

Applying a diversity lens to consumer-centred care



Voula is an aged care worker with over 10 years' experience. She has recently started in a new role as a home support worker with a Greek service provider and happy she can directly help members of her community. One of her new clients is Dimitris who has been with the service for 2 months. Prior to working with Dimitris for the first time, Voula read his care plan. The care plan said he lived independently, but because of his arthritis needed some help to keep the house looking right. It said he liked gardening, but he mostly used pots, so he didn't have to get down on the ground. The goals listed on his care plan were "To have the house cleaned twice a month" and "To go to the shops when I need". Voula also read Dimitris's client summary which showed he spoke English and Greek, had no memory loss, high cholesterol and has some social networks with the neighbours and ex-work colleagues. It also says he is willing to attend some church events that celebrate Greek culture, but he isn't interested in going services as he isn't religious.

Voula arrives to work with Dimitris, and they have agreed she will do the cleaning that he can't do because of his arthritis, and he will clean the bench tops in the kitchen and bathrooms. Voula has felt that Dimitris is quite reserved around her and wants to build rapport with him. She asks him to tell her about his life. He says there's isn't much to say. In my early 20's I moved from Kefalonia to Sydney with my two brothers, then I moved to Melbourne in the 80's for a better job, now I'm retired. I like my garden and of course Greek food, real Greek food. Voula asks if he was ever married; he says no, never met the right girl. As they clean in the kitchen, the TV is on in the background.

A news story celebrating 3 years since marriage equality passed comes on. Dimitris looks up at the TV and says, "it's not right, why should poustis be allowed to get married?" Voula feels politely says to Dimitris "please don't speak like that around me, I know this is your home, but it's also my workplace and I don't want to hear things like that." Dimitris quietly apologises and walks off to another room.



As Voula is leaving she says goodbye to Dimitris, and he asks to speak with her. He says, "Voula, apologises for making him feel uncomfortable by asking about being married, reassures him that he can trust her and says she is glad he was able to share this with her. She tells him the organisation has a strong focus on making all clients feel safe and supporting them to be themselves. She says, there is training for all staff on working with gay clients and understanding the experience the community has lived through.



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Over the coming months Dimitris feels safer with Voula and tells her he is still grieving the loss of his partner who recently passed away. He is also feeling disconnected from the gay world as the small group of friends he had has slowly drifted away or moved. He also misses connection with his Greek community and culture as he didn't develop a close network in Melbourne and only attended big cultural events and celebrations. With his permission Voula shares how Dimitris's is feeling with the care co-ordinator and a meeting is arranged to discuss how things could be better for him. He asks Voula to attend as support and they talk about options to connect with some grief counselling and local social groups, some that are Greek specific and some with older LGBTI people. They also tell Dimitris the organisation is going to make it easier for clients to know that their services are safe for LGBTI people.



Reflective questions

- What risk factors are present in this scenario?
- How did learning about Dimitris and his diversity support him?
- How would you rate the goals on Dimitris's care plan? What worked well, what could be improved?
- How could the organisation make it clearer to clients/potential clients that their service is safe for LGBTI people?

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Case Study Reflections

- Dimitris has experience significant personal loss and is still grieving but has been reluctant to share that information with the service because he worries, he might be mistreated if they knew he was gay. This stems from his previous experiences with his families and others in the community and society. Feeling the need to hide who he is, who his partner was and that he is grieving just to feel safe, are all significant risk factors that could impact his health and wellbeing.
- Assumption could have been made from his first interaction with the aged care system that focused heavily on his language and cultural background. While these are very important to him, we can see there are other parts of who he is that are also important.
- Voula assumed that Dimitris is heterosexual by asking if he was ever married. This happens often and creates a difficult situation for the person. They must lie about their sexuality or “come out” to someone who hasn’t displayed inclusive behaviour by assuming they are heterosexual. Given his lived experience of being mistreated for being gay, it would be unsurprising if Dimitris would correct this assumption. This further alienates him, and he can’t feel safe when the service is in his own home. Voula could have asked if he had a partner or a significant other/person without assuming their gender.
- Voula challenged Dimitris’s use of offensive/homophobic language in a calm, firm and appropriate way. She lived up to the values of the organisation by addressing it and was setting clear expectations on what was appropriate while she worked. These conversations are not always easy, but they are necessary. In this instance her strong and considered approach not only told Dimitris that the language was unacceptable, but it allowed him to know that Voula would not mistreat him for being gay.
- When Dimitris “came out” to Voula her response was very supportive. It is positive to see that she and the other staff have LGBTI training, and the organisation was committed to creating a safe place for LGBTI people. However, part of creating that safe space is making it explicitly clear to all clients and potential clients that they will be welcomed and safe. Without doing this the systemic barrier of LGBTI discrimination isn’t being addressed.
- Voula built rapport with Dimitris and demonstrated she could be trusted. This allowed her and the organisation to learn about Dimitris and his diversity and then they were on the path to providing Consumer-Centred Care.
- If Dimitris grief wasn’t supported, combined with the disconnection from his Greek and gay cultures he could also experience depression and social isolation.
- The “goals” listed in Dimitris’s care plan were not appropriate goals, they were actions. The goal should describe what Dimitris wants to feel, achieve or be different. Why does Dimitris want his house cleaned twice a month? What will “being able to go to the shops when he wants” mean to him? Answering these questions should support you to find out what the goals are.
- The organisation should explicitly mention their commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive environments for the LGBTI community in all their communication materials, in conversations with clients/potential clients and have that commitment visible through their interactions.