

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.**



Sophia Lindner

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



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

*Acknowledged by*

CROATIAN AUSTRALIAN  
WELFARE CENTRE



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## Disability experienced in Croatia

This introduction talks about past experiences of Croatian people with disability who lived in the republics of the former Yugoslavia and about how it has been since the war, for people with disability in the Republic of Croatia.

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

Croatians are very proud people for whom family honour is an important part of community life. Sometimes this means we hide our suffering and sometimes this includes hiding our disability. Our communities are very diverse in the way people with disability are and have been treated in the past. Some people would have been helpful or would have encouraged respect but many others would have teased or seen people with disability as having less value than others in the community.

Generally disability was something taboo and people with disability were not included in community and family celebrations. Many parents would hide their child to protect them from the negativity in the community. One common thought in Croatia was that people with disability need to be protected and that others always knew better than the person with disability what they needed. Often the family would feel 'shame' about having a child or sibling with disability. Some people would ask what they had done wrong that God was punishing them in this way and others would see it as God testing their faith. Having someone in the family with disability would often lessen their sisters' and brothers' chances of getting married.

We had pensions for people who acquired a disability through war or accident. Many years ago farmers were not able to access these pensions, because they were considered to be able to generate their own income. But a few years before the war the government

changed this system and farmers also became eligible to receive pensions.

In the past children with a mild disability and lower support needs worked together with other family members. They looked after cattle and sheep and kept their sheds clean. Some families used to treat children with disability like 'servants'. It was quite common that the youth from the villages did not want to socialise and gather with young people with disability.

Tomislav

Tomislav was a young man with a mild intellectual disability who lived on his own in the village he grew up in. The village and Tomislav's family supported him to live on his own and he had work in the village but there was no prospect of him finding a marriage

Caring for people with disability started after World War I under Red Cross, which organised some specific institutions for people with sensory disability, mental illness and intellectual disability. After World War II these institutions developed further. Communism brought education for everybody and specifically trained personnel started to emerge. Under the Communist government children were always assessed as to their health and welfare by the family GP and a range of specialists before they started school. If a child had a disability there were specific services such as physiotherapy and special schools available in the larger cities.

There were institutions for all kinds of disability and levels of need. These places had schools, training for work, rehabilitation services and sheltered workshops and people would live there for periods of time or for their whole life. Some people married and had children there. People with disability interacted with the local community and would also have contact with their family. Nevertheless many people with mental illness and intellectual

disability were institutionalised in 'asylums'. Similar to other places in the world, these institutions were threadbare, filled to capacity with people but not enough facilities and staff and they were often isolated from the community.

## What are the myths or beliefs about disability in Croatia?

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 tries to keep it as a family secret. Families sometimes believe that this has to be handled within the family with neither community or government involvement.



In general it was thought that people with disability could not learn or improve their ability to live in the community. Thus disability was often seen as an economic burden for the community due to non-employment of people with disability. In addition, religious beliefs also contributed to this negative attitude, such as the belief that god is punishing the family with a child with disability for their sins, that you acquired a disability because of your sins or that the disability is a curse from devils or witches.

In Croatia, as anywhere else, people still have huge prejudices against people with disability.

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

After World War II and the sudden industrial progress everything changed. People became more educated and more aware of the poor standards of living people with disability experienced. More

and more institutions were established, especially in the bigger cities.

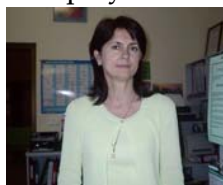
The recent civil war in Croatia had a huge effect on everyone's lives. As a result of the war the numbers of people with disability greatly increased, making disability more visible in the community. People who acquired disability as a result of the war often receive more acceptance from their community than those who did not.

Humanitarian organisations that worked in our country to improve the lives of people with disability changed our attitudes, as did our increased readiness for integration and affiliation with the Western European countries.

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

In the past the language we used to talk about people with disability was mostly negative. The word "invalid" was used to signify a person with a disability. It was common that even professionals used inappropriate language when they talked about a person with disability, such as idiot, cripple or maniac.

Furthermore we have always used humour as a way of coping with stress and difficulty in life and this plays out in nicknames that play on disability or difference. At school, children with



disability were often teased, called names and their disability was used as an excuse to abuse them.

Language started to change especially after the war. We became more sensitive and careful in talking about people with disability. Attempts were made to use the terms 'person with disability' or 'person with special needs'. Today the community is more focused on the personality of people with disability rather than on their disability.

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

In country areas it is more usual that people with disability are cared for at home without any specialist support services. Compassion for people with disability is more likely to be common because people in small communities usually have stronger ties.

The cities have more services for people with disability and the services are easier to access. They also have organised public transport and activities for raising awareness and acceptance of people with disability by the public. People from the city sometimes tend to be more educated and more accepting of differences.

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

Families still have the key role in the care of people with disability without using outside services. Parents, especially the mother, care for the person with disability at home with support from other siblings if necessary, usually sisters, unless the person has high support needs that the family cannot manage, particularly if the parents are ageing.

The care within the family 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 or separated. This often increased the difficulty of caring for family members with disability.

## What services are there for people with disability?

In the past we had very few services for people with disability, but those that existed were usually not specifically for any particular type of disability. Community-based services did not exist. After World War II organisations for people with sensory disability were developed and organisations for other types of disability were established from the late 1960s onwards.



Today we have around 400 organisations for people with disability, which are mostly non-government organisations (NGOs) or charities, especially Catholic organisations. In general they provide various services and specific projects for people with disability and activities for greater awareness of disability for

the public. Nevertheless service provision for people with disability is still limited and we are still not content with the community services available for people with disability. Government services are often not five days a week available and there is still low financial assistance for organisations to provide all the support people with disability need.

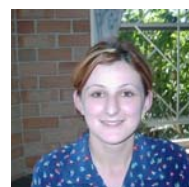
There are government services to support people with disability in their own homes, such as healthcare, homecare or meals on wheels, which operate only in the capital Zagreb. But again there is still the problem of financing this assistance. We have a social security system and a disability support pension in Croatia, but it is usually less money than the people with disability need.

In recent years the government has tended to support social services more and more. Many special schools for children with mental illness, sensory or intellectual disability have been developed. Gradually centres for social work, rehabilitation, specific protected workshops for employment of people with disability, and foster care services for children with disability are being developed.

## 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 about rights. Rights for people with disability existed, but people did not know about them. Today it is still a problem in smaller communities and people with disability do not have access to information about their basic rights or about laws and regulations protecting them.

In the years after the war, NGOs influenced policies and laws for and attitudes towards people with disability. Public awareness is



rising and the consciousness of the community is changing. Most of the organisations that work for people with disability, work for the principles of independent living.

Two years ago a new pilot project started which allows young people with disability to do their civil service instead of the military service through assistance by carers. Till today this project only operates in Zagreb, but it should soon be extended to other places in Croatia.

Every year a National Symposium about appropriate standards for people with disability is organised. In 2004 the 9th Symposium will be held and in the past 8 the following subjects were discussed: awareness raising, health, employment, accessibility, advocacy, education, law, and organisations for people with disability.

During the annual International Day of People with Disability coordinated actions are organised in different Croatian cities and regions and the most recent problems of people with disability are highlighted. People with disability exhibit their handicrafts and artworks. Dance performances, sport competitions and book promotions are organised. The whole community and the media are also involved in these activities and the aim is to spread information about the needs of people with disability.

## Web Sites used in writing this document

<http://www.eumap.org/library/datab/Documents/1077190610.15/croatia.pdf>

<http://www.euro.who.int/document/E72495.pdf>

<http://www.hupt.hr/project-e.html>

<http://www.udrugakorak.hr/>

<http://www.mogu.hr/index.htm>

<http://www.uspih.hr/>

<http://www.hsuti.hr/EasyWeb.asp?pcpid=2>



## 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 the *Transition to Work Program, Community Participation Programs, 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 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*

