



# *Getting To Know You*

## *Working With The Chinese Community*

December 2000

**Elder Abuse Prevention Unit in collaboration with The Cathay Club**

# **Getting To Know You**

**A Project of Cross Cultural Awareness**

**and**

**Elder Abuse Prevention strategies**

**for**

**Working With The Chinese Community**

**In Brisbane**

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## CONTENT

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Historical background to the Chinese migration to Australia -----	1
The profile of the older Chinese people in Brisbane -----	1,2
General awareness information -----	2,3
Cultural attitudes -----	3
Spirituality, religion and celebrations -----	3,4
The 'Concept of Face' -----	4
The use of translators and interpreters -----	5
The DOs and DON'Ts of home visits -----	5,6
Interpersonal communication -----	6
Family connections -----	7
Elder abuse issues -----	7,8
Summary and recommendations -----	9
Case study 1 -----	10
Case study 2 -----	11
Elder Abuse Prevention Unit and Older Person's Advocacy Service -----	15
Acknowledgments -----	16
Bibliography -----	17

## **Historical Background to the Chinese Migration to Australia.**

The first Chinese migration wave can be tracked down to 1827, when large numbers of Chinese labourers were recruited to work in the pastoral industry. Those first early migrants were followed by many others who arrived in the 1870s to join in the gold rush.

The Immigration Act of 1901, which forbade non-Europeans and their descendants from permanently living in Australia, put an end to Chinese migration until 1973, with Australia's decision to end the 'White Australia Policy'.

In 1976, the 'Australian-Chinese Family Reunion Agreement' legislation, had a direct effect on the increased numbers of older migrants who arrived to join their children in Australia. This legislation has since been altered to impose some restrictions on eligibility for migration.

In the last decade, the size of the Chinese population in Australia has increased rapidly, as the result of growth in migration from the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong-Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries.

## **The Profile of the Older Chinese People in Brisbane.**

According to the Office of Ageing (1999), the number of Chinese who were 60 years of age and over, living in Queensland in 1996, was 2,385. Approximately 66.5% of the older Chinese population reside in Brisbane, with the majority concentrated in the South-side of the city.

English proficiency among the older Chinese persons varies according to their country of origin, age at migration, socio-economic background, previous exposure to the English language and other factors, but it is generally low, particularly among PRC born older women.

The Chinese language includes many spoken-dialects, a fact that contributes to barriers in communication within the Chinese community and increases the likelihood of isolation among its members. The most common dialects spoken are Cantonese, which is spoken by approximately 50.8% of the Chinese community in Queensland, and Mandarin by 38.5 %.

Regardless of what socio-economic status the Chinese migrants had in their country of origin, many of them have experienced a drop in their living standards and socio-economic conditions after migrating. Underemployment and unemployment are serious problems, particularly among migrants who arrived under the family reunion scheme, working hours for the employed can be long, living conditions overcrowded and support networks minimal.

Racial discrimination, whether open or subtle, against the Chinese population in Australia, is still obvious in the general community. It can add another factor that contributes to the preference of the Chinese people to live in proximity to each other, to regard non-Chinese with mistrust and to prefer services that are provided by Chinese.

Cultural differences that are part of everyday living can contribute to problems with cross-cultural communication and can impact on the acceptance level of the Chinese People by the general community and vice versa.

Australian and overseas studies suggest that prevalence rates of elder abuse are in the vicinity of 3% to 5% (D'Urso 1998:10) and that abuse is experienced by older people across all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

Non English Speaking Background older people, have further difficulties in accessing support, due to migration process, cultural differences, language barriers and often insensitive and inappropriate services. They might be more vulnerable to abuse as a result of their greater dependency on their families for support (D'Urso 1998:6).

## **General Awareness Information.**

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- Be aware that Chinese people did not all arrive from the same country of origin. The majority arrived from the People's Republic of China, Hong-Kong and Taiwan, and in smaller numbers from Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries.
- Country of origin may influence socio-economic status, knowledge of English and exposure to Western cultures, but be open-minded, **do not** generalise and **do** approach each client as an individual.
- It is safer not to discuss politics with your client as Chinese people arrived in Australia from a variety of countries with very different political systems.
- The Chinese hold family and the role of China in human history in high regard. The Chinese civilisation is one of the oldest lasting cultures in the world.
- Chinese people have long honoured the ethical concepts that form the building blocks of their civilisation: Virtue, patience, diligence and piety.
- Chinese, who left their country of origin and settled in other lands, have held strongly on to their traditions for fear of losing their identity. As a result, they continued to practice or observe traditions that have been long discarded in their motherland.
- Basic Chinese culture and traditions have remained recognisably Chinese, in spite of the changes that have taken place over thousands of years.
- Chinese culture includes a very important element, which is the 'Practical Wisdom'. In some cases Chinese people can be seen as not abiding by rules and regulations, but it is their way of dealing with restrictive situations and limited resources by using improvisation, inventiveness and flexibility.
- Many Chinese people migrated to Australia from overly populated and noisy environments. Living conditions in their countries of origin might have been crowded, unhygienic due to poverty and with poor sanitation.
- That type of environment would have influenced the habit of some Chinese of speaking loudly and not allowing for 'personal space', issues that may not be understood by the wider community and cause friction.
- The enjoyment of food to the Chinese people is regarded as 'First Happiness' and is a very sociable and pleasurable passing of time.
- Tea is the symbol of earthy purity and tea drinking is more than just quenching of thirst but is for relaxation in quiet and friendly company.
- As a minority, some elderly Chinese find it difficult to believe that they do have a voice that will be taken into account.

## **Cultural Attitudes.**

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- The Chinese tend to have long lasting memories for things that were done to please them and they respond readily to courtesies or favours.
- Chinese people appreciate a smile and an act of kindness for building rapport, especially due to being a minority group that experiences occasional discrimination.
- A handshake not only expresses a sign of welcome, but gratitude, congratulations and encouragement as well.
- Chinese people seldom display emotions, and kissing or embracing in public is not appropriate.
- Chinese people, especially the elderly, prefer to show gratitude by giving a gift or food, instead of sending a thank-you card.
- Chinese elderly are more likely to accept a female for providing personal care to an elderly man, than a male who provides personal care to a woman. It is advisable to match same sex carers when possible.
- Chinese people usually use Chinese medicine only for the purpose of balancing and complimenting the Western medicine that they are taking. Western medicine is regarded as warming up the body and the Chinese medicine as having a cooling effect on the body system.

## **Spirituality, Religion and Celebrations.**

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- The Chinese people had no formal religion until the coming of Christianity and Islam.
- Chinese culture emphasises religious freedom and tolerance.
- Although Chinese people might not all be religious, going to the temple or church can have spiritual value and can provide them with social interaction.
- Some religions, which are observed by the Chinese, have impact on everyday observances and from that point of view it is helpful to know if your client practices a certain religion, e.g. Muslims do not eat pork, some Buddhists are vegetarians.
- Some Chinese people keep an ancestral altar at home, which is regarded as sacred, at which they offer gifts and burn incense. They believe that their deceased relatives can grant them prosperity and good health.
- The Chinese have embraced a variety of philosophies that aided them in everyday situations and spiritual needs:
  1. **Confucianism**----is not a religion but a practical philosophy of human relationships and conduct, which has served as the moulding force of Chinese culture.
  2. **Laosim or Taoism**----has moulded human character in a practical way by preaching that people should not strive for things they cannot get.
  3. **Buddhism**----has provided the Chinese with answers to more spiritual questions of life and death, with the major instruction that the duty of each person is to help reduce the sufferings of others.
- The Chinese follow the lunar calendar, which is why their festivals fall each year on a different date of the common calendar. Their major two festivals are:
  1. **Chinese New Year** is celebrated from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the first Chinese calendar month, to the 15<sup>th</sup> day of that month (usually in late January or early February). Most people observe only the first couple of days.
  2. **Mid-Autumn Festival** falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth Chinese calendar month. Other dates that may be observed by elderly traditional people, for paying respects to their ancestors, are:
    1. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each Chinese calendar month
    2. The Ching Ming Festival, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, and the Chung Yeung Festival in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Chinese calendar.

## The 'Concept of Face'.

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- The concept of 'face', which involves avoiding someone getting embarrassed, is very common among the Chinese in considering their choice of action. Some examples of keeping face are:
- A Chinese host, in approaching the door with a guest, would usually gesture for the guest to proceed first.
- Escorting a departing visitor all the way to the front door is a common practice.
- It is polite to accept a drink or some food that is offered, and in any case, it is better to accept than to refuse. The Chinese host might be seen as pushy, but it is the custom to lavish the guest with food.
- Hands have a lot to do with 'face'. Objects that are offered to you by both hands should be taken by both hands as a sign of respect. Furthermore, it is recommended to hand any object of importance e.g. forms or brochures, by both hands directly to the client and not just putting it down on the Table.
- It is considered polite to pour water and to hold the glass by using both hands as well, and is part of making a good impression.
- Punctuality is one of the many forms of keeping face. Always try to be on time and if hosting the meeting, make sure to be there first.
- When acknowledging someone's presence by giving 'face', one has to establish eye contact and exchange a nod and a smile.

## The Use of Translators and Interpreters

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- Bilingual professionals are most effective in communicating with Chinese clients, but their availability is limited. When a bilingual worker is not available, and the client's ability to understand and communicate in English is limited, it is recommended to work with an interpreter to ensure accuracy, impartiality and confidentiality. The client is more likely to confide in a professional interpreter than in a friend or another community member, whom he/she mixes with socially.
- For making a written transfer of a message or a statement from one language into another, it is required to use a professional **translator**. To convey oral messages and statements from one language into another, the use of a professional **interpreter** is recommended. Interpreters are trained to relay not only what is said, but through cultural understanding, they can interpret other aspects of communication like body language, the way that something is said, voice intonation, silence periods and the avoidance of direct responses.
- For more information regarding eligibility for a free interpreting service, call Translating and Interpreting Services, **TIS**, on **131 450**.
- For recommended rates of accredited interpreters call: **AUSIT** on **0407 127 713** or **NAATI** on **3393 1358**.

## The DO's and DON'T's of Home Visits.

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- Clients might feel more relaxed in a neutral environment, away from home yet not in an office setting. Meeting for 'Yum Cha' could be helpful for building up rapport. Chinese people prefer to pay for each other as a sign of friendship, rather than splitting the cost.
- Next to language barriers, transport is a major issue for the elderly person. Many elderly will not be able to make an appointment outside their house, if transport has not been organised.
- Do not make judgments or decide on an action-plan before listening to all parties involved.

- Do not presume that all the Chinese people who are present at your client's home are members of the family, as they might be neighbours or friends. Clarify with the client if privacy is preferred, to protect confidentiality.
- Do not make promises that cannot be kept. It is advisable to explain the limitations of your position and those of your organisation, in the early stages of your communication with the client.
- For home visits, observe a conservative code of dress and avoid wearing low cut tops, shorts and a completely black outfit, as they might not be well accepted by the elderly client.
- At a time of funeral or mourning, show respect and empathy, speak quietly, do not laugh and do not wear colourful or bright clothes.
- Relatives of the deceased will avoid making appointments and discussing business for a few weeks.
- If invited to a wedding, wear bright colours and say pleasant things like 'have a long and loving relationship' and 'may you have many offsprings'.

## **Interpersonal Communication.**

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- It is highly recommended to use interpreters when facing language barriers, as interpreters can understand not just the verbal response but body language and non-verbal messages as well
- Family and friends should be avoided as interpreters because of possible intimidation of the elderly client, and for concerns with issues of confidentiality.
- Talk slowly, to show that you are prepared to stop and listen to your client at any time.
- Be patient when you listen to a Chinese person and try not to interrupt or finish his/her sentence. Expressing thoughts in a second language is often difficult, even for people with good knowledge of English.
- Chinese people do not usually regard counselling and verbal support as sufficient, if real options for change and concrete, practical solutions do not accompany them.
- Address your client by the family name, which is usually written before the given name by Chinese people. Calling an elderly person by first name might be taken as a sign of disrespect.
- It is important to observe body language and to be prepared that the client might avoid giving a direct answer, as Chinese people seldom voice their objections to confronting questions.
- It is helpful to learn a few Chinese key words and expressions, which will aid in breaking the ice with the client and show good will and the awareness of a different culture.
- Some Chinese basic phrases are:  
NI - HAO? ----- How are you?  
HAO -----Good.  
ZAI-ZIEN -----Goodbye.  
SIE-SIE -----Thank-you.
- Give your client a sense of security in trusting you, before addressing the problem or the issue.
- It is important to show sincerity in communicating with a client. The client can usually spot if the worker is prejudiced or false, as reflected in body language, and in that case, no other skills of the worker will break the barriers to acceptance and trust.

## **Family Connections.**

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- Traditionally, the Chinese people regard the family as the principle supporter, carer and home provider for elderly people.



- Most Chinese elderly prefer to stay with their families, so separation, as an intervention, should be kept as the last resort.
- Chinese people may feel that they have 'lost face' in their community if they accept outside help with caring for their ageing parents, or permit their parents to move to an alternative accommodation. They can be regarded as lacking filial respect, as being self centred and cold hearted.
- Older persons who move away from living with their families might feel shame for 'being abandoned' by their children, or guilt for being considered as 'bad parents' and deserving the treatment.
- Some people may feel that if they allow their parents to move to a retirement accommodation, they are sending a wrong message to their own children regarding filial respect and will suffer in consequence when they grow old.
- When approaching your client's family with an issue, permit them to speak first from their point of view, as they might see the situation from a very different perspective.
- In some situations, the Chinese elderly might be those who are contributing to the problems at home by having excessive expectations of their children and demanding them to be subservient and obedient in the old traditional custom.
- Chinese families with Westernised views and attitudes would be more likely to accept outside help and service, or agree for the elderly parent to move to a retirement accommodation or a nursing home.
- Intergenerational gap in a Chinese family, where there are grandchildren, is usually very wide. The elderly may remain very traditional and with minimal knowledge of English, while the grandchildren are quite Westernised and with very minimal knowledge of Chinese.
- Some traditional Chinese customs that are being practised by the elderly can create disharmony at home. Those practices may include the custom of burning incense at the home ancestral altar, rubbing their body with strong smelling oils or sitting around with other elderly friends and being very loud and noisy. The more Westernised children might object to those practices and would be concerned about disturbing their non-Chinese neighbours.

## **Elder Abuse Issues.**

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- When discussing issues of abuse with a Chinese client, it is preferable not to use the term 'abuse', and instead to refer to it as 'mistreatment', 'unfair treatment', 'lack of respect' or 'lack of consideration'.
- Chinese people usually associate the term 'Abuse' with physical harm and if implied to their situation, can put them on the defensive and block further communication.
- Nevertheless, it is important to address issues of abusive situations with the client by making him or her aware of their rights and stressing that certain behaviours are not acceptable, should not be tolerated and may even be illegal.
- Discussing options and available services for the elderly client with the family, can only be done with the client's permission. It should be handled very diplomatically, and with sensitivity, without accusations and with the intent of helping the whole family resolve the matter for the benefit of all involved (see case study 1).
- After implementing an intervention, it is advisable to conduct follow up visits for an ongoing support and to monitor the situation, as well as assuring the continuation of the service by 'checking on' and by the 'show of presence'.
- When referring a Chinese Elderly to an alternative accommodation, it is important that a Chinese-speaking worker is employed there. Yet, it should not be the only criterion for placing the client in that residential care and the accommodation should comply with acceptable standards.

- Be careful about referring clients to their community or religious leaders, as they might not be qualified to assist in the specific area of need and might not be bound by the observance of confidentiality.
- Like in many other ethnic communities, the Chinese have concerns regarding confidentiality in their community, as they believe that gossip and rumours spread fast.
- The Chinese elderly, who are isolated, are more likely to suffer from elder abuse, due to having little knowledge of English and less knowledge of available services and resources.
- Most of those isolated elderly are **not likely** to experience **physical abuse**, because of traditional Chinese values of respecting the elderly. Yet, they are **more likely** to experience **social, financial and psychological abuse** due to social, physical, and financial dependency and intergenerational conflicts.
- Sometimes the best solution to problems in the family is for the elderly person to move to other accommodation. Education and information are to be given both to the elderly person and to the family in order for them to accept the decision as being appropriate and acceptable in the wider Australian society. It is important to point out the benefits for all involved and emphasise that relationships within the family could substantially improve as the result (see case study 2).
- It is important to educate the elderly people about their rights and inform them where they can get help, legal advice or police intervention from preferably Chinese speaking service providers.
- It is just as important to get the message across to abusive family members that the Australian community does not accept certain behaviours, that some practices might be illegal and that their elderly relatives know their rights (see case study 1).

## **Summary and Recommendations.**

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The major skill of any worker in a cross cultural environment, is an awareness of cultural differences that are reflected in the way people think, perceive situations and relate to each other.

It would be presumptuous to claim real knowledge of a culture without actually living, experiencing and being a part of it. This study provides only an insight into the rich tapestry that makes up the centuries old Chinese culture; yet, it can help with establishing rapport and trust with a Chinese person.

Language barriers and traditional attitudes contribute to the isolation of the older Chinese person and the stronger dependency on the family. Bridging over cross-cultural differences can enhance the older person's quality of life and by that, reduce the possibility of various kinds of elder abuse.

A holistic approach, within the family cultural frame, is recommended when working with the Chinese elderly. Providing information and advice to both the client and the family can help with the shift of attitudes to greater acceptance of the norms in the wider community. Education of all family members can also narrow the intergenerational gap and bring the family closer to each other.

The term 'abuse' might have very strong connotations when used in the Chinese community, so it is advisable to choose other, less confronting terms (see 'elder abuse issues', pages 7, 8). Wherever possible, it is recommended to implement interventions that can eliminate the abuse, without treating the case as an 'abuse issue'.

There are some existing services that are run by Chinese service providers or that employ bilingual workers (see the directory on pages 12-15). In cases where there are language barriers, Chinese speaking interpreters should be engaged to ensure that the communication sustains the intended meaning and ensures confidentiality (see the directory on page 15).

There is a Chinese run Aged Hostel but no Chinese run Nursing Homes in Brisbane, although some may be employing Chinese workers. A Chinese older person might feel extremely alienated if admitted to a Nursing Home that cannot provide culturally appropriate support, so every effort should be made to prolong one's stay in the family home with the provision of proper and adequate support.

Nursing homes are now given accreditation, which includes their commitment to an appropriate cross-cultural approach. The family of the elderly Chinese who has been admitted, or is considering admittance to a nursing home, should know their rights in that respect, for negotiating appropriate food and other cultural needs. The Older Person's Advocacy Service may be able to assist with this issue (see the directory on page 15).

## **Case Study 1 of Elder Abuse**

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Mrs. W is an elderly Chinese woman who is partially blind and lives on her own. A Home and Community Care worker visits her twice a week and her son brings her food daily.

When the son delivers the food, he puts it on the front steps of his mother's home and leaves. Mrs. W eats the food unattended, spills and drops some of it on herself and on the table and the floor. The HACC worker reported to her supervisor that she usually finds Mrs. W dressed in dirty and stained clothes and food remains scattered on the floor. She has also noticed mice and cockroaches in the house.

The HACC service coordinator intervened by talking to the son, to find out whether he needed more help with looking after his mother and with providing her with her needs. Mrs. W has been giving her son part of her pension as a payment for her food and for his efforts. The HACC worker made it clear to him that she was aware of that arrangement and that it did not look like he has been fulfilling his obligations to justify the payment.

The son admitted that he was not aware of how bad his mother's eyesight was but added that he worked long hours and did not have time to stay and supervise his mother's meal times. He felt ashamed for being seen as a not caring son and was concerned about losing his mother's payments and 'losing face' in his community.

After discussing the issue with his wife, she decided to start delivering Mrs. W's meals, as well as keeping her company while she ate and helping her clean the table and change her clothes.

Both the son and his wife thanked the HACC service coordinator for being so observant and caring. They realised that they were made accountable to the service provider. From then on they made sure to spend more time with Mrs. W, so they could be aware of any arising issues ahead of the HACC worker.

## **Case Study 2 of Elder Abuse**

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Mrs. X is a widowed Chinese woman in her 60's, who came six years ago from China, to live with her son and his family. Her daughter in law is from another ethnic group and because neither she, nor the grandchildren, speak Chinese, the communication between them and Mrs. X is very difficult.

Since her arrival, Mrs. X has been expected to vacuum and clean the house, take the grandchildren to and from school and perform other home duties. She has not been treated with respect and has never been thanked or acknowledged for her work. She has been restricted in her activities, not allowed to use the phone and not permitted to invite friends over. When on family outings, she has often been made to pay for everyone's meals but no effort has been made in meeting her own social and personal needs.

Eventually, Mrs. X confided in her Chinese General Practitioner that she desperately wanted to move to an alternative accommodation, as she could not possibly live with her family any longer. She told him that she felt used, unappreciated and alienated from the rest of the family. The GP referred her to a Chinese social worker who found a place for her in an aged hostel accommodation, which was run by a Chinese organisation.

Mrs. X's son refused to consider her move away from home, as traditionally it is the children's duty to look after their ageing parents and failing to do so, they might 'lose face' in their community. Mrs. X could not be admitted to the hostel without her son signing the assurance of support document and that caused the relationship with his mother to escalate even more.

The social worker started to work on two fronts --- persuading the son to accept that his mother's wellbeing should be considered, and working with Mrs. X through the various grievances that she had against her son.

The counselling sessions resulted in Mrs. X moving to the hostel and after a settling down period, the family started to visit her and include her in family activities. During that period, the social worker

continued to discuss change in attitudes with his clients. In the course of his work, he has put the emphasis on working within the cultural frame of keeping the family together with an holistic approach, and by breaking down intergenerational barriers.

## Elder Abuse Prevention Unit

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**Elder Abuse Prevention Unit (EAPU)** provides a Queensland state-wide service to respond to the abuse of older people. The goals of EAPU are to enhance the quality of life and safety of older people in Queensland.

- Elder abuse in Queensland is "**Any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person**"
- Elder abuse can include **physical, financial, psychological, social, and sexual abuse and/or neglect.**
- **Helpline** - the EAPU operates a state-wide telephone information, support and referral service for anyone experiencing or witnessing the abuse of an older person. Helpline operates between Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on **1300 651 192.**
- **Helpline** operates only in English (see page 7 for use of interpreters).
- EAPU provides **awareness raising sessions** to community groups and to older people groups and to their families.
- EAPU provides **staff and student training**, to enhance their awareness about and capacity to respond to situations of elder abuse of their clients.
- For inquiries regarding information and training sessions, please call EAPU on **1300 651 192.**
- **Website:** [www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au)

## Cathay Community Association Inc.

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- **Cathay Community Association** provides in-home care and support services to frail aged and people with disabilities who are from Chinese speaking and cultural background living in the Greater Brisbane area. Service types include domestic assistance, personal care, social support, respite care, centre-based day care and information & referral.
- Service provided under Home and Community Care Program and Community Aged Care Packages.
- Address: 1/F 161 Wickham Street Fortitude valley Queensland 4006
- Postal Address: PO Box 1582 Fortitude Valley Qld 4006
- Telephone: (07) 3252 9066
- Fax: (07) 3852 2348
- Email: [homecare@cathay.org.au](mailto:homecare@cathay.org.au)
- Website: [www.cathay.org.au](http://www.cathay.org.au)
- Contact person: Stephanie Lee, Coordinator

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- Nip, Polly, Clinical Service Coordinator, at the Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Ipswich Rd. Woolloongabba.
- The Elder Chinese Focus Group, Which included fifteen participants, members of The Cathay Club English Language Program.
- Wong, Chi Kim, social worker at The Cathay Club at 161 Wickham St. Fortitude Valley.
- Wong Melissa, Ethnic Mental Health Program, 87 Juliette St. Greenslopes.
- Yuen Linda, Sister, The Evergreen Taoist Temple, 41 Depot Rd. Deagon.

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