DEBBIE HINDLE: It gives me great pleasure to welcome some more NDCOs to our wonderful screen. We have Susan Beard, Gary Kerridge, Devan Nathan and Isabel Osuna-Gatty who will present the wonderful topic Engaging with People with Disabilities from Multicultural Backgrounds. This little team is going to share some information and provide some strategies which will allow us to build capacity and service delivery when working with students with disability from multicultural communities. I’m going to hand over to one of the dynamic team to take us through this presentation. Thank you. Who’s going to step up and take us forward?

ISABEL OSUNA-GATTY: Devan. Devan is going to share his screen and put the presentation on.

DEBBIE: Great, Devan. Is Devan with us?

DEVAN NATHAN: Yes.

DEBBIE: Here he is. Thanks, Devan.

ISABEL: Good afternoon, everyone. As Deb said, my name is Isabel Osuna-Gatty. I’m one of the NDCOs from South Australia. Susan, Gary and myself are from South Australia and Devan is from North Sydney. Thank you very much for being here today. Today we are going to be sharing with you some strategies on how to work with people with disabilities from multicultural backgrounds. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of Australia and recognise the continuing connection to land, water and culture. Today we’re on the land of the Kaurna and the Dharug people. We pay our respects to all elders past, present and emerging. We also pay our respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people present here today. As you all know, today is the International Day of People with Disability and we would like to shine a light on those people from multicultural communities living and studying in Australia and the intersectionality of challenges they face when they settle and adapt to living and participating in the Australian educational system. Many multicultural communities face significant and complex barriers which require greater support in accessing services. For many multicultural communities disability carries a high level of stigma. When participating in tertiary education whether they are migrants, humanitarian entrants or international students disclosing disability or reaching for support becomes a very high hurdle to jump. The aim of this presentation is to share information, provide strategies and best practice methods which will improve engagement and service delivery for tertiary education providers. We would appreciate if you could put any questions in the chat and we will endeavour to answer them at the end of our presentation, but now to speak about what we know so far here is Susan who will talk to you about finding data on people with disabilities from multicultural communities.

SUSAN BEARD: Hi, everyone. What we know so far about statistics for multicultural people with disability nationally and for those attending tertiary study they are difficult to source and under-represent the population and these students’ needs. To understand the challenge we need to look at the definition of culturally and linguistically diverse people, CALD, for gathering statistics. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, recommends a minimum core set of indicators they use in addition to their standard set of indicators to indicate CALD. The minimum indicators include country of birth excluding the so-called main English speaking countries or NESCs, Fiji, Canada, USA etc. Another minimum indicator is the main language spoken at home other than English and proficiency in English. The ABS standard set of cultural and language indicators also includes in addition to that country of birth, parents, language patterns, religious affiliation, year of arrival in Australia etc, ancestry. If we look at problems with data collection and exclusion the Federal Institute of Health and Welfare indicates one of the main problems in identifying statistics is that many government agencies and organisations, tertiary providers, tend to use only minimal data indicators such as country of birth, other than main English speaking country, to define CALD and use minimum indicators in isolation even to identify people from CALD backgrounds, so not even using all the minimum indicators. There is support by the institute and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability into much broader indicators including interpreters, humanitarian status, dual heritage, migrant and non-restricted length of residence in Australia. We know there are migrants and multicultural people who have been in Australia for many years who aren’t identified and still need support. The Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia, FECCA, and the National Ethnic Disability Alliance, NEDA, further indicates that by identifying only people born in non-NESC countries this includes those born in mainly English speaking countries with parents from different cultural backgrounds and of course we know of the humanitarian crisis and those with parents with humanitarian status who live in those countries. Further, approximately a staggering 1.4 million Australian born people are also excluded from CALD statistics if they say they speak English proficiently yet identify as another culture. For this reason, in this presentation and our project we’re using the term multicultural because we want to look at those people from diverse cultural backgrounds that include all of these variables. The next slide, thanks, Devan. Multicultural tertiary students with disability, let’s look at the national data. Firstly, we would like to give a big thanks to NEDEA for providing research documents and the following table sourced from ABS 2016 and 2018. It’s been very difficult to source the data, thank you NEDEA, and we are still exploring how to capture it. Let’s take a look at the CALD minimum variables on the left. If we look at the data in this table across RTO, TAFE and university we can see nationally students with disability and those from multicultural backgrounds a total of 282 students from the data collected. However, the other table that includes those who are Australian born, those born in NESC countries and also have other cultural indicators, there’s a total of 11,017 students. We’re looking at a total of 11,299 nationally as opposed to 282 if we just use the minimal indicators that many of us use. Obviously, this is a drastic flattening of the stats with implications for resourcing and how these students are assisted if we only use the minimum data. What about rich data? Further studies highlight the problems with the lack of rich data. The multicultural youth Australia census by the University of Melbourne consulted and surveyed 1,920 multicultural youth. Most of them were in the age group 18 to 25 and almost 17% of the youth respondents had disability. A number of these participants commented that the minimum use of data really flattens out their identity. The report was able to capture rich data that’s not captured when we use the minimum indicators. For example, one cohort that identified with a particular religion indicated they had good belonging in their own community. They didn’t indicate the same mental health issues as other youth cohorts but nationally didn’t feel they belong and importantly many also didn’t know who to turn to if in trouble and that’s particularly important and always is but particularly with COVID-19. We can capture rich data and data can be collected in a way that supports identify so we can create programs and policies which better foster inclusion and support needs in ways required. We can capture data for strength-based understandings as well. So, in order to achieve improved support national consistency in data collection is required by all of us including asking individuals themselves the question, “What cultural background do you identify with?” Of course, we must be mindful not generalise the group statistics to individuals with disability and use strength-based approaches. Some questions for consideration are who’s included, who’s excluded from your data collection, how do you know you’re gathering and using feedback appropriately and providing the best possible resources and support. Now I’ll pass the baton to Devan who will tell you about understanding multicultural communities. Thanks, everyone.

DEVAN: Thank you, Susan. My name is Devan Nathan. I am the NDCO for Northern Sydney. People with disabilities from multicultural communities face many barriers and among them are common language and cultural barriers. This is more challenging for people with disabilities who need to adjust to not only the new environment but also the academic requirements. Factors such as culture, gender, social life or even food may have an impact on education. It is a common belief among many multicultural communities that by disclosing disability the chances of securing employment will be difficult particularly if it is a hidden form of disability. It is a commonly considered idea that the information of a student with a disability is passed down to others in the future. The concept of support to engage in employment is still very much new to multicultural communities and often is prejudiced against the recruitment system. Some community members’ experience from their home country may have contributed to this. Older generations may not have the knowledge and understanding of current practices, quite often reflect on their own experiences and try to relate those to their children. The experience of students and parents of children with a disability from multicultural communities prevents them to disclose their disabilities to any third party outside their circle of confidence. This is mainly because in some communities disability is perceived as a bad omen occurs on the family or even shame. Many families depress disability especially if the disability is hidden. Parents and close contacts at large keep disability information concealed as there are other underlying reasons that go beyond employment such as marriage, social status, social image and so on. Parents from multicultural communities are very reluctant to talk about their children’s disability within their community let alone to an educational institution. A disability is not only seen as a condition of a person but rather linked to a family background, cultural belief and, in some instances, it affects the social life of other family members, for example, marriage of other siblings. Some people with disability from multicultural communities who may not have completed their early education in Australia will need some time to adjust to schooling in Australia and not only because of the language but also because their previous schooling experiences may be very different. The thought process in the mother tongue is very common amongst students who spoke English as a second language despite having spent some reasonable years studying locally. Due to this, students can often be misunderstood as not having the capacity to comprehend what they are being told. Educators need to allow them time to process extra information mentally especially as most are learning and are improving their English language skills in addition to understanding and cognitively processing the content of what is being presented in class. Multicultural communities from most western countries are different from the multicultural communities from other parts of the world. There are many similarities among education institutions from other western countries as to how they operate in the context of people with disability. Therefore, there’s no one size fits all solution when engaging with people with disabilities from multicultural backgrounds. Even among western countries cultural differences may affect people with disabilities when participating in education. Education providers need to take into consideration the intersectionality of all the factors when engaging with people with disability from multicultural communities. Now to highlight the issues faced by people who are deaf and are from multicultural communities here is Gary.

GARY KERRIDGE: Good afternoon, everybody. Firstly before I head on, I’d just like to apologise to anybody who saw me scoffing my ice-cream in the last session. It’s because I forgot to turn off my camera. My sincere apologies for that. It would not have been a nice vision. Before I go on to my proper presentation, I’d just like you to think about the people who provided the support, the group of people that I’ll be talking about. You might think that they didn’t provide enough support or something like that, that is not the case. The providers moved heaven and earth to support these people but the complexities were really great and it’s very, very difficult to provide for them. What they’ve done with this group of people is amazing. Moving on to the presentation, in South Australia. It’s interesting, we have a group of Bhutanese people, we have over 3000 Bhutanese people which is the largest population of Bhutanese people outside of Bhutan. That came about from refugees, humanitarian visas and all of that sort of stuff. What happened is they brought their families over and some of those family members had disabilities as well. It so happened that 30 of those people formed a small sort of Bhutan deaf community. There was an advocate for them who negotiated with a training provider to set up a language program for them to help them to learn English, to learn sign language and all that sort of stuff. Now, with the group of people from Bhutan, they were deaf. One of the common attributes they had was that they had language deprivation and language deprivation can be quite common among deaf people generally but when that happens it can impact on your communication, impact on your human development, impact on your ability to learn, impact on your ability to develop relationships with other people, a whole host of things. What we had here was a group of people from Bhutan who may have known a bit of Nepalese sign language. They may have been able to speak a little bit. They may have had very limited communication and we had 30 people with really varying needs. The provider had to design a program for them that would meet their needs adequately. It was very, very difficult. One of the issues with these people also is they had very limited access to technology so to learn language. If you wanted to learn spoken language you had to hear. Well, many of them had had no access to hearing aids, no access to maintenance of their hearing aids if they’d broken and so and so. You had a really complex group of people with really different behaviours. Many of them also had not been involved in formal education at all before so you found in the classroom they didn’t focus. Sometimes they distracted people. They sometimes didn’t trust people. They sometimes didn’t know how to respond in communication or how to develop relationships and so on. You needed a group of people who were training them who were very, very, very patient. They also had trauma. Some of that trauma comes from being a refugee, comes from coming from a war-torn country or whatever but also apparently some of them had been abused in their education as well, so they brought with them that trauma and they had a real mistrust that would cause them behavioural meltdowns and so on. I’m not sure how they managed that but there were lots of variables in supporting these people. What they did they used strategies where they employed people from the deaf community, native Auslan signers to be able to communicate with them. They had teachers there who were very, very patient who knew Auslan. They used visual communication, they used pictures. Some of the people from Bhutan who were more proficient, I guess could communicate better, they used them to help communicate with some of the others. They might have used a little bit of their own home language to communicate but it meant that all of these people with varying needs you had to have a really innovative program for them. I think they did a wonderful job. I know that after several years one person in particular had become like an advocate for the community. He interprets for them. He goes to NDIS meetings with them to explain NDIS concepts. He goes to Centrelink, legal meetings and all of that sort of stuff and he works as a training provider as well helping to teach them and improve their language as well. Apart from the group of Bhutanese I also had the experience of meeting a person from South East Asia who was also deaf. She’d been in Australia for 24 years. She’d tried to learn English and tried to be involved in courses but she should found it extremely, extremely difficult. She couldn’t relate to people. She couldn’t communicate with people and she needed support, help to be able to communicate with tutors and that sort of stuff. She couldn’t do that either. After a while she became really, really frustrated and she dropped out of the course. In 24 years she’s been involved in the deaf community but she’s really, really struggled but recently, and I don’t know how this came about, they found out she had some proficiency in writing her home language, so now we’re trying to incorporate her home language for writing and through an interpreter help her to understand concepts. It’s just another example of how complicated that it can be. What I wanted to do by telling this story is show you that sometimes dealing with multicultural groups and designing learning programs for them can be really, really complex. From there I’ll hand you back to Isabel.

ISABEL: Thank you very much, Gary. As you can tell there is really not a perfect picture of what’s happening at the moment in this space but I would like to share some approaches that you could use in your practice. When people from multicultural backgrounds access education here in Australia they have to get used to a different way of life, culture and communication. Most will have English as a second language and some will have been facing pressures from their own families to achieve certain goals and others will have survived experiences of trauma and social isolation and we haven’t added disability to this mix. As educational providers we need to be mindful of the intersectionality of factors affecting people with disability from multicultural backgrounds. This information will allow us to understand this cohort better and it will prepare us to design strategies for service and engagement. So, how do we practise inclusive engagement? Multicultural people come from collective societies where resources and information are shared for the survival and betterment of the community. When settling in Australia whether they are humanitarian entrants, migrants or international students they need to learn the intricacies of life in an individualistic society. If you have a student who made an appointment to see you it is possible that they looking to connect with someone who could answer some questions and give them the guidance they are looking for as they may not many people in the classroom. It is not just about the course they are taking or the educational provider it is a bit deeper. They need to find someone they can trust and build a relationship with. We connect through our stories. You need to try to find a commonality with your student, tell them a little bit about you. Talk to them about what you know about their culture, if you know about art, music, what you know. Do not talk about conflict, politics or religion. Do not speak about disability even if it is visible. This process will make students at ease and the barriers between you two will start to get smaller. They might start asking for assistance with an assignment but they are actually sensing around to check if you would be the one they can share more about their situation. Usually they do not know the type of assistance they will need so offer this information once they have spoken to you about a situation. How do you apply a trauma-informed approach? Once I had a student who was picked up on a bus and taken to a campus that was located in a rural area. His classmates encouraged him to take a taxi to the main street to do his shopping. He said that he walked everywhere during the first week of his arrival because taxis looked exactly like police cars until he learned the difference when he took a ride with one his friends. He said that every time he jumped into a taxi his heart jumped a bit. This is a perfect example of how someone’s world view is completely different than yours. It is important to ask your student where you would like to meet. It is possible that an open space or a closed space may trigger some memories. If you are an educator do not use a student or the student’s culture or country of birth to illustrate examples in the classroom. As multicultural people we like people and we like sticking together. Another way is to work with your student council to create opportunities for students to meet and share. Some of the students may be interested in learning about cultures or just simply meeting new friends. This will drive inclusion and provide that collective culture that we are looking for. How do you apply a strength-based approach in your practice? Start your conversation from a glass half full perspective, what do they know, what are the skills they bring, how would they like to work with you. Their strengths will inform the design of your strategy. This will promote resilience and you will be able to pick up different cultural ecologies. This approach will also allow you to obtain valued information as you will be actively engaging with the student building trust and rapport. Then it will be easier to talk about support and services. What is being culturally appropriate? It means to be respectful, to be aware of other people’s cultures and beliefs, be mindful of the different English language skills and abilities your students bring. Remember Gary’s case studies. Auslan is another language so give them time to tell you their story. If they have disclosed a disability ask them if it is okay for them to talk about it. Do not correct them. Remember they are telling you what they know. Ask them how you can assist them. If they do not know give examples of how you have been able to help other people. Once you have built rapport and trust you can provide them with other information about their circumstances if this is important to clarify. Remember you will not solve all the problems within your first consultation. It might take several appointments to assist your student. You can connect with your local migrant resource centre. They usually have a list of multicultural services available in your area that the student might want to connect with. They also have a list of multicultural groups available. Students may want to connect with someone from their own culture. Students may not remember everything that you say to them but they will remember how you make them feel. Thank you for my presentation.

DEBBIE: That was wonderful. Thank you, Isabel. Can I just thank all of you for presenting that. It’s something that’s really resonated with me working in communities which are multicultural. I actually really love it. I find it very fascinating but it really startled me the data that you provided Susan with the minimum indicators that we’re using. I find that quite startling. There are some questions that are coming in so I hope the four of you can stay and just have a look in the chat box just to make sure that we all get those answered and your contact details are up there as well. Thank you very much. There are some really good questions and I think it’s a topic we can talk more about. There were some really good practical strategies there that we can really take on board. Thank you very much all for your presentations. It was brilliant.

ISABEL: Thank you very much, Deb.