

At MDAA we do **advocacy**. This means we work together with people with disability, families, and the community to promote, protect and secure the rights and interests of people from a non-English speaking background (NESB) with disability and their families and carers in NSW.

*How we can help you and your family*

**Individual Advocacy:** A worker, called an advocate, works with you when your rights are ignored. The advocate will 'stand beside' you and support you, so you can make your own decisions and get what you need. An advocate can help you stand up for your rights, for example, when you have problems with housing, immigration, work, school, and disability services.

*How we can help your community*

**Advocacy Development:** We work together with groups of people with disability and their families to learn more about standing up for your rights and needs. This can help you to have a say about the things that are important to you.

**Community Development:** MDAA can work with your community to increase knowledge and awareness about disability, disability services and the rights of people with disability.

**Systemic Advocacy:** We lobby politicians and government departments to make things better for people from a NESB with disability and their families.

**Our advocacy and community development services are free.**



***opening doors***  
***Disability experienced***  
***in Bosnia and Australia***



**Working for a NSW where the diversity of disability and culture is anticipated, supported and celebrated**

*Acknowledged by*



**Bosnian Information and Welfare Centre**  
(Bosnia Herzegovina Project Inc.)



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'opening doors' was undertaken by MDAA together with many individuals and organisations to increase the knowledge about disability in different ethnic communities.

MDAA would like to thank everyone from the community who helped us with this project.

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## Disability experienced in Bosnia

This introduction is about disability experiences of Bosnian people and families. Some of the attitudes and beliefs discussed are also common to other cultures.

### How we treated people with disability in the past

Bosnia has a long history of different religions and cultures living side by side in the same community. We are people for whom family reputation is important. Sometimes this means that we hide our suffering and this may include hiding disability.

There is much variety within Bosnian culture about how people with disability are and have been treated in the past. Sometimes people were hidden away within the family, separated from the community, as the family and the person with the disability were feeling ashamed about the disability. This was more common than people with disability being seen and included as part of the community.

Rasim

Rasim's story is very unusual. He was a person with a mental illness living in a small city in Bosnia. There were many people he spent time with and talked to. In this way he was accepted as a part of the community. He had somewhere to live and people were always generous, giving him food and he could come and go as he pleased.

A person with disability was often cared for by their parents at home, if necessary with support from other family members, usually sisters. Having someone in the family with a disability

would often lower their sisters' and brothers' chances of getting married.

We had special classes in local schools for children with a mild disability and there were special schools for children who needed more support. There were some rehabilitation services for people who had strokes and other physical disability. If a family could not care for their family member with a disability at home, the person would go and live in an institution. Like everywhere in the world, these institutions were poorly equipped and separate from community life.

### **Were there any events that changed attitudes to people with disability?**

The war in Bosnia had a huge effect on everyone's lives. The numbers of people with disability greatly increased, making disability more common in the community. People who have a disability because of the war were often more accepted by their community after the war.

### **Has the language we use to talk about people with disability changed?**

In the past the words we used about disability were mostly negative. We would often talk about or nickname people using words that were degrading and identify them as their disability. This was especially the case at school where children with disability would often be teased and called names.

In recent years the language we use to talk about disability has begun to change slowly to show that we respect a person as a human being rather than simply focusing on their disability. But the terms 'mentally retarded' and 'handicapped' are still common.

### **What are the myths or beliefs about disability in Bosnia?**

People with disability are treated in different ways, but across society attitudes tend to be negative. Disability is usually seen as an embarrassment within the family. When there is a family member with a disability often the whole family will feel disgraced. People will avoid the family and not want to marry into the family.



Sometimes mothers are blamed for causing the disability by doing something during the pregnancy they should not have done. More often religious beliefs are involved; such as the belief that god is punishing the mothers of children with a disability for their sins.

Many people are afraid of people with an intellectual disability or a mental illness believing that they will behave in a violent way. We often think of people with an intellectual disability or mental illness as having no mind of their own, not seeing them as whole people and believing they will never have a 'life' or money. This negative thinking is generally stronger towards people with mental illness or intellectual disability than towards a person with a physical disability or someone who is blind or deaf.

As said before, we try to hide the disability and the shame we feel. For example for a man in Bosnia disability brings the added shame of not being able to do military service, which is a great source of social standing and respect in the community.

#### **Mirsad**

Mirsad is a young man with intellectual disability who because of his disability was not allowed to do his military service. His father is a Colonel in the army and was able to arrange for Mirsad to do his military service.

## Are there any differences in the way city and country people respond to disability?

It is more common to see people with disability on the street in the cities than in the country. Also most services are in the city, so people with disability and their families who live in country areas would have to travel to the nearest city to receive services and other supports. Children with disability living in country areas are more likely to be cared for at home without any specialist support services.

In country areas compassion for people with disability is more likely to be common because people in small communities usually have stronger ties.

## What services are there for people with disability?

There are schools for particular disability types, such as for children who are blind, deaf or have an intellectual disability. These schools are often very poorly equipped, with teachers teaching large numbers of children with disability single-handedly. Children with mild intellectual disability would usually attend special classes in ordinary schools.

Many people with disability used to work in 'sheltered workshops', which were attached to the institutions. Today there are rehabilitation centres for people with disability.

Many of these institutions are slowly disappearing and are being replaced by smaller services in the community.

The war caused serious disruption to services and many services cannot cope, with more people now needing services. As in all areas, there is a shortage of skilled workers, as many fled the county, died or were wounded. There is a shortage of support equipment such as wheelchairs. Some services were provided by international aid organisations immediately after the war but this aid is now being withdrawn.

## What role do families play in caring for people with disability?

Individual and family reputations are highly regarded and honoured in Bosnia. In the past, three generations often lived together in a Bosnian family. Now the generations live close by in separate households, but families are usually close and provide support to each other.

Traditionally people with disability are cared for within the family without using outside services.



Mothers are the main carers, with sisters and then other family members providing extra support. It is a family obligation to care for ageing parents, children under 18 and adult children with disability for life. People who cannot carry out their duty are looked down on and often feel guilty and ashamed. This was very difficult during the war when many people fled for their lives and had to leave some family members behind. There are many families where husbands and wives are from different communities and, with the conflict, many of these extended families have been torn apart. This often increased the difficulty of caring for family members with disability.

## What does the community know about the rights of people with disability? How has this changed over the years?

In the past we cared for people with disability in many ways but we did not think much about rights. Since the war Bosnia has been a country and people in crisis. With so many of its people lost and disabled by land mines, torture, trauma and other war events, disability has become a more common part of Bosnian life.



There is growing understanding both in Bosnia and internationally of the effects of torture and trauma on people and communities who have been in conflict. In 1999 Tuzla hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Post War Mental Health. In 2003 the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Psychiatrists of Bosnia and Herzegovina was held in

Sarajevo with international participation, and dealt with mental health reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

International aid organisations have provided some support to new and already existing disability groups and services. However these international organisations are now withdrawing from Bosnia, even though services in Bosnia have only been partly restored. For many people the main concerns are food, clothing and shelter and there seems to be little energy left to struggle for rights of people with disability.

### Web Sites used in writing this document

[www.vso.org.uk/overseas/cprofiles\\_bosnia.pdf](http://www.vso.org.uk/overseas/cprofiles_bosnia.pdf)

[www.easterncorner.com/Bosnia.htm](http://www.easterncorner.com/Bosnia.htm)

[www.belarus.net/formerbl/w\\_bosn\\_1.htm](http://www.belarus.net/formerbl/w_bosn_1.htm)

[www.megastories.com/bosnia/history/croats.html](http://www.megastories.com/bosnia/history/croats.html)

[www.cco.caltech.edu/~bosnia/history/histinfo.html](http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~bosnia/history/histinfo.html)

[www.4cbiz.net/kosta/tar/RS/dean/bih\\_history.hitm](http://www.4cbiz.net/kosta/tar/RS/dean/bih_history.hitm)

[www.kakarigi.net/manu/briefhis.htm](http://www.kakarigi.net/manu/briefhis.htm)

[www.sttar.org](http://www.sttar.org)

<http://meds.queensu.ca/icacbr/Albkobih.htm>

## Disability experienced in Australia

### What is Disability?

A disability is something that stops a person from doing things they want to in their day-to-day activities. At least 19%, or one in five people in New South Wales, will experience one or more of the following:

- blindness or vision impairment (even when wearing glasses or contact lenses)
- deafness or hearing impairment (even when fitted with a hearing aid)
- chemical sensitivity
- speech difficulties in their first language
- blackouts, fits or loss of consciousness
- disorientation in unfamiliar environment
- slowness at learning or understanding
- acute anxiety
- difficulty making decisions
- incomplete use of hands or arms
- difficulty in gripping or holding or carrying small objects
- physical weakness over distance or long waiting periods
- lack of balance and coordination
- incomplete use of feet or legs
- difficulty walking on uneven ground, stairs and slopes
- pain, fatigue and discomfort

- difficulty breathing
- long term illness
- medical conditions and/or physical trauma leading to one or more of the above

In Australia disabilities are often categorised into different types, such as: physical disability (e.g. polio, arthritis, burns, obesity, broken bones, amputation), intellectual or learning disability (e.g. autism, down syndrome, attention deficit disorder), psychiatric disability or mental health problem (e.g. post traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, depression), sensory disability (deafness, blindness) and neurological disability (e.g. brain injury, spinal injury – paraplegia and quadriplegia, cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s, multiple sclerosis).

A disability can be permanent or temporary. Many people with disability say that what usually stops them from fully participating in the community is not their disability, but the barriers put up by society and the negative attitudes of the community.

### What support can people with disability get?

In Australia people with disability have the same human rights as other people. This includes having the right to be part of the community, make their own decisions and receive services that assist them to have a reasonable quality of life.



People with disability have the right to all the services people without disability can get. General community services need to provide services to people with disability. Just because somebody has a disability should not mean that they cannot get general services. In many

instances people with disability can get support and assistance from the same places as people without disability.

However, to ensure that people with disability have the same opportunities there are specialist services available only to people with disability. These services include:

- Services assisting you to get a job or more training such as *Employment and Vocational services*.
- Services assisting you and your family to have a break from each other such as *Centre-based and In-Home Respite Care*.
- Services assisting you with your personal care such as *Attendant Care Services*.
- Services assisting parents when you first find out that your child has a disability such as *Early Intervention Services*.
- Services assisting mainly younger people with disability to learn more skills such as *Adult Training, Learning and Support Services, Community Access Services or Day Programs*.
- Services assisting you to live in the community with support such as *Accommodation Support Services*.
- Services assisting you with technology, equipment, therapy and para-medical specialist services, such as *PADP (Program of Appliances for Disabled People)*.
- Services assisting you to have your rights respected and to get information, such as *Advocacy and Information Services*.

### How to find out more about services for people with disability

While there are many services for people with disability, it is not easy to find out about them or find out what the right service is for you. Also sometimes the services are full and have a waiting list, or sometimes you don’t know who to ask and what service to ask for.

Here we have listed only a few services, services that say they will organise an interpreter if you need one:

The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs is available to any person or organisation in Australia requiring interpreting services. TIS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*TIS phone: 13 14 50*

You might have to pay a fee depending on the circumstances and depending on whom you are calling.

One good starting point to find out about things is by calling Centrelink.

*Centrelink phone: 13 10 21*

*Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre phone: 13 12 02*

*TTY phone: 1800 810 586*

If you can go to your local Centrelink office, one good person to talk with is the Disability Officer.

Also a good place for you to start is the Commonwealth Carelink Program.

*Commonwealth CarelinkCentres phone: 1800 052 222*

*TTY phone: 1800 555 677*

*Speech-to-Speech Relay phone: 1800 555 727*

Another disability information service is IDEAS.

*IDEASphone: 1800 029 904*

You can also call the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) which promotes and protects the rights of people from a non-English speaking background (NESB) with disability and their families and carers.

*MDAA phone (02) 9891 6400 or 1800 629 072*