Ask PEACE
A virtual mental health service to support culturally and linguistically diverse peoples affected by COVID-19

Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) commenced our Ask PEACE service in early 2020 to support culturally and linguistically diverse peoples (CALD) negatively impacted by COVID-19. RASA's team of trained bilingual practitioners working with diverse multicultural communities in SA, combined with our established organisation infrastructure, enabled rapid development of a co-designed service to meet emerging community needs.

Ask PEACE aimed to effectively respond to arising mental health needs resulting from the pandemic, providing access to services, individual counselling and education designed to reduce transmission and allay any unfounded fears associated with COVID and its impact on families. The service mobilised bilingual mental health peer supporters to help reduce the level of stigma associated with mental health issues in CALD communities and offered community-based services to help build resilience and a supportive environment via community education, group therapy and healing-related projects focusing on specific cohorts.

The service prioritised communities heavily affected by COVID-19 including recently arrived refugees, others working in the gig economy, international students, and people in isolation or quarantine with little social support. Through a dedicated Ask PEACE phone line, people in need were offered direct access to highly qualified and experienced bilingual practitioners. The service adopted a "no closed doors" policy in recognition of the effort it takes for CALD people to seek help. In addition, services were delivered in collaboration with the client, significant others, and the service provider(s) to help address cultural barriers. To date, 450 CALD individuals have accessed the service and reported improvement with the issue(s) for which they sought help.

Ask PEACE has engaged 18 community consultant volunteers from diverse language and cultural groups. The consultants meet monthly to discuss COVID-19 issues in their communities and have been instrumental in designing culturally appropriate mental health related resources such as an educational animated video, "Ask PEACE". The video is available in 18 languages and focuses on COVID symptoms rather than medical terminology in consideration of community context and health literacy levels.

Ask PEACE has also supported clients of the service to attend a foundation course developed in collaboration with RASA and the Australian Institute of Social Relations to develop skills as peer support workers. The therapeutic course provided participants opportunity to understand their lived experience and explore their identity. The success of the course is evident with 11 of 15 participants now deeply involved in community work addressing stigma and discrimination associated with their diagnosis and 7 engaging in further community services courses.

Through the provision of multiple interventions, Ask PEACE has achieved optimal results for CALD people during the pandemic.