

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.

Serbian

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW



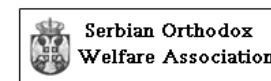
opening doors

Disability experienced in Serbia and Australia

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

Acknowledged by



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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.

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Disability experienced in Serbia

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

How we treated people with disability in the past

Our people have a long history of war, foreign occupation and migration resulting from those occupations. We are a very proud people for whom family honor is an important part of community life. Sometimes this means that we hide our suffering and this may include hiding disability.

Serbian communities are very diverse in the way people with disability were treated in the past. Some people were helpful or encouraged respect but many others teased people with disability or saw them as having less value. Sometimes disability was taboo and we hardly ever saw children with disability on the street. Many parents hid their child as they wished to protect them from the negative experiences in the community. People thought about disability as something that should stay within the family. So families tried to keep a person with disability inside the house. Families did not share their worries with other people or neighbours. Often families felt embarrassed about having a child with disability.

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.

Before starting school children were always assessed as to their health and welfare by the family GP and a range of specialists. If a child had disability there were specific services available in the larger cities such as physiotherapy and special schools. There were also institutions for all kinds of disability and levels of need. These places had schools, training for work, rehabilitation services and 'sheltered workshops' and people lived there for periods of time or for their whole life. Some people married and had children there, and interacted with the local community and people had contact with their family. However many people with mental illness were put in institutions in places far away and isolated from the community.

Miroslav

Miroslav was a deaf boy who lived with his family in a small town. His family sent him to a special school for deaf children, which was in the capital. Miroslav lived at the school, coming home for holidays. He learnt sign language and a trade and his family was very proud of him.

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

Before the war there was strong support for people with disability, with free health and education services. Since the war and different governments there have been huge changes. The period between the end of the socialist government and the year 2000 was a dark time for people with disability. People who lived through the war and the associated reduction in services, systems, etc report great changes in the way they feel about their lives. Many people say they no longer feel healthy, physically and emotionally. They feel different about themselves and their abilities. People feel a huge loss for who they were before. The war resulted in a huge increase

in people with physical disability and people with post-traumatic stress, making disability much more visible in the community.



In 2000 the government changed and with this there is more hope. The government is working with disability organisations including grass roots, rights based organisations to address issues for people with disability.

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

In the past we felt it was not right to talk about disability at all. Now as there are many changes in society that affect the way we see disability, our language is changing and becoming more positive.

What are the myths or beliefs about disability in Serbian communities?

There is much variation in the way individuals with disability are treated, but across Serbian communities attitudes generally tend to be negative. This negative view is generally stronger towards people with mental illness or intellectual disability than towards someone with physical or sensory disability. The community tends to be more supportive of persons with physical disability than to people with mental or intellectual disability. Pity is something that many people feel about people with disability.

When there is a family member with a disability often the whole family will experience social stigma. People will not want to marry into a family where there family members with disability. A common belief is that disability is inherited and people fear to marry into a family where a person with disability lived/ lives, in case the disability is passed on from one person to another.

Some traditional beliefs blame mothers for causing the disability by doing something wrong during pregnancy. There is a common belief that a person with disability will not have an ordinary life. Some people believe that disability is given by god, perhaps because of a sinful life.

For a man in Serbia disability brings the added shame of not being able to do military service, which was a great source of social standing and respect in the community.

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 cities than in rural areas. Most services are located in cities, making access for rural families more difficult. Many more children with disability from country areas are cared for at home without outside support.

In rural areas sympathy and compassion for people with disability are more likely to be common as people in small communities usually have stronger bonds between them.

What services are there for people with disability?

There are primary schools for people with a specific disability, such as for children who are blind, deaf, have a physical or intellectual disability. Generally children with disability attend schools. If a child attends only a special school they will not have the knowledge to attend an ordinary high school and so they will not have access to a range of job opportunities. Some parents successfully lobby for their children to attend regular schools. There are also a small number of university scholarships for students with disability.

People who are assessed as having 70% impairment are eligible for a small allowance to help pay for personal assistance. There are also rehabilitation services.

The war has caused serious disruption to services and many agencies are unable to cope with the increased numbers of people now needing their services. As in all areas, there is a shortage of skilled workers, as many have fled the county, went overseas or died. There is also a shortage of support equipment such as wheelchairs.

Generally the only support services outside the family for people with mental illness or intellectual disability are institutions.

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

For Serbians a close-knit family life where sometimes up to three generations live together is an important part of support and community.



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 shameful. 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 about rights. Rights for people with disability existed, but people did not know about them. People were not informed and educated about existing rights. There were disability unions for different disability types such as the Deaf Union but the focus was on needs rather than rights.

Since the civil war (1991) Serbia has been an independent country and many Croatian and Bosnian Serbs moved to Serbia or overseas. With so many of our people lost and disabled by land mines, torture, trauma and other war events, disability has become an unavoidable and more prominent part of Serbian life.

The government has formed a body called Republic of Serbia Council for Disability Issues. The success of this body will depend on how the traditional disability unions, disability rights organisations and the government work together towards positive changes for people with disability. An example for non-governmental organisations is the Association of Students with Disabilities based at Belgrade University. It was the first cross-disability organisation in Serbia and is an active rights-based organisation determined to make changes for people with disability on a broad scale. This organisation is supported by mainstream student organisations. These students are also lobbying for physical access to city buildings and in schools.

Web Sites used in writing this document

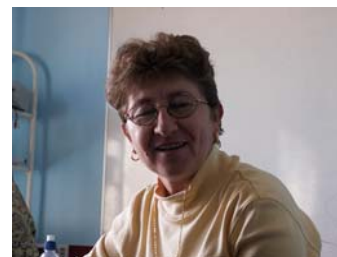
www.adsu.org/htmleng/glavni/aktivnosti/ekuce/savetodavno/save_todavno.html

www.mdri.org/projects/kosovoinitiative/untransfer/htm

www.independentliving.org/docs6/rajkov200303.htm

www.disabilityworld.org/06-08_03/access/sebia.shtml

www.sttar.org



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