settlement years were focussed on survival and re-establishing some semblance of stability. For many, there was no time, no opportunity, and no models through which to develop parenting skills within the extended nurturing practices valued within Australian society. Those who remained in Cambodia were similarly disadvantaged, and had even less access to positive and constructive models of parenting.

¹⁴ For a very interesting discussion of this and the therapeutic implications of it see Dwivedi, 2003



- Low English proficiency and a lack of appropriately translated material meant limited access for many to information on parenting, early childhood and adolescent development, effective family relationships. Primary schools report that many children don't show evidence of having been encouraged in pre-learning activity, such as play or early language formation.
- Lack of interpreters and bilingual/bicultural workers within family and early childhood services also was a barrier to many accessing information and support.
- Reaction to the pressures of resettlement will in some cases have led to parents falling back on traditional practices that were/are out-of-step with current Australian expectations and practices. Some parents may simply have given up on parenting in these situations, feeling they had lost control.

There is a playgroup for Khmer mothers conducted through UnitingCare Burnside at Cabramatta. Mothers do access nursing services for the new born. However, many parents, particularly men, still are unable to engage in parenting education. For those with mainly adolescent children, patterns of parent/child relationships are hard to break. Employment in areas that are characterised by casual labour, long hours and shift work leave little time for parents to engage in family education. Language continues to be a barrier. Many parenting programs are targeted only at mothers or are run at times that fathers cannot meet.

The manifestations of this lack of parenting skills in abuse and neglect within the family are discussed below. There is another impact that goes largely unrecognised, however. That is the impact on cultural transmission within the family unit. Bhattacharyya says 'The earliest interaction (of cultural experience) takes place through communications that occur between the mother and the baby. This language between them is the main transporter of culture as the infant grows up and becomes part of society'.¹⁵

There is also good evidence that poor parenting is a risk factor for children engaging in criminal behaviour and in continuing that behaviour into adulthood. Poor patterns of parenting identified here include:

- Poor supervision and monitoring of child.
- Harsh or inconsistent discipline.
- Rejection of the child.
- Abuse of the child.
- Lack of warmth and affection to the child.
- Low involvement in child's activities.¹⁶

There is also an impact on the transmission of the cultural value of nurturing family and community life discussed above. What the child is

¹⁵ Bhattacharyya, A 2003

¹⁶ Attorney General's Department, 1999



exposed to is an apparent self-cherishing on the part of the parent, a focus on the parents' needs and not those of the child. Parents are unable to develop a supportive family structure, and the community of these parents is unable to develop a help-giving network.¹⁷

This of course is also relevant to discussions in the community of what to hold on to in forging a new Khmer Australian identity.

8.4 The absent parent

Recent literature on adolescent behaviour identifies the absent parent as a major contributor to adolescent drug and alcohol and antisocial behaviour.¹⁸ Young children left at home alone for significant periods of time are more vulnerable to self-harm and antisocial behaviour. Participants in the current needs assessment often identified the absence of fathers in particular as being a significant issue for parent/child relationships. Many fathers are shift workers or work long hours; their contact with their children is very limited as a result, with fathers leaving before children are awake, returning after children have gone to bed, or returning from shift work needing sleep and so not having time for play or other activity with children. There is also a perception that many men spend time after work gambling at clubs.

Many mothers report that the burden of child rearing falls unevenly on them. Some say that their capacity for discipline and control is reduced as a result, with children being able to cast them in the role of nagging mother, one who can be ignored. They report that they are subject to emotional and verbal abuse at times from their children. Some young people and mothers also say that lacking the constant interaction with their children, fathers can resort to verbal and physical abuse when trying to discipline and control their children.

Interestingly, Khmer men farmers consulted for this needs assessment are less likely to say that they have problems in relating to their children. They say this is because they are always at home when their children leave for school or return, and that their children can see what it takes for their family to earn its livelihood. They believe that this leads the children to respect their parents and to see themselves more integrally part of the family.

8.5 Parent/adolescent conflict, particularly around discipline and control

This is the most frequently raised issue by adults when talking about issues within families. Parents and other adults say that their children and their children's peers and friends do not 'respect' them. That is, their children verbally abuse them, don't obey them, don't value their opinions

¹⁷ Dwivedi, Dr K N, 2003

¹⁸ Garbarino, 1998



and don't behave as they expect family members to behave. Adults place the onus for this on schools and other services that are seen to encourage children to act on their rights. They also believe there is a strong negative influence from non-Asian peers. More generally they see the problem of a conflict between what they hold as traditional Cambodian values and those of Australian society. As discussed above, parents' lack of English proficiency and the isolation of women are seen to exacerbate the situation. Parents say that in Cambodia, the parents' role is accepted as they are the provider. Income support for independent young people is disapproved of as it subverts this role.

Interestingly, a parents' view of their own childhood is one in which they do not see themselves as having 'rebelled' against their parents.

Young people agree that there is conflict. However, they don't see it as lack of respect for adults/parents. They do see it as a failure of both sides to negotiate the boundaries of the two cultures to which young people are inevitably exposed through school and the media. They also identify language barriers in their relationship with their parents, both their parents' lack of English and their own lack of proficiency in Khmer. They say that they would like to know what words to use to express to their parents their perceptions, aspirations and expectations. They believe that parents are unnecessarily overly protective. They understand the source of this in part to be their parents' experience of the Pol Pot years. But they also ascribe it to media exaggeration of the level of crime and drug trafficking in Cabramatta/Fairfield. Some say that parents don't understand the pressures on them at school and don't understand their home study needs. For some, there is no private space for study at home.

A poor family environment has been shown to be a risk factor for young people engaging in criminal behaviour. Features of a poor family environment include:

- Family violence and disharmony.
- Family disorganisation.
- Negative interaction/ social isolation.¹⁹

Again, it has to be borne in mind that not every family has these tensions and conflicts. The extent to which the natural stresses and strains within parent/adolescent relationships becomes a problem will depend on the parenting skills of the adults and the help-giving network which they and their children can use to support them and de-fuse situations. Where parenting skills are poor, and these networks are lacking in the extended family or the community, then problems are likely to develop and be unresolved.

8.6 Violence and abuse within the family

¹⁹ Attorney General's Department, 1999



At its worst, family dysfunction leads to violence and abuse. The forms of abuse have been discussed above and are only re-capped here:

- Financial abuse where the mainly male family income earner exerts control over women, the elderly and children in the family.
- Emotional abuse, where members of the family exercise control through gate-keeping of information or threatening to use their civil and human rights to exert power to have their wants met.
- Neglect of children by adults with poor parenting skills, or affected by alcohol. This is noticeable in diet and nutrition problems of young children.
- Physical punishment being used as discipline for children.
- Physical abuse of wives by husbands, often arising out of conflict over gender role expectations, but also alcohol and gambling related.

Data available from the National Data Collection for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program indicate that for 2001-2002, around 170 women aged 20 years and over of Cambodian or Khmer-speaking background were housed in services for women escaping domestic violence. Workers with these women confirm the patterns of abuse noted above. They particularly draw attention to the situation of Cambodian born women entering Australia as spouses of Khmer Australian men. It is often these women who are most isolated in the community and most vulnerable to financial, emotional and physical abuse. They are often afraid to leave an abusive situation as they fear their residency application will be endangered, even though there is a specific category of residency application for women in such situations. Their isolation and lack of English leaves them open to being accused of lying by the husband and so having their applications rejected.

8.7 The isolation of women

This has been discussed before, but it is worth emphasising. Many women reported feeling isolated from both the Khmer community and the wider Australian community. The significant barriers here are:

- Low English language proficiency.
- Financial dependence on their husbands, and the financial abuse that follows often.
- Lack of access to transport.
- The gender role expectations of some husbands.
- Fear of putting their residency applications at risk when they are newly arrived spouses.

One mother said 'When I came (to Australia) I spent 3 years in the home not going anywhere, just crying for 3 years'. This cycle was broken for her when she attended the women's support network run in partnership by CAWC, UnitingCare Burnside and the Khmer Women's Support network themselves, at Cabramatta. It is telling that the mothers attending this group in May 2003, who were consulted for this needs assessment, all



lived within a few minutes walking distance of Cabramatta. They agreed that if they could not walk to the group they would be unlikely to be able to come.

Women see themselves as being more cut-off from the wider Australian society than their working husbands. At least the latter get to travel between suburbs. Low family incomes and the pattern of hours of what work is available also are barriers to them travelling around Sydney – 'I hear about wonderful Australia, but I never get to see it. I only know the Opera House and Darling Harbour!'

They appreciate the efforts being made by primary schools to engage them, and value the role of the Ethnic Liaison Officers in the school.

8.8 Socio-economic pressures

Finally, Khmer families, like many other families in ethnic communities, are subject to particular socio-economic pressures that hamper effective parenting and family relationships. Sebuliba draws attention to issues such as poor housing, heavily urbanised and industrial environments (often foreign to migrant and refugee communities from developing areas where large parts of the population continue to be rural and small village dwellers), racism and discrimination as factors here.²⁰ This needs assessment shows that they are pertinent factors when looking at the parenting and family issues in the Khmer communities in NSW.

Recommendation 7

That Federal and State Governments and the Khmer community jointly develop a comprehensive family intervention and support program. Elements of this program could include:

- **Early childhood services (playgroups, motherhood classes, infant home nursing, family day care, effective parenting courses) conducted at decentralised sites that are easily accessed by walking.**
- **Out of school care programs attached to community organisations such as temples.**
- **Culturally appropriate family therapy and adolescent support services.**
- **Enhanced bicultural/bilingual services to support women victims of domestic violence.**
- **Community education focussed around the development of a Khmer Australian identity that integrates the positive elements of traditional family practices with those of Australian family practices and expectations.**

²⁰ Sebuliba, 2003



9. The Elderly

The elderly continue to be a small percentage of the Khmer settlers, with only 4% aged 65+ years in 2001. Women continue to substantially outnumber men. The Khmer population over 65 years (4%) is proportionally only third as great as that of those over 65 in the NSW and the Australian populations (13%). However, there are issues emerging for this group that must be factored into any plans for service delivery in the future.

Their isolation within the Khmer community has been noted before. Lack of proficiency in English makes it difficult for some to access public transport and other services. Access to community transport such as Council buses is limited. They are consequently dependent on family members for transport and for interpretation. This can be difficult as they have to wait for family members to be available to accompany them. This also puts a strain on those family members who may have to take time off work, or school. While some would like to take up learning English again, others feel it is too late for them or that there are other priorities. They can get by with the English they have when the things to be dealt with are not complicated. They are frustrated by the lack of interpreters at key health and welfare services. Khmer language radio is a key source for them of information on services, community activity and news.

There is also frustration for them in their role as child carers in the family. The children are most likely to only speak English when at home. Grandparents see this as a lack of respect for them and as putting them at a disadvantage when they try to exercise discipline. They also are concerned for young people losing their Khmer culture.

Few appear to access aged care packages available to them. The Home Care Service of NSW could only identify four clients, three of whom only received 1 – 2 hrs personal care or domestic assistance each week. For some elderly, reluctance to let into the house someone not personally known to them, is a barrier to accessing home care.

There is no day centre program targeted for them. For many, their social and community life increasingly focuses on the temple. Many have never travelled outside of the round of home to temple and back. A number of them express a wish to live near their temple, and some have moved into poor quality accommodation attached to temples. The temple is also a focus for many who see this period in their life as one where they can change their focus to their spiritual life and re-engage with their cultural traditions. Some also want opportunities to learn more about Australian society and culture.

Health workers identify late onset diabetes related to diet as a significant health problem for the elderly.



Recommendation 8

That a comprehensive age services plan for the Khmer elderly be developed between the Federal and State governments and the Khmer communities. Elements of this plan could include:

- **Day centre programs building on existing social networks centred on temples.**
- **Home care services pairing volunteer visitors from within the Khmer communities with professional staff to address client concerns about privacy and safety.**
- **Enhanced community transport services.**
- **Aged persons accommodation within easy access to temples.**



10 Housing

There has been little change in the proportion of Khmer who fully own their own home between 1996 and 2001 - 31 %. A higher proportion say they are purchasing their home in 2001 (27%) than in 1996 (19%). However, the overall level of home ownership in the in the Khmer community (58%) was less than that for the NSW population (64%) and for the Australian population (66%). The proportion of those renting (42%) was corresponding greater than in the NSW population (28%) and the Australian population (26%). Most of those renting (60%) were renting units.

As noted earlier, informants for this needs assessment are generally happy with the standard of their accommodation, both rental and owned. They say it is of better quality, better maintained, cleaner and roomier than what they could expect in Cambodia. However, many say that their level of family income makes it impossible to save towards the deposit on a house. This is because the cost of living is generally high in the area and housing prices are increasing as Sydney's population grows.

Rental costs are said to be a major drain on family income by all of those renting. The consultant noted rental prices on units in Cabramatta and near suburbs for April 2003. Two bedroom units ranged from \$145 - \$155 per week, and three bedroom units ranged from \$140 - \$175 per week. Three bedroom units are rare in these suburbs. Three bedroom houses ranged from \$170 (for a fibro building) - \$280 (for a brick building).

In the 2001 Census, one third of Khmer families had household incomes under \$600 per week - 11% earning under \$300, and 22% earning between \$300 - \$599. This suggests that up to a third of Khmer families may be paying between 25 % - 50% of their income on rent. House prices during April 2003 ranged from a low of \$169,000 for 2 bedrooms to a high of \$450,000 for a brick veneer 3 bedroom. Mortgages in the area averaged \$1281 per month in May 2003. ²¹Again, this is a considerable proportion of the household income of many Khmer families, up to 33% for those on the median family income of \$800 per week. Measures of housing need are generally set at 25%-30% of income being spent on housing.

Figures obtained from the Department of Housing indicate that at December 2002 there were 147 Khmer applicants awaiting public housing in the Fairfield allocation zone. Some Khmer families on low income are being housed through community housing organisations in the area.

The figures suggest that there may be a considerable number of Khmer families in critical housing need.

²¹ Sydney Morning Herald, 2003 (1)



This is exacerbated for many renters who continue to live in substandard or poorly maintained accommodation for lack of knowledge of their rights and the lack of English proficiency to understand rental documents they sign 'We did sign the (lease) but we don't know what it means'. There are no Khmer speaking estate agents in the area. One renter reported that a complaint about water leaking into the flat from the ceiling went unattended for a week. Others report of suddenly being asked to pay for things like water rates when they were told they didn't have to.

Recommendation 9

That CAWC be funded to conduct a more detailed study of housing need within the Khmer community.

That the NSW Office of Community Housing, CAWC and other community organisations meet to consider the options for increasing the number of Khmer families housed through community housing programs. Consideration should be given to funding a cooperative housing program similar to those funded for other CALD populations such as Vietnamese, Islander and Tamils.

That CAWC enter into discussion with tenant organisations with a view to developing community education for Khmer renters on their rights and means of redress.



11 Health

11.1 General health issues

Some health concerns have been discussed earlier. In brief these include:

- Services for the elderly arising from their isolation.
- Diet/nutrition issues for pre-school and primary school age children. This is a result both of parental work-patterns (with parents having no time to prepare breakfasts or lunches) and lack of parenting skills.
- There is also a high prevalence of active tuberculosis in the Khmer community.

Specific illnesses of emerging concern include:

- Hepatitis C, as a result of vaccination and injection treatment practices in Cambodia from as long as 10 years ago.
- Diabetes, particularly for pregnant woman and the elderly. This is related to diet but also to stress and a lack of exercise.

There is a trend for people to join private health funds for their dental and eye needs in the face of growing costs for these in the private sector and increasing waiting times in the public sector.

Young brides newly arrived from Cambodia need information on family planning but access to it is sometimes blocked by husbands who want wives to play conservative traditional roles in the family.

The lack of bilingual/bicultural health professionals in public health, general practitioners, allied health staff, skilled counselling staff is seen as a major barrier to effective community education on health issues and in effectively maintaining prevention and treatment regimes. Women in one of the groups consulted told the story of a woman who needed a caesarean delivery and was upset and stressed at her inability to communicate with hospital staff during her operation for lack of an interpreter. Another story is of a young child taken to a hospital emergency centre with a very high temperature. The parents were unable to communicate the urgency of their case and were kept waiting for hours. The sole bilingual health worker is critically over-stretched and not a full-time worker. It took 5 years of lobbying to get another part-time worker, but that position is now in doubt.

There are Khmer general practitioners working in the area who bulk bill and who do help their clients negotiate the health system. But they can only do so much. Some of them don't have adequate knowledge of services themselves.

Many health workers say that there is a need for culturally appropriate mental health services that are not torture and trauma focussed.



Recommendation 10

That Federal and State governments address the need for bilingual/bicultural health and allied health professionals in the Khmer community.

11.2 Alcohol and other drugs

The majority of informants for this needs assessment say that it is alcohol that is the significant problem area in its impact on the community. This is not to deny that illicit drugs are used within the community, particularly marijuana. Many say that to admit that your child uses drugs is to lose face in the community, and so there is a reluctance to talk openly about it and to access services. There is a Khmer drug education program in the area currently targeted at teenagers and parents.

However, many believe that the problem is exaggerated by media and demonising of the Asian population of Cabramatta/ Fairfield. Also, the use of these drugs is seen as damaging to the individual, whereas the impact of alcohol is on the family, and that is why it is seen as the large problem. Alcohol abuse results in abusive behaviour by both men and women within the family.

There is a perceived need for culturally appropriate detoxification services in the area.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Health Department work with the Khmer community to develop strategies for better access to drug and alcohol detoxification services.

11.3 Gambling

The combination of gambling and alcohol is of particular concern. There is a lot of discussion in the literature on gambling and about its place in Asian cultures. Many of those consulted for the needs assessment are critical of views that there is something 'natural' about high levels of gambling by Asians. Their perception is that those who have a gambling problem are often men on low incomes looking for a way 'to get rich quick'. This is borne out by data held by the NSW Department of Gambling on the level of gambling by residents in Fairfield.²² Though the area rates lowest on socio-economic indicators among the metropolitan areas, its residents spend more than \$251 million a year on poker machines. It is estimated that there are 9000 'problem gamblers' in the area.

²² Jacobsen, Sydney Morning Herald 2003 (2)



Women paint a picture of husbands returning from work and heading straight for the club to gamble the family income away. They report that the combination of alcohol and gambling leads to domestic violence at times. They talk of women they know who have left the home for short periods, staying with friends for support. Others know of women for whom the break was permanent. They ask 'Why does the Government keep building casinos?'

They are very critical of what they see as the exploitation of gamblers within the community by the large gambling business interests, for example providing transport and meals for gamblers.

Funding has been approved in 2003 for a program within the Khmer community targeting problem gambling.



12. Specific sub-groups within the community

12.1 Geographically isolated Khmer

While the vast majority of Khmer in NSW live in the Fairfield/Cabramatta area, there are small pockets in Bankstown and in Campbelltown. These smaller groups are disadvantaged through the concentration of community life and targeted services in Fairfield/Cabramatta. Accessing these services is time-consuming via public transport. Sustaining community life in these geographically isolated areas is difficult.

Many of the Khmer speaking workers in Government and community services are also concentrated in offices in the Cabramatta/Fairfield area. This presents problems for Khmer living outside of these areas. Khmer in Campbelltown express concerns that area services of the State Departments of Health, Housing, and Community Services, Campbelltown Court and Centrelink do not have any Khmer speaking staff who can act both as interpreters and as advocates for them. They believe that the quality of service they receive is degraded as a result.

They recount experiences of being abused by Department staff when they make constant calls to try and communicate their difficulties to staff who do not have the cultural understanding to be able to adequately explain why regulations and procedures are as they are, or the resource problems that may be hampering service delivery. They talk about the alienation they experience in court, often appearing with no legal assistance for lack of any knowledge about how to access what assistance there is.

While governments at Federal and State level say that they believe migrant communities ought to be more dispersed, policies and programs on the ground don't always support this. Services targeted for the community don't always have sufficient resources to provide outreach to the more isolated community members, and the number in these isolated areas at times are seen by Government and community services as not sufficient to justify locating workers full time in these areas. In the face of this kind of isolation, many families who had moved away from the areas of high population concentration have returned there.

Recommendation 12

That Federal and State governments provide enhanced resources to Government and community services for the Khmer communities to enable these services to provide outreach programs to smaller Khmer communities outside of the Fairfield/Cabramatta area.

12. 2 Khmer Kampuchea Krom



The term Khmer Kampuchea Krom refers mainly to a large group of Khmer living in the lower Mekong areas who became isolated from the rest of Cambodia when the region was subsumed into Vietnam. Culturally and ethnically, this group are Khmer. There has been significant migration of Khmer Kampuchea Krom to Australia over the last 10 years, part of a wider diaspora worldwide, arriving both as refugees and more recently under general migration categories. At present, there are 170 Khmer Kampuchea Krom families in Sydney comprising around 410 individuals.

The language barriers for Khmer Kampuchea Krom have been noted earlier in this report. Their Khmer dialect and grammar have developed within the context of Vietnamese society. It borrows words from Vietnamese, and its inflexions reflect Vietnamese patterns. This means that other Khmer speakers often have difficulty in understanding Khmer Kampuchea Krom. There are currently no trained Khmer Kampuchea Krom interpreters or bilingual workers and the community would like to access NAATI funds to train members as interpreters.

There is a broader issue for Khmer Kampuchea Krom, however. They are an ethnic minority within Vietnam and have been subject to repressive policies by successive Vietnamese governments. The full practice of their Buddhism is denied them. Their movement both within Vietnam and out of the country is controlled. Those who have left Vietnam have either done so through journeying to the refugee camps while they existed, or now make the journey to Phnom Penh in order to make a migration application as they will not be given Vietnamese passports for migration from there. Khmer Kampuchea Krom in Australia say that when they return for visits to relatives in Vietnam they are subjected to harassment by the Vietnamese authorities and that their movements are restricted.

Khmer Kampuchea Krom understandably have nothing to do with the Vietnamese community here and will not use Vietnamese targeted services.

Recommendation 13

That the Khmer Kampuchea Krom community be supported to access training in interpreting.

That the Federal Government support the Khmer Kampuchea Krom in their lobbying of the United Nations to continue to recognise them as an ethnic minority within Vietnam and to ensure the protection of their human rights, particularly those of freedom to practice their beliefs and freedom of movement.

12. 3 Farmers

Khmer small holding farmers in the Fairfield area have become a very significant part of the fresh vegetable growing and marketing sector in



Sydney. There is a Khmer Farmers' Association with a membership of 50 growers. For the past two years there has been a project conducted by the growers in partnership with the University of Western Sydney aimed at educating growers about the use of chemicals.

Discussions with members of the Association indicated, however, that there is more than could be done to assist this group. Their major concern is the high costs involved in small holding farming and the uncertainty of income that depends on the vagaries of the weather. They say that they have difficulty in securing start up loans for equipment. They say that they have been unable to access drought relief and that their water costs are crippling. Many are becoming concerned at the future of their holdings under the pressure of urban expansion. They say they have also been frustrated in plans to bring their countrymen to Australia on education visits so they can show them the new practices they have learnt that can increase productivity of farmers back in Cambodia.

Recommendation 14

That CAWC, the University of Western Sydney, the NSW Department of Agriculture and Fairfield Council meet with the Khmer Farmer's Association to draw up a comprehensive development strategy for the Association which can address the issues they have raised in this needs assessment.



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