

Dung Hop: Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation Support Service for the Vietnamese Community

After the Fall of Saigon in April 1975, the world experienced huge waves of refugees coming from Vietnam. These people primarily left their birthplace for political reasons and in order to seek freedom and a better life / future for their children. For some, however, the price they had to pay for this move has been indescribably high. For many, the trip to Australia and other developed countries was horrific. Many people experienced the loss of family members, trauma, assaults, tortures, imprisonment and even death. Before 1975, some Vietnamese also migrated to Australia as servicemen's spouses, or through the children-in-adoption program. In April 1975, Vietnamese students under Colombo Scholarships or the Professional Training Program and staff of the Vietnamese Republic of Vietnam's embassies who applied to stay in Australia were all granted permanent residency. Later on, the Family Reunion Scheme was introduced to cater for their spouses, children and parents who were left behind. Recently, there have been Vietnamese people who came directly to Australia to learn the language and to obtain tertiary education. Whichever way Vietnamese people used to make their way to Australia, many have faced predicaments such as social isolation, cultural shock, language difficulties, identity problems and long-term health issues, including mental illness.

The Western Region Outreach Service (WROS), a service of the Western Region Health Centre (WRHC), has developed an innovative program and model for service delivery for Vietnamese people with a mental illness, their carers and family members. This model is known as Dung Hop, a family- and community-based model that reflects Vietnamese values and culture. Dung Hop is an eclectic merging of the Psychiatric Disability and Rehabilitation Support Service (PDRSS) principles and the Vietnamese Collectivist Philosophical principles, suggesting a harmonious and balanced way to provide support for clients and their support systems. The written text of this model and some of its applications to the success of the Vietnamese Program can be found at www.wrhc.com.au

The WROS Vietnamese Mental Health Program has been considered extremely successful in providing services, developing partnerships and documenting a culturally sensitive model for mental health service delivery. This has taken over 10 years.

Even though the Dung Hop model provides explanations for the cultural differences in approaching support for people with a mental illness from a Vietnamese background, it is acknowledged that human effort cannot be underestimated. Partnership development and consolidation are therefore strongly reflected within this model and makes Dung Hop as unique and adaptable as its own definition ... "Dung Hop: To find common and harmonious ground for opposite elements to exist in a unified and unique way". Dung Hop suggests ways in which our hurdles can be overcome and our dreams can be realised. In order to provide effective service delivery to the clients, amazing work has been done in developing and consolidating partnerships with other agencies in both the clinical and non-clinical sectors and with other Vietnamese mental health workers within the western region of Melbourne. For Vietnamese clients, their carers and family members, it has been a long and yet rewarding journey for them to march alongside each other, to share their experiences, to learn from one another, and to celebrate their achievements

together. The continual support from WROS, other PDRSS, Mental Health Area Services and other community organisations has been one of the major contributing factors to the success of the program, which is now growing from strength to strength.

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