



Diversity & Disability The DnD Story

*“It is good to start as a little tree ...
I can’t tell how much the tree will grow.”*



Published June 2007

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Portraits of DnD members and workers used throughout with permission. Photographs by Qing of Mirror Stage Media

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Acknowledgements

This story, and DnD itself, would not exist without the energy, enthusiasm and hard work of Elizabeth McGarry, Merinda Epstein, Christine Williams, Janet To, Mary-Ann Cosic, Margherita Coppolino, Val Johnstone, Ingrid Hindell, Cara Brough, Teresa Chu, Dora Pappas, Frances Salomon, Grace Larliano, Annette Sassino, Effie Meehan, Christian Astourian, Chamila Fernando, Amanda McNeil, Arthur Constantinos and Snezana Veljanovska.

We want to acknowledge also the support and contribution of the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region and staff, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Victorian Communities.

Acronyms

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background
DnD	Disability and Diversity
DVC	Department of Victorian Communities
MRCNW	Migrant Resource Centre North West Region

This publication is also available in large font, please contact DnD for a copy or visit our website au.geocities.com/diversityndisability

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Introduction

The DnD Story documents DnD's journey from an idea about the importance of the collective voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background, to a vital organisation run by and for people with a disability from an ethnic background.

The DnD story documents:

- What DnD is
- How DnD was established
- The lessons we have learned, and
- DnD's plans for the future.

We decided to document our story because we think it has a lot to offer other groups or individuals who wish to create a similar organisation or who are interested in learning more about what we did and how we did it.

The DnD Story is also an opportunity for us to celebrate our achievements thus far, and to let everyone know about our plans for the future.

We want to be heard so that we can have more choices and achieve more in life.



What is DnD?

DnD stands for Diversity and Disability.

DnD is a network run by people with a disability from an ethnic background who live in Victoria. We provide self-advocacy, support and information to everyone interested in disability and ethnicity.

DnD supports people with a disability from an ethnic background to make themselves heard at all levels of the community, government and the non-government sector. We want to be heard so that we can have more choices and achieve more in life.

We provide the tools, knowledge and expertise to support people to advocate for themselves and achieve as much independence as possible.

DnD provides people with a disability from an ethnic background with information and support to effectively advocate for themselves, and with opportunities to share ideas with each other, and to advocate to the ethnic and disability sector and government.

DnD provides government and the broader community with information and resources to facilitate the inclusion of people with a disability from an ethnic background in planning and decision making processes. DnD aims to be a conduit for the collective wisdom of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Our Vision

To enhance freedom, independence, knowledge and opportunity for people with a disability from an ethnic background to be valued citizens of the community.

Our Mission

We will provide support to people with a disability from an ethnic background to speak for themselves and achieve their full potential as citizens of the community.

Our Aims

We aim to:

- provide self advocacy skills for DnD members and promote positive outcomes
- connect with ethnic communities to create attitudinal change
- provide opportunities for consultation for those who work with or seek to support people with a disability from an ethnic background
- enhance participation and representation by people from an ethnic background living in Victoria

- engage with policymakers in the ethnic and disability sectors, and
- represent consumers at local, regional and national forums.

Our Objectives

Objective 1 To build an inclusive, vital organisation that develops, and provides a conduit for, the collective, independent voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Objective 2 To form and work in partnerships that enhance the freedom, knowledge and independence of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Membership

DnD has two kinds of membership: full and associate membership.

Full membership is available to adults with a disability from an ethnic background. Full members have the option to vote and be elected to the steering committee.

Associate membership is available to everyone else who is interested in DnD and supports its vision, mission and aims. Associate members do not have voting rights and cannot be elected to the steering committee.

Administration, Governance and Funding

DnD is governed by a steering committee made up of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Since beginning in 2005, DnD has had an interim steering committee with the task of guiding the organisation while it establishes itself. In the future the steering committee will be elected by members every 12 to 24 months.

DnD is currently supported by the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region. It plans to become an independent organisation in the near future.

DnD has received funding from the Department of Human Services and the Department of Victorian Communities.

DnD has three staff members: a coordinator, a policy and communication officer, and an assistant administration worker. These workers are responsible for implementing DnD's strategic plan and decisions made by the steering committee. They are also responsible for supporting and resourcing the steering committee.

The Project set out to find the most 'grassroots' and participatory way to develop the independent collective voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Our History

What we did and how we did it

Starting Out

In 2004, workers from the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region (MRCNW) came together with a group of people with a disability from an ethnic background who were involved in self-advocacy and disability rights work, to establish the Voices Heard Project.

The Project set out to find the most 'grassroots' and participatory way to develop the independent collective voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background.

The MRCNW received funding from the Department of Human Services to initiate the project.

The goal was to identify and form a structure that would become the conduit for the voices of people with a disability from an ethnic background. Once established, the MRCNW would leave the organisation to run on its own.

The Voices Heard Project began with some basic values. One was that all people had the right to participate, collectively or individually, in their own lives, in the services they used, in the communities and broader societies in which they lived.

The other was that participation could lead to enhancing independence, self-confidence and freedom.

The Voices Heard Project also started with some basic assumptions about the way things are and how they should be. One was that the collective voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background is not always heard by government, disability organisations, ethnic communities, community organisations and carer organisations. The other was that this should change so that people with a disability from an ethnic background can participate actively as citizens and community members, and work with others to improve their own lives.

The Project had an idea: that perhaps the best way for the voices of people with a disability from an ethnic background to be heard was if an organisation, network or mechanism was established.

This structure would be run by and for people with a disability from an ethnic background. It would listen to, and develop, the collective voices of people with a disability with an ethnic background.



First Consultation


After a lot of discussion and sharing of ideas, one of the first steps the Voices Heard Project took was to test whether their ideas and assumptions were shared by other people with a disability from an ethnic background. They also wanted to measure interest in establishing some kind of organisation that acted as a vehicle for their collective, independent voice to be heard.

The Project ran two consultations in 2004. An independent facilitator was engaged to run the consultations and write a report summarising what people said.

The first round of consultations took place in August and September 2004 and involved interested people with a disability from an ethnic background, who were familiar with the disability services system and the disability rights movement.

Participants were asked three main questions:

1. Who should hear the voices of people from an ethnic background with disabilities?
2. How should we go about making these voices heard?
3. If an organisation is to be formed that would work towards ensuring these voices are heard, and was run “by and for” people with a disability from an ethnic background, what should it do and how should it be structured?



“... by working together we can achieve so much; the voice heard will be much bigger, we have much more power.”

Effie Meehan, Diversity and Disability Coordinator

What people said...

'If ever we have an organisation, for me it would be the rule of the organisation to have a watching brief over all these people who say they provide a service and you say; but hang on now, how come you are not providing it for this group? And actually put them on notice that we are just part of the community like everybody else.'

'I think what is important is for people to believe in themselves, to believe that they can improve things ... but it is also a matter of not only to believe in yourself but also be willing to work with other people, because by working together we can achieve so much; the voice heard will be much bigger, we have much more power.'

'[We want] self-determination and the right to experience risk.'

'But even before you have to work on yourself, believe in yourself and believe in what you can achieve and this is not just to be persistent but also to have the right knowledge, the right information on how to deal with different situations and to have very good communication skills because you have to know how to speak clearly about what you want.'

'It's not only for people who don't speak English ... it's also for people like myself who are starting to honor their ethnic background ... like up until now I've always worked on my disability issues, being a woman and other issues. But I've never acknowledged the fact that I come from a CALD community.'

'In fact, I spent most of my life denying that. I didn't want to be called a Wog ... instead of accepting who I am.'

'We are not fitting in general community and we don't fit in ethnic community ... Where do we fit?'

While participants believed that different groups, communities and organisations silenced the voices of, and discriminated against, people with a disability from an ethnic background, they expressed enthusiasm for working collaboratively and constructively with these groups and organisations to create change.

Most consultation participants were positive about the formation of an organisation that aimed to be a conduit for the collective voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background. Participants strongly believed that this organisation should embody the principles of self determination by ensuring that all its activities and processes are driven by, and are accountable to, people with a disability from an ethnic background.

When asked about their passions and interests for working towards change, participants were committed to supporting other people with a disability from an ethnic background to develop the skills and confidence to speak for themselves.

Participants were also interested in working with government, government-funded agencies and other organisations to create strategies and actions for change, rather than just talking about the problems.



Participants believed that for any meaningful change to happen government, government funded agencies and other organisations needed to support and commit to partnerships with people with a disability from an ethnic background and create mechanisms and processes through which the voices of people with a disability from an ethnic background could be heard.

Participants suggested that the proposed organisation's role could include:

- Ensuring that disability services and organisations provide accessible, equitable and inclusive services to everyone
 - Becoming a peak body for people with a disability from an ethnic background in Victoria
 - Providing a safe, non-judgemental space for people with a disability from an ethnic background to debrief, discuss, create, be empowered and learn skills
 - Promoting and practicing self-advocacy and self-determination by people with a disability from an ethnic background
 - Responding to, and including, diversity within ethnic and disability communities
 - Providing input into government policy
 - Connecting people with a disability from an ethnic background to each other and to existing services, and
- Developing a strong, independent collective voice.

Participants came up with the following ideas about the kind of work that the proposed organisation could do:

- Provide cross-cultural and disability awareness education to service providers. These education sessions should be designed and conducted by people with a disability from an ethnic background
- Develop positive and constructive strategies for change
- Involve people with a disability from an ethnic background on boards, advisory groups and committees of management
- Advocate for alternative governance models that place more control in the hands of people with a disability from an ethnic background
- Create a strong collective voice
- Share migrant experiences of both struggle and resilience with other people with a disability from an ethnic background, to inspire and support each other
- Ensure that organisations, services and policy-makers hear the voices of people with a disability from an ethnic background, 'to get them thinking'
- Encourage non-disabled people to 'stand beside' people with a disability from an ethnic background

Chamila Fernando
Diversity and
Disability
Administration
Support Worker



The proposed organisation could ... encourage non-disabled people to 'stand beside' people with a disability from an ethnic background

- Form partnerships
- Create channels for participation
- Train people with a disability from an ethnic background in assertiveness, listening skills, their rights, principles of self determination and governance
- Train people with a disability in awareness of the service system – the 'language, culture or behaviour of the sector' – and knowing when, where and how to advocate for systemic change in sustainable ways.

Setting up DnD

Because there was strong support for the establishment of DnD (although it didn't have a name at this stage), the MRCNW employed two workers to establish and build the organisation.

Following the preferences from the consultation, the MRCNW employed workers who had a disability and were from an ethnic background, and who had extensive experience in working in disability rights and self-advocacy. An office was also set up at this time.



Second Consultation

After generating so many ideas and so much interest in the proposed organisation, the Voices Heard Project decided to invite all those previously consulted to a follow up workshop in January 2005.

Participants were asked:

1. Where should DnD start?

Prioritise a list of proposed activities for DnD. This was developed by participants at the initial 2004 consultations.

2. What kind of structure would be most appropriate for DnD?

- How should the organisation be governed?
- How should decisions be made?
- Who should and shouldn't be members of the organisation?
- How should members communicate with each other?
- How should the organisation be accountable and responsive to its membership?



What people said...

“It is good to start as a little tree and then I want to start setting up groups in each region. I can’t tell how much the tree will grow.”

“I was very excited because it is a good thing to have a voice because we are people from different cultures and if we work together and things can work out it will be good.”

“In regard to service providers, it also becomes a matter of making them aware of what people want and what people need. That actually becomes a way to make them increase the quality of their service that they provide because in the end if they really understand what people want and they can provide the services to people with a disability from CALD background at the end of the day it becomes good business practice.”

“A lot of people haven’t got confidence to speak for themselves but if they know that they have support behind them, they feel more confident.”

“we want to start small and then build up and our aim is really to become a leading organisation in the community for people with disability coming from An ethnic background. I mean to be able really to provide training, information and everything can help to support people from CALD background with a disability to be really involved as much as possible.”

“It is good to start as a little tree and then I want to start setting up groups in each region. I can’t tell how much the tree will grow.”

Consultation participants identified two broad strategies for DnD:

1. Build a strong independent organisation

Participants believed that before the new organisation could form partnerships for change, it needed to be a strong, independent organisation.

They said that the organisation should “start small” and expand with the needs and interests of its members and might consist of smaller regional groups or interest groups. They also thought that the new organisation should start with a clear, modest focus while being flexible enough to expand and change as the organisation grew.

Participants said that the new organisation should begin by building the capacities and skills of its membership through recruiting people with a disability from an ethnic background and creating a space for sharing skills, knowledge, passions and interests.

2. Create partnerships for change

Participants believed that once the organisation had established a membership base and become independent, partnerships with service providers were essential. In keeping with the principle of “starting small” and remaining focused, they suggested one or two pilot partnerships.



Steering Committee

It was agreed that an interim steering committee should oversee the first stages of DnD's life, including recruiting of new members and DnD's first activities. The expanded membership could then elect a new steering committee.

An ongoing management committee of people with a disability from an ethnic background was seen as essential for guiding DnD's work and ensuring its relevance and accountability to people with a disability from an ethnic background.

Participants believed that people with a disability from an ethnic background with existing networks and advocacy experience were needed for the interim steering committee. However it was seen as important to involve both experienced and inexperienced people in future committees, to ensure that DnD remained open to new ideas and energy, and encouraged new people in leadership roles.

Membership

Participants believed that DnD's membership should be restricted to people with a disability from an ethnic background, but that others who believed in DnD's vision and aims should be able to be involved in some way.

It was thought too early to determine how and when the membership should meet, but that the interim committee should recommend some ideas on membership for the first management committee.

Communication

Participants discussed the best and most accessible ways for DnD members to communicate. It was decided that there was no "one size fits all" communication method.

Rather, a variety of different methods should be employed, including face to face meetings, online forms of communication, making texts available in large font and in plain English and sending out information via email and the post.

Setting up the Steering Committee

After the consultations an interim steering committee was set up to guide DnD in its first steps as an organisation. People involved in the consultations were invited to join, and the committee began to meet in 2005.

DnD supports committee members to attend meetings by reimbursing them for travel expenses, and providing attendant carers and interpreters when necessary.

The DnD staff and management committee developed a purpose for the steering committee and a set of rights and responsibilities:

Purpose

Committee members will help establish the Diversity and Disability program by using the recommendations from consultations to guide DnD's future direction, and helping develop a structure and



Involving a range of experienced and inexperienced people was seen as essential in making sure that DnD remains open to new ideas and energy

procedure for DnD's operations, and a membership plan for the organisation.

Members' Rights

Committee members will have the right to speak at their own pace and style, have their ideas and criticisms treated with respect, and have others listen respectfully to what they are saying.

Members' Responsibilities

Committee members are responsible for attending as many meetings as possible; reading reports, minutes and other

papers sent to them; bringing their DnD folder to each meeting; and contributing to discussions and decisions.

Members are also asked to work together in partnership to achieve common goals, stick to agenda items and follow them in order, and show respect to others by giving them time to speak, listening carefully, using language that everyone can understand and being on time to each meeting.



Members experiences of being part of DnD's interim steering committee

Recently, we asked our steering committee members about their experiences of being part of the DnD steering committee.

Many people said that as a result of being part of the DnD steering committee they had made new friends, learned new skills and gained new knowledge. Some members also had enjoyed sharing their skills and knowledge with others.

One member said that since being part of DnD she had "come to terms" with her ethnicity and the way it had affected her life. Others said that mixing with people from many cultures was very rewarding.

When asked about what they would like the committee to do in the future, members said that they would like to work towards DnD increasing their membership, becoming more outwardly focused and developing more activities for general members and steering committee members.

Most members felt that they had created a strong foundation for the organisation and believed it was time for expanding the organisation.

As one member put it "We have built a single story house, it is now time to build the second story".



Planning

The interim steering committee held a planning workshop in June 2005 where they discussed DnD's two priorities: building a strong, independent organisation, and creating partnerships for change.

The result of this workshop, and several months of follow-up work is outlined in the DnD Strategic Plan.

Another result of the workshop was a profile of the type of organisation interim steering committee members wanted DnD to become.

They wanted DnD to have the following characteristics:

- respected
- flexible
- vital
- known
- resourceful
- knowledgeable
- adaptable
- understanding
- supportive
- inspiring
- open
- informed
- non-judgmental
- focussed
- approachable
- authentic
- practical
- networked
- sustainable.

*“We have built a single story house,
it is now time to build the second story”.*



Our Lessons

What we have learnt along the way

We have some learnt valuable lessons on our journey together so far.

Commonalities and Differences

We discovered that the category, 'people with a disability from CALD backgrounds', is diverse and includes a very broad range of people including people with different disabilities, cultures, religions, ethnicities and languages. It also includes people with different levels of English language skills and migration experiences, not to mention different people with different ideas, interests and experiences!

DnD is still learning about how to include these differences while building on what we have in common. We have discovered that DnD is most relevant to people who believe that both their ethnic background and their disability impact on who they are and their everyday experiences.

In setting up our steering committee we found that it was important to include people whose identities and lives were shaped by both having a disability and coming from an ethnic background.

People with a disability from an ethnic background who did not believe they were shaped by their disability and ethnicity did not find DnD very relevant to their needs and found little in common with other DnD members.

Setting up a steering committee

We learnt that when getting a group of people together to form a steering committee, it is very important to spend time getting to know each other and developing trust and respect.

It is also important to explain terminology and ensure that everyone understands what is happening and has the opportunity to contribute to discussions.

We learnt how to cater for people's individual needs, including providing an accessible meeting space, interpreters and attendant carers, and providing documents in large font and with colour coding for greater clarity. It was also important to provide good directions to the meeting space.

We learnt that people need skills to participate in a steering committee, and that some people with a lot of steering committee experience have these skills and others don't.

... the category 'people with a disability from CALD backgrounds' is diverse and includes a very broad range of people including people with different disabilities, cultures, religions, ethnicities and languages.



We learnt that it is very important that people have the opportunity to learn new skills and that more experienced people need to take extra care not to leave others behind.

We believe that the skills people need to participate in the steering committee include understanding the committee's role and knowing how to chair a meeting.

Other skills include being able to listen carefully, to speak up when you have something to say, to respect people's different ideas and opinions, and to look past your own experience and think about the needs of people with disabilities from ethnic backgrounds as a whole.

We also learnt that the first steering committee of a newly forming organisation needs to operate for at least 18 months to 2 years before the organisation can get on its feet and elect a new committee. We originally expected our first steering committee to only exist for six months. This was unrealistic! It takes time to build an organisation.



Support

We have learnt that having an established organisation, such as the MRCNW, to support us through our first years is very valuable.

This support has meant that we can focus on building our organisation without having to focus on things like employment practices, professional development needs of workers, finances, office space and major office equipment.

Inclusiveness

We have found that ensuring DnD includes people with a diverse range of disabilities and a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds is very challenging! In the future we would like to include more people from newly-arrived communities and people with a diverse range of disabilities.

We would also like to make sure that we include both men and women. So far, it is mainly women who are involved with DnD.

... ensuring DnD includes people with a diverse range of disabilities and a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds is very challenging!



Our Future

A Plan for Action

DnD has developed a strategic plan for the future. The full plan is available from DnD. Some key elements of the plan are outlined below.

Objective 1

To build an inclusive, vital organisation that develops, and provides a conduit for, the collective, independent voice of people with a disability from an ethnic background:

- Increase DnD membership
- Provide more activities to members, including social activities and training opportunities
- Create more opportunities to listen to people with a disability from an ethnic background about what they would like from DnD
- Set up peer support groups for people with a disability from an ethnic background throughout Victoria
- Continue to provide information to members through newsletters and the website, and
- Work towards becoming an incorporated body.

Objective 2

To form and work in partnerships enhancing the freedom, knowledge and independence of people with a disability from an ethnic background

- Develop partnerships with ethnic community organisations and peak bodies, and
- Work with ethnic communities and ethnic community organisations and peak bodies to:
 - Develop a community education campaign that challenges negative perceptions within ethnic communities about people with disabilities
 - Create positive images and perceptions of people with a disability from an ethnic background, and
 - Raise DnD's profile.



The DnD Story:

Plain English version

This is DnD's story. DnD stands for Diversity and Disability. We are a group run by people with a disability from an ethnic background who live in Victoria.

This story gives information about DnD. It also gives some information about DnD's history.

What is DnD?

At DnD, group members can learn new skills, make friends and work together to make positive changes for people with a disability from an ethnic background.

DnD supports people with a disability from an ethnic background to make their voices heard. We want the services that we use to listen to our opinions and ideas. We also want government departments, who make decisions about our lives, to listen to our opinions and ideas. We want our opinions and ideas heard so that we can have more independence and freedom in our lives.

DnD also works with the community, services and government to make positive changes for people with a disability from an ethnic background.

'I think what is important is for people to believe in themselves, to believe that they can improve things ... but it is also a matter of not only to believe in yourself but also be willing to work with other people because by working together we can achieve so much; the voice heard will be much bigger, we have much more power.'

'We are not fitting in general community and we don't fit in ethnic community... Where do we fit?'

"A lot of people haven't got confidence to speak for themselves but if they know that they have support behind them, they feel more confident."

Steering Committee and Workers

DnD is run by a steering committee and three workers. The steering committee is a group of people with a disability from an ethnic background who help decide what DnD will do. The workers are the people who do most of the tasks that keep DnD running. The workers do things like share information, give advice, write newsletters and help people join the group.

Becoming involved

Only adults with a disability from an ethnic background can become full members of DnD and can vote on decisions about the group. Associate members can be people who are interested in DnD and want to support our work, but cannot become committee members or vote.

When you join DnD you can meet other people with a disability from an ethnic background. You can make friends and learn new skills. You can receive our newsletter and join in our activities.

Our History

Before we started DnD we talked with people with a disability from an ethnic background about what kind of group DnD should be and what it should do. The people we spoke to had many ideas.

Ideas about DnD

DnD should be a place where people with a disability from an ethnic background can learn from each other and support each other.

DnD should help people with a disability from an ethnic background to become more independent.

DnD should try to make sure that government departments and services used by people with a disability from an ethnic background listen to our opinions and ideas. Some people have said:

“It is good to start as a little tree and then I want to start setting up groups in each region. I can’t tell how much the tree will grow.”

“I was very excited because it is a good thing to have a voice because we are people from different cultures and if we work together and things can work out it will be good.”

DnD timeline

May 2004

The Department of Human Services gave the Migrant Resource Centre North West some money to start DnD.

August 2004

Talked with people with a disability from an ethnic background about what DnD should do.

January 2005

Employed some people to work for DnD.

January 2005

Talked again with people with a disability from an ethnic background about what DnD should do.

March 2005

Steering Committee started.

July 2006

DND’s first newsletter sent to members.

January 2007

DnD launched its website.

June 2007

The DnD story is launched.

Our Future

In the future we aim to build DnD into a stronger organisation with many members.

We also aim to work with other organisations to make positive changes in the lives of people with a disability from an ethnic background living in Victoria.

We plan to start groups for people with a disability from an ethnic background in different parts of Victoria.

We want to get more people with a disability from an ethnic background to join DnD and participate in our activities.

We will work with ethnic communities to make sure that people with a disability from an ethnic background are treated with respect and do not experience discrimination.





connections
safe space
supportive
standards
sustainable
working together
training
information
sharing skills
sharing knowledge
open
respectful
flexible
adaptable
understanding
informed
non-judgemental
focussed
practical
approachable
resourceful
authentic
grassroots
diverse
inclusive
effective
networking
self-advocating
engaging
partnership
citizenship
vital
independent
participatory
human rights
voices heard
meaningful change
collective voice
consultative
disability
rights
community
communication
acceptance
enthusiasm
collaboration
accessible
responsive
connections
self-determi-
nation
empowerment
creative
safe space
leadership
strong
accountable
inspiring
supportive
standing beside
listening
assertiveness
sustainable
working together
good practice
training
information
sharing skills
sharing knowledge