

Serbian Cultural Profile – older people

Please Note: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Serbian people living in S.E Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients. **We gratefully acknowledge assistance of the now Serbian Community Association of Australia in compiling this profile.**

Migration:

- Serbia is part of Former Yugoslavia. It is bordered by Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Bosnia & Herzegovina.
- Few Serbians settled in Australia during the 19th century, probably fewer than 100 people by 1901
- After the First World War there were a few hundred Serbs living in Australia.
- The Second World War resulted in the displacement of many Serbs and by 1961 their number grew to 10,000.
- In the 1970's many Serbs arrived in Australia under the Assisted Passage Scheme raising the number to 70,000
- The community's focal point is the Serbian Orthodox Church. Currently there are ten churches throughout Victoria and they reach out to approximately 21,000 Serbs.

Local Demographics: Serbian speaking residents in the South East Region (ABS 2011)

	City of Greater Dandenong	City of Casey	Cardinia Shire
Total population of LGA	135,605	252,382	74,174
Total no. of Serbian speaking residents	2,645	2,536	94
Total no. of Serbian born residents	772	817	61
Serbian speaking residents, 55+ yrs.	792	579	25
Serbian born residents, 55+ yrs.	366	309	34

- City of Casey has 11.1% of Victoria's Serbia-born residents and Greater Dandenong has 10.4% (ABS 2011)
- Gaining accurate figures for the Serbian community in Australia is difficult because place of birth does not accurately reflect ethnicity and many Serbs will say they are from Yugoslavia.
- Serbia born Victorian residents reflect an ageing profile, with 24.5% being 65 years and over.

Language:

- Serbian language is spoken by Serbs and the Cyrillic alphabet is used
- Ask the client not only what country they were born in and what language they speak but also what ethnicity they identify as. Many Serbs were born in Croatia or Bosnia & Herzegovina but identify as Serbian although they may also speak the local languages.
- It is not culturally appropriate to book a Serbian speaking Croatian or Bosnian interpreter for a Serbian client as one can not be sure of what the client may have experienced prior to migrating to Australia.

Religion:

- Most Serbs belong to the Orthodox Church-(42.9% of Serbs in Victoria (ABS 2011).
- There are certain specific elements of Serbian Orthodoxy, such as the continued use of the Julian calendar. Christmas for example is celebrated by Serbs on the 7th of January
- Sunday is seen as a day of rest. Even people who are not religious will tend not to work on Sundays
- Traditionally Serbian people invite a priest to bless their new home once they move in

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Attitudes to / Issues with Aging:

- Traditionally children look after their aged parents. Placement in a nursing home is unacceptable. To the older generation of Serbian migrants a nursing home is outside of the family. “If the children won’t look after me this must mean that I have failed as a parent and the children are paying me back.”
- There is also the fear of being shamed by other families
- Most children care for their aged parents at home and are in need of support
- Social and recreational support needs are high for elderly Serbs.

Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Often Serbian people who are experiencing problems related to mental health do not seek support outside the family.
- This could be related to the huge stigma and shame associated with mental illness and getting help from psychiatrists, psychologists etc.
- Also, most Serbs are ill informed about the problems they may be facing and do not understand the supports available as well as mainstream services not understanding the Serbian culture.

Customs / Values:

- Baking and eating a ceremonial cake is an important feature of Christmas Day. Serbian people have “BADNJAK” oak branches adorned with straw and sometimes nuts and lollies
- Traditionally there is a fasting period six weeks prior to Easter

Communication Styles:

- In a professional context, a handshake with an introduction of who you are is usually an appropriate greeting style for both male and female clients. A handshake is a form of respect and it is often found rude if one does not acknowledge a person by introducing him or herself with a handshake.
- Some clients may offer you a gift as a thank you token for your services. This was a common thing to do in Yugoslavia and it is often found rude if the gift is not accepted. However, in most cases if you explain to the client what your organisation’s policy is regarding accepting gifts, it is usually accepted and not taken offensively.

Naming Conventions:

- When you first meet someone you should be formal, greeting with a title and the surname. As you and the client become familiar with each other, first names may be used.

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Serbs are comfortable with approaching a medical doctor however there is a lack of familiarity with the Australian style of making an appointment. Often a Serb will just turn up and wait for an available appointment
- There is also a lack of familiarity with the role of GP’s as in their home country GP’s were specialists and not the generalists that they are in Australia.

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Greetings:

English Greeting	Serbian – Romanised	Pronunciation – closest English
Hello	DOBAR DAN	DOBBER DAN
Good Morning	DOBRO JUTRO	DOBRO YOUTRO
Goodbye	DOVIDJENJA	DOVIJENYA
Yes	DA	DA
No	NE	NAY
Thank you	HVALA	HWALA

Key Serbian Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Christmas is celebrated on 7th January
- Easter's date is to be confirmed each year
- St. Sava is celebrated on 27th January. The day is celebrated as a children's educational festival
- St. Vitius Day is celebrated annually on 28th June
- New Year's Eve is celebrated on 13th January

Services & Activities useful for older Serbian people in Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia.*

<p>Serbian Community Association of Australia</p> <p>186 Foster St East Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9701 7308 Fax: 9706 9912</p> <p>Contact: info@serbiancommunity.org.au</p>	<p>Services provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Group activities – Wednesday 12.00 - 2 • Community Visiting Scheme • Information, referral and advocacy <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Casey & Cardinia</i></p>
<p>Serbian Social Services & Support Inc.</p> <p>Shop 7 /Vanity Court Arcade 249-253 Lonsdale Street Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9793 2100 Contact: Maja Trazivuk Mon, Tues and Wed. 9.00 am – 3.00 pm</p>	<p>Services provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly Visiting Program • Every Second Tuesday PAG in Dandenong • Information, referral and advocacy. • Monthly Outing PAG for Casey residents only <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Casey & Cardinia</i></p>
<p>Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre</p> <p>39 Clow Street Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9767 1900 Fax: 9706 8830</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multicultural PAGs core and high • Positive Ageing Programs- strength training, warm water exercise and tai chi • Outing Groups • Carer Support Program • Volunteer Visiting Program • HACC Access and Support • Community Visitors Scheme <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Casey & Cardinia</i></p>

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<p>Serbian Australian Pensioners Association</p> <p>310-322 Perry Road Keysborough, Vic, 3173</p> <p>Contact: President Milka Jaksic Ph: 0402 011 027</p>	<p>Services provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This group meets every second Thursday 12pm - 2pm for lunch and a social gathering.• The group is connected to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Keysborough.
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***This resource list of services (other than Council HACC), has been prepared for aged care staff in the Council areas of Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia. Some services and activities listed are in fact available to residents beyond these three municipalities.**