

# Understanding Our Clients

## Culturally and linguistically diverse people

### What do I need to know to work more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse clients?

- It is important to understand the barriers and the challenges that these clients are experiencing, as well as the emotional background to their circumstances.
- It takes time to sit with these clients to build a rapport, to build trust so that we are able to assist with their legal problems and connect them with the right people who can provide support.
- Language is a huge barrier. Not only is court a daunting new experience for clients, they can't understand what is being said.
- Clients have all had different experiences and may feel stressed and anxious. It's about asking the right questions, understanding, and listening to them, and allowing them to tell you their story when they are confident and ready.
- Even people who have been in Australia for many years may find it difficult to understand the legal process and the issues you are assisting them with. If they need an interpreter, you should always use one. Refer to the [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\) website](#) for further information regarding interpreters.

## Refugees

### What do I need to understand to work more effectively with refugees?

- A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country of origin to seek safety in another country. They may have arrived in Australia from a country that is experiencing war and violence.
- All refugees have suffered a level of trauma, simply because of their experience as a refugee. Trauma impacts memory and cognition. You might have to repeat advice more than once, using different words each time. Stop often to ask the client if they have any questions about what you have just said.
- You should always offer an interpreter to the client. Even clients who appear to have a reasonable level of English will occasionally struggle with the words and concepts you are trying to convey.

- Do not use a friend or relative of the client to interpret (unless you have no other option, or if the client insists they only want to use a friend or relative). Avoid using children to help interpret for their parents.
- Assume the client knows very little about the legal system and the bureaucracy that we work within and do not use acronyms. Most refugee clients will be sensitive to the intervention of the state in their lives, and you might need to explain confidentiality and assure them that the process of interacting with the courts and the justice system is safe. Most refugees will have no experience of a service equivalent to Legal Aid NSW in their home country.
- Be aware of cultural differences and religious precepts. For example, people who practise Islam might be uncomfortable with a handshake, but also too polite to refuse that gesture when offered. Take your cues from the client and wait for them to act first. Often a smile is all you need to welcome someone.

## Support services for non-legal issues – referral options

### Online referral databases

These online databases may also assist you to find appropriate non-legal services for your client.

- [WayAhead Directory](#) – online database used to find local services, to make referrals and access mental health information and resources.
- [Ask Izzy](#) – search over 350,000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and more.
- [Data Diction LINCS](#) – LINCS is used by almost all councils in the Sydney area and lists community services
- [My Community Directory](#) – directory of health and community services in NSW and other states.
- [Infoxchange](#) – national database of community support services.

## Action learning activities

- Reflect on the points raised in the [Understanding Our Clients video](#) and consider if there are aspects you could improve on in the way you work with culturally and linguistically diverse clients and refugees. Take action to make changes where appropriate.
- Learn more about the barriers and challenges that culturally and linguistically diverse clients and refugees experience and consider how you can be mindful of this when working with clients of this background.

- Think about how you might develop a rapport with your client and put this into action when you meet. Consider what worked well and what you would do differently next time.
- Discuss support services for non-legal issues with your client and help your client access these services if required.
- Review one or more of the resources below and consider how you can apply any insights to your practice.

## Useful Resources

- [The Legal Aid NSW Podcast Channel](#) that you can access via our Podbean account or wherever you get your podcasts. The series covers a variety of topics. Use the search function or topic list to find podcasts that may be relevant.
- The [With You Trauma-Informed Organisational Toolkit](#) provides practical guidance to foster the development of trauma-informed, rights-based legal assistance services.
- [The Bugmy Bar Book](#) summarises key research relating to social disadvantage and deprivation. It is hosted on the Public Defenders Website and is designed to equip lawyers with a sophisticated, accurate understanding of the impacts adverse experiences can have upon individuals.
- [The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors \(STARTTS\)](#) is a specialist, not-for-profit organisation. Their website has many useful [STARTTS-produced free resources](#) that provide valuable insights about the experience of refugees that may assist you when working with clients from a refugee background.
- The [SBS Cultural Atlas](#) is an educational resource providing comprehensive information on the cultural background of Australia's migrant populations.
- The [Legal Aid NSW Quality Standards Manual](#) outlines the practice standards, client service standards, panel requirements and law practice requirements that apply to your role.