“I’m trying to sort my life and my son here, because I’ve been having a lot of problems and I’m trying to get the house fixed up for my son’s needs. As he’s getting older, I’m getting older.”

- Aboriginal carer, Western NSW

THE WOBBLY HUB & DOUBLE SPOKES TEAM

Over the past 3 years we have been learning about and testing new ways to deliver therapy services to people with a disability in rural areas. The Wobbly Hub team is based at the Faculty of Health Sciences, at the University of Sydney and often visits communities in Western NSW.

The project was developed in partnership with management and frontline staff from NSW Ageing Disability and Home Care, Western Region. Their help to the project design and ongoing support has been invaluable to the project’s success.

The Wobbly Hub team is keen to explore other ways to work with communities in rural and remote areas to support Aboriginal people with a disability. We have recently linked with Dr John Gilroy, a Koori man from the Yuin Nation who has worked in the disability field for many years. John’s research identified factors that influence the participation of Aboriginal people in disability services.

SHARED ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCES AND STORIES

During our visits to rural and remote communities across Western NSW we heard many stories from Aboriginal people and their experiences with disability.

In June 2011, we visited a community in far western NSW and spoke to some Aboriginal carers of people with a disability. These carers told us they had to wait a long time to get changes made to their homes to help them care for their son or daughter. They didn’t always know which service providers were coming to their town and when they would be there, so sometimes they missed out. Carers also travelled to cities to get specialist support for their children – this was expensive and took people away...

“When people with a disability outlive their parents they need to stay being cared for in their community not sent somewhere else”

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
CONTINUED

from their community. The comic above is a representation of the many stories and experiences we heard about getting equipment in rural and remote NSW.

We met with Aboriginal workers of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) Western Region as well as the Indigenous Coordination Centres in Wagga Wagga and Dubbo. They told us that “disability” is not something that Aboriginal people identify with. This means that sometimes people don’t ask for the help they could get.

RESEARCH AND SERVICE QUALITIES

We heard from Aboriginal people that they want services that:
- Acknowledge and respect cultural values and traditions - especially the importance of “place” - Land and Language;
- Are led by Aboriginal people;
- Grow the skills of local Aboriginal people;
- Respect the importance of family and community in the life of the person with a disability.

LOCAL IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

During 2011 we met with various indigenous communities and indigenous community groups in Walgett, Bourke and Cobar. One group, the Murdi Paaki Assembly, represents 16 Aboriginal communities in Western NSW. They said that what is really important to the health of Aboriginal people is Land and Language. Overall community leaders shared the need to grow the skills and capacity of local people rather than having people fly in and fly out.

Services that give Aboriginal carers a break from caring was another common view from rural Aboriginal communities. This also includes more early childhood supports, so that families can get the help they need from the beginning.

TRYING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

With these lessons in mind, we have recently been engaged to evaluate an ADHC pilot of disability services in Western NSW. The pilot provides children aged 0 – 8 years living in remote Aboriginal communities with various therapy services. In the pilot, four therapy support workers, the majority of whom are Aboriginal women, have been employed to work with children in local playgroups, preschools and schools to prepare them for school. In this pilot project the workers learn new skills by working in partnership with regional specialists, and the children receive services they might not otherwise have access to.

WE’RE COMMITTED TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

The Wobbly Hub team are committed to working with Aboriginal communities to develop and test new ways to deliver services to Aboriginal people with a disability living in rural areas. We feel fortunate that we’ve been welcomed into communities and are always respectful of local customs, knowledge and wisdom. We are looking for ways to use the things we have learnt to improve the lives of Aboriginal people with a disability in rural and remote areas. If you would like to learn more about us, or if you have anything to share, please visit our website www.sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/research/wobbly-hub or call project manager Angela Dew on 02 9351 9050.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

T +61 2 9351 9050
F +61 2 9351 9128
E angela.dew@sydney.edu.au

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