Final grant report: Information update for asylum seekers

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<tr>
<th>Project title</th>
<th>Information update for asylum seekers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grant recipient</td>
<td>Refugee Advice and Casework Service (Aust) Inc</td>
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<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Tanya Jackson-Vaughan</td>
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<td>Position</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<td>Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount</td>
<td>$40,411.82</td>
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<td>Grant period</td>
<td>April 2012 – November 2013</td>
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<td>Date of this report</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
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Description of the project

*Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?*

The factsheet project funded by the Law and Justice Foundation resulted in the production of 7 factsheets explaining the process of applying for asylum in Australia and 1 brochure explaining what services RACS provides.

The aim of the project was to produce factsheets that explained a complicated and daunting process in simple English that could then be translated into 6 community languages.

The audience for the factsheets was both caseworkers and clients. Caseworkers at Red Cross, SSI or ASC provide welfare and other kinds of support but having a basic understanding of the visa process is essential for their work. They need to understand how clients apply for visas so that they can support their clients, work collaboratively with the lawyers and keep abreast of the different steps their clients must overcome.

For asylum seekers who are not eligible for our services (because they do not meet the criteria), the factsheets explain step by step how to go through the process of applying for a visa. In addition, lawyers can use the factsheets for current clients to clarify what the application process involves.

The factsheets give an overview of what they should bring to an interview, what to expect at their interview, the Refugee Review Tribunal application process and how to write a request for Ministerial Intervention. They do NOT replace legal advice but may assist people applying for asylum by giving them an overview.
The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?
The project had been mooted by the previous Director, Melissa McAdam, as RACS did not have factsheets available for clients and no brochure explaining our services.

The current director, Tanya Jackson-Vaughan, realised that the gap in information to clients was problematic as we had nothing explaining our services nor the complicated visa application process.

Having met with Jane Kenny from the Law and Justice Foundation and discussed the viability of the project. RACS applied for a grant.

Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.
The Executive Director met with RACS lawyers and explained the brief.

RACS lawyers worked on developing the information in clear and simple English.

Then our designer, Mitchell Dale from Electric Elephant got on board.

The UNHCR kindly gave us permission to use some of their photos and Mitchell transformed plain text into accessible, easy on the eye factsheets.

After much proof reading (each reader picked up different typos!), we were happy with the content.

We then sourced an affordable and efficient translating company and sent the content off to them.

The factsheets were sent to the printers. The PDFs were emailed to electorate officers, migrant resource centres and asylum seekers agencies.

The Hon Tanya Plibersek and Geoff Mulherin, Director of the Law and Justice Foundation, launched the factsheets, our new website and our family reunion clinic.

If grant materials were produced:

How were they distributed?
The PDFs were emailed to electorate officers, migrant resource centres and asylum seekers agencies. The hardcopies are given to clients (advice clients) and handed out at community information sessions.
The PDFs are on our website and links are sent to interested parties.
There is a link to the factsheets on the NACLC website thanks to NACLC Bruce.
What was the extent of the distribution?
All electorate offices in Sydney were sent links to the factsheets. All organisations that are member of the asylum seekers interagency, all migrant resource centres in Sydney, Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid.

If applicable, at the time of this report, what has been the extent of online use of your publication?
Our publications can be accessed in several ways on our website. On the publications page and on each page outlining a step in the protection visa application process.
We have tweeted about them and posted on Facebook.

Now that the project has concluded, how did the implementation and/or the outcome differ from what was originally intended? Did anything surprise you? Were there any unintended outcomes?
I was disappointed in the time it took to complete the project. My expectations were unrealistic. Dealing with policy and procedural changes in the protection space was very time consuming and took me away from the project. I would give the project to someone else to oversee next time.
I had to rewrite the project plan several times.
Thankfully the Law and Justice Foundation were very understanding.

Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?
1. Did you find the info sheets clear and easy to understand?
2. Did they help you understand your legal problem? If yes, did the info sheet give you an answer? If no, why not
3. Would you recommend this info sheet to your colleagues, friends? Why?
4. Have you given this info sheet to anyone else? Do you know if they found it useful
5. Is there anything that we should create an info sheet on that you think would be helpful for your or your clients? Do you have suggestions?
6. How did you find the layout, colour of the info sheet - was it easy to follow?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?
Qualitative data from caseworkers within organisations who work with refugees, who were given the factsheets to use themselves or pass on to clients and colleagues.

Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?
Overall the feedback was very positive, with caseworkers finding the factsheets visually appealing, very useful and helpful in assisting their clients. The production of the factsheets has benefitted both our clients and the clients of other organisations. In particular we received positive feedback from caseworkers with non-legal backgrounds. They found the factsheets easy to follow and that they also clarified and simplified complex legal issues. However the factsheets were also very informative and a good basis for further enquiry. The factsheets made the various stages of applying for Protection Visas and the legal problems associated at these stages, easier to understand for the caseworker and therefore easier to explain to their clients. The project has enabled caseworkers from various
organisations to provide their clients with accurate information and our solicitors the confidence to give out this information to clients who attended an Afternoon or Evening Advice session, but were limited with time to provide more advice. Caseworkers passed on the factsheets to colleagues and clients, who passed them on to family and friends within the community. The factsheets answered a client’s legal questions. Numerous positive feedback was given about the factsheets being available in community languages, which made it much easier for caseworkers to explain to their clients their legal problems and about the different stages of applying for Protection Visas. Caseworkers found it useful to be able to provide the factsheets to refugees, who they could not take on as clients, knowing they would at least have some understanding of the process and to actively help themselves or they could provide them with the RACS factsheet, giving them an overview on what we do and how we can help them. In particular it was useful for the clients to be provided with a step-by-step guide on how to write and answer questions at the various stages of the Protection Visa application process.

Some suggestions for the content of future factsheets included instructions on how to fill out forms, information on Temporary Protection Visas and a factsheet on opportunities once a visa has been granted, which could include subjects like where asylum seekers can find work, etc. Also one caseworker suggested the layout of the factsheets be more point form so they are easier to read. Caseworkers suggested we provide information on what non-migration agents can and can’t do for clients, because there is a fine line between providing immigration assistance and immigration advice - perhaps with case studies.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

**What is your conclusion?**

Overall the project was successful with encouraging feedback and a positive overall impression of both the content and visuals of the factsheets. The factsheets in particular made it easier for caseworkers with non-legal backgrounds to understand the Protection Visa process and therefore it gave them the confidence to advise their clients. Caseworkers were also confident in giving out the factsheets to refugees and asylum seekers who they could not take on as clients, as were RACS’ lawyers, who gave the factsheets to clients they only saw once for advice or were limited by time in giving advice. Many appreciated and highlighted the importance that the factsheets had been translated into community languages.

A technical issue was that the fact sheets don’t print out very well in black and white – some of the white text on a coloured background can’t be seen. We’ve had feedback at Community Information Sessions that the factsheets aren’t very accessible on the website – you have to know where to look to find them. To help with accessibility, we could also create subheadings for the fact sheets so it’s clearer to find them – e.g. have the name of the fact sheet as a heading, and then under it in bullet points the different languages. It would also be good to be able to track how many people click on each factsheet, to monitor the popularity of their use.

**What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?**

One recommendation would be to have the factsheets translated into more languages commonly used by clients within the asylum seeker/refugee network.