Community Partners Project 2011

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Community Partners Project: 
Finnish Community Profile

1. Where is Finland?
Finland is located in North Europe. It is bordered by Russia to the east, the Gulf of Finland to the south, the Gulf of Bothnia and Sweden to the west and Norway to the north. Forests cover about 68% of the land area with pine, spruce and birch trees in the northern coniferous zone. The southwest coast and Baltic archipelago are in the continental European oak zone and Lapland is in the Arctic-Alpine zone. There are 188,000 lakes in Finland. The capital of Finland is Helsinki which is the seat of its presidential republic government. The population of Finland is 5.4 million and Finland’s official languages are Finnish, Swedish, and Sami. 91% of Finns speak Finnish as their mother tongue and only 5.4% speaks Swedish (Statistic Finland, 2010).

2. Immigration patterns
Finnish people have a long history of visitation to Australia, with the first Finn to visit Australia being Herman Georg Spöring, an assistant to botanist Solander on James Cook’s first voyage to the Pacific in 1770. Finnish people did not begin to arrive in Australia in significant numbers until the 1920s when the United States imposed immigration quotas. High unemployment in Finland, together with immigration assistance provided by the Australian government, made Australia an attractive destination, particularly for single men.

A second wave of Finnish settlers arrived in Australia after World War II, followed by family migration, which saw over 22,000 Finns settle in Australia during the decade following the war. Of these, about half ultimately returned to Finland, or migrated to the United States. The Finland-born community in Australia is now smaller than these historic figures, with the 2006 census recording 8,200 Finland-born people residing in Australia (DIAC Community Info, 2009). Of these, 1,180 Finland-born people (14%) were recorded as living in Victoria, with the majority of these based in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It is expected that the size of the community will continue to decline as the community ages, and immigration rates remain low.

About 27% of Finland-born people living in Australia are aged 65 years or older. A marked increase in the proportion of elderly can be expected over the next decade. Elderly Finns have limited access to support networks and rely instead on their families, friends and own community associations. However the demand for support services from the Finland-born community is expected to increase.

3. Language and literacy
The main languages spoken at home by Finland-born people in Australia are:

- Finnish 56%
- English 39%
- Swedish 2%

About 17% spoke English not well, or not at all (DIAC Community Information, 2009)

English proficiency is lower in the older Finnish generation. As a result, they rely heavily on their family, friends and community organisations to provide interpreting support.
4. Education and employment history
Finland-born people tend to be more educated than the average for Australian citizens. At the 2006 Census, 56% of Finland-born aged 15 years and over had some form of higher non school qualification, which is slightly higher than for the entire Australian population (53%). Of these, 23% had a diploma or higher qualification, 20% had certificate level qualification, and about 5% are still attending an educational institution.

Among Finland-born people aged 15 years and over, the participation in the labour force was 53% and unemployment was only 6% (DIAC, Community Info, 2009). Finland-born migrants who arrived in Australia with little or no English language skills have generally worked in unskilled, manual labouring jobs where opportunities for improving their language and professional skills were limited.

5. Religion
Christianity is the major faith amongst the Finland-born community in Victoria, with 63% of the community who identify themselves as Lutheran, 5% Pentecostal and a smaller percentage are Jehovah Witnesses and Orthodox. The Finnish community in Victoria celebrate a range of significant religious events. These events are seen not only as a means of worship and religious celebration, but also as an opportunity for the community to meet and strengthen their networks.

6. Culture and traditions
The role of the family in the Finnish community & attitudes towards the elderly
The Finnish community in Victoria is small, and those who regularly participate in community activities are close-knit, with strong cultural views and traditions. Others prefer to integrate more closely with the mainstream Australian community and attend Finnish community activities and events only occasionally. Finns are often shy and modest, with a tendency to downplay their own accomplishments. They are private in nature, and are generally considered to be reliable and trustworthy people.

Elderly Finns are more likely to have family member as their carer, and prefer to live at home with their families for as long as they can. However, some elderly with families in Australia choose to live alone and others with no family seem to manage well with limited outside support. A move to an aged care facility will generally only be considered as a last resort when the elderly person has developed medical, or other complications. This is because the majority of the elderly tend to believe that they will lose their independence and connections with families and friends if they move to a mainstream Aged Care Facility. Elderly Finns tend to prefer to move to a Finnish specific residential facility, but unfortunately there is only one of these within Australia (Finlandia Village with residential care, retirement living and home care services in Brisbane-Queensland). Despite its distance from Victoria, many would prefer to go to live there if possible.

7. Health issues
The overall health of the Finnish elderly in Victoria is good. Through discussions with community representatives, it has been reported that the main health issues relate to arthritis, diabetes, high cholesterol; and heart conditions. There are also reported incidences of alcohol related illnesses, however, it is important to note that not all Finns consume alcohol. In addition to the medical issues, social isolation has also been raised as a problem. Generally, Finnish people do not like to complain and tend to view sickness, pain and old age as natural life experiences. They tend to ignore minor medical issues and appear to be reluctant to seek professional help with health concerns. Unfortunately, this can create circumstances where medical assistance and support services are sought only after a condition has become severe and care options within the community have been exhausted.
8. Access to services

Pre-migration experiences & its impact on the Finland-born community in Australia

In the past, the Finnish government provided limited aged care support to its citizens. However, in present-day Finland, the government provides good support services for the elderly. Some of the services are free, others require a small fee. For instance, equipment hire (e.g. wheelchairs) is free in Finland. Carers are provided with short holidays with the cost being subsidised. Information regarding services is widely provided to families in Finland.

After arriving in Australia, those with low English proficiency found it very difficult to navigate the Australian health and welfare systems. Today, only small numbers of elderly members of Finnish community have adequate knowledge of services that are available to aged persons in Australia. Nonetheless, many of them still may not know how, where, or who can help them to access these service. The members who attend, or know someone who attends, HACC Planned Activities Group have stated that they are aware of some services available to them. Overall, the majority of the community can be considered to have limited knowledge of the support services available.

9. Key issues that Finnish elderly consider to be barriers to service access are:

• Poor English language skills
  All Finns are literate in Finnish, but not all have a high level of English proficiency. English proficiency is lower in the older Finland-born generation. As a result, they rely on their families, friends and community organisations to provide interpreting support. Their ability to seek information, or communicate with service providers is limited and the existing translated materials are not reflective of their needs.

• Cross Cultural communication issues
  Finns tend to be shy, modest and believe that one must not draw attention to oneself, and they don’t feel comfortable approaching others for help. For a Finn, privacy is very important, which is why Finns are often reluctant to disclose personal information. Also, they will often try to manage on their own for as long as possible and only seek assistance when they reach crisis point.

• Lack of awareness of Aged Care Support services
  The community has limited awareness of services available to them, do not know who to contact for assistance, and don’t know how much it will cost. This is largely due to communication barriers and their reluctance to seek help. Those who have been linked to support services, either by family or community organisations seem to be appreciative of the support they are receiving and, in turn, tend to inform other Finnish elderly of these services.

• Inability to use interpreter services to access information
  Due to a lack of awareness of the interpreting services, a low level of understanding of the role of interpreters, and privacy related issues, Finns are reluctant to use interpreters and prefer instead to rely on families, friends or the Finnish Friendly Visiting Service. This in itself limits what the person can disclose to support services.

• Lack of transport
  Most Finnish men learnt to drive after arriving to Australia and owned a car at some point, but have now lost their licences due to old age or medical conditions. Women on the other hand, have often never driven a car, have no licence and are reliant on public transport. However elderly are now finding it difficult to catch public transport and may not be able to afford to pay for taxi services, and as a consequence, have a reduced ability to participate in community events or activities that promote social connections.
10. Leisure and recreation
Finns socialize with family and friends with food and BBQ. Some having alcoholic drinks and some being teetotalers. Socializing during daytime happens often with coffee and home baked cakes. A common way of meeting others is to invite them for the afternoon or evening coffee. Common activities are card play, handcrafts such as woodworking for men and knitting, crocheting, weaving with loom and cross-stitch for women, reading books and magazines, crossword puzzles, carpet bowls, Tai chi, pool games, walking, golf and fishing. Many Finns also follow winter games such as skiing, ice-hockey and summer games such as athletics and Finnish baseball.

- Music and Dance
  Ballroom dancing (tango, waltz etc.) and folk dancing have been some of Finns' favorite activities. In their younger years, dancing was a way of meeting people and socializing. Finns in Victoria still enjoy using music and dance to reconnect with others in their community. Others enjoy singing or/and listening to music. The type of music varies from religious hymns, folksongs, and popular music from their era to classical music.

- Outdoor Activities
  Gardening is also one of the activities enjoyed by many Finns in Victoria. Elderly Finns love to grow their own vegetables, fruit trees, indoor and outdoors plants and maintain their home gardens. They also love to go to the countryside to pick berries when in seasons.

- Sauna
  Sauna is an important part of Finnish culture and a traditional place for relaxation and cleaning oneself.

11. Food and diet
The typical Finnish dietary staples are bread (rye, whole meal or sour dough), potatoes, beef, pork, chicken, sausages, fish, milk products (milk, butter milk, cheese and yoghurt), vegetables, fruit and berries. Milk or butter milk is commonly served with the meals as a drink; others are cordial, beer or water. Spices and herbs are used very sparingly in Finnish cuisine to keep taste mild. Traditionally women have made their own jam, preserves, baked cakes, short bread, pastries and bread for the meals. Bread is served with every meal.

Mealtimes

**Breakfast**
Usually includes porridge, rye/whole meal bread, bread rolls, butter, cheese, sliced meats, hard-boiled eggs, cucumber or tomato slices, yoghurt, milk, and coffee/tea.

**Lunch (12noon)** Usually hot cooked meal with meat (e.g. casseroles, stews, soups) or fish (baked, fried, grilled, smoked) and vegetables including potato (boiled, mashed or baked), fresh salad, bread, milk and dessert (tart, cake, yoghurt, ice cream).

**Afternoon coffee (brewed or filtered) or tea (2pm)**
Usually served with sweet buns/scrolls, pastries, short bread or cakes.

**Dinner (5pm)**
Can be cooked meal (as lunch above) or lighter meal consisting of an open sandwiches made from rye/whole meal bread topped with a variety of fillings such as cheese, sliced meats, eggs, smoked salmon or pickled herring with some vegetables such as lettuce, cucumber and tomato.
12. Codes of conduct to be adopted when dealing with Finnish elderly

• Be mindful of the cultural differences
When conducting a home visit, do leave your shoes by the door and do not be overly friendly as most Finns tend to be reserved at the first meeting.

• Greetings
A handshake is a common form of greeting upon meeting or leaving. In company a woman’s hand is shaken first then a man’s. Good morning, Good afternoon and Good evening are used commonly when arriving. When you become more familiar with a person “Hi/Hello or bye/ see you” can also be used.

• Faith
It is important to ask what religious denomination a Finnish person belongs to as some Finns belongs to the Lutheran, some Pentecostal, Orthodox Church and Jehovah Witnesses. This is important in situations where a person is in need of pastoral care, and it helps in providing the person, or family, with appropriate religious material and hymn/songs.

• Be inclusive
Finns are direct communicators and verbal commitments are considered to be official agreements “Man’s word is his bond”. They place great value on speaking openly, plainly and honestly, so when communicating with Finnish people, speak clearly, honestly and don’t appear to be in a rush. Include family members in the communication loop and in the decision-making process unless otherwise advised.

• Time Management
Be punctual, this is seen as a sign of respect and efficiency.

• Double-check translated materials
Translated materials may be reviewed by the Finnish Friendly Visiting Service Inc. to help ensure that they are correct, relevant and suitable.

• Use competent, independent interpreters
When interpreting services are required, it is advisable that an independent interpreter be used, rather than a family member to provide this service. Using a family member or friend may hinder the communication process and information flow to the individual requiring support.

• Generally always be polite, courteous and never appear to be in a hurry
Community Partners Project:  
Finnish Community Survey Results

Outcome Summary
The survey results indicate that many elderly Finns are in need of a variety of support services, including direct practical support and information, improved access to support services, health information, improved dementia awareness and information around dementia risk reduction.

Language difficulties, lack of awareness of the interpreting services and appropriate resources in Finnish languages, resulted in the community having problems accessing information and support services.

There is a clear need for services providers to develop and deliver culturally appropriate material for the community and in a language that is clearly understood by the community.

Community Survey
Conducting a community survey was seen as the best approach in obtaining information from the Finnish elderly as it was considered they may be more willing to provide open feedback, in comparison to face-to-face interviews. About 70 questionnaires, composed in the Finnish language and in English, were handed out to the elderly Finns and their families. Sixty questionnaires were returned (55 in Finnish, 5 in English). The results were then collected both in writing and verbally by Finnish community workers.

The main aim of the survey was to collect information around the needs of elderly Finnish people, the level of understanding about dementia, barriers to service access, knowledge of aged care and the type of resources they believe will be useful for them and their community. The information will be used to assist in developing resources that are tailored to the particular needs of the Finnish elderly.

Needs of Elderly Finnish People
The community survey results show that older Finnish people are in need of a variety of support services and information regarding the services that are available to them.

• Access to information, support services and language assistance

A large proportion of elderly Finns surveyed stated that they have no access to general information regarding dementia support and other support services. The few who may have already been linked with services stated that they found it very difficult to navigate the Australian health and welfare systems due to language difficulties.

It was found that while the majority of the elderly Finns were literate in Finnish, they lacked well developed English language skills. They stated that their limited English language skills, combined with insufficient use of interpreters and a perceived lack of materials translated into Finnish has had a negative impact on their ability to access information and support.

• Direct and practical support to continuing independent living

Elderly Finns strongly felt that they need to be linked to services that promote independent living, including through direct practical support. They were also very supportive of any services and initiatives that promoted their participation and connection with the wider community.

Examples of support services that were identified by the participants included: assistance in completing forms; home maintenance and meal services; home visits from doctors or district nurses; financial support (e.g. Centrelink); provision of useful telephone contacts; and information regarding social support groups.
• Financial Support

Generally there seems to be confusion regarding the costs associated with services and the financial support options available. Some participants stated that financial difficulties and lack of information and clarity regarding access, eligibility and costs associated with services, are barriers preventing them from seeking help. Others were unaware, or unsure, of the costs associated with services and, in the absence of this information, concluded that these costs were unaffordable.

• Culturally appropriate services and information

Survey participants indicated that they would like service providers to consider their needs, take into account their culture and produce bilingual information that would help them in taking the necessary steps in seeking support. This extends to having service providers employ Finnish bicultural workers who can help Finnish speaking people to complete forms and generally facilitate communication.

The need for a specialist aged care facility in Victoria that catered to Finnish speaking people was also raised.

Service Access Issues

The following were identified as barriers preventing Finnish elderly from accessing services.

• Communication difficulties

Lack of English language skills was identified as a key issue limiting information and services access. A number of participants who had been provided with information written in English stated they did not understand it at all, or found it very difficult to understand.

• Lack of knowledge about services

A large number of elderly surveyed stated that they did not know where to go, or who to contact, when they required assistance. It appears that, because this segment of the community has managed to cope with very limited support from others over an extended period, there is a tendency for them to believe that there is nothing anyone can do to improve their situation. They are often unaware of the range of support services that are available to them and/or their families.

• Culture of modesty

Some participants do not consider that they are in need of support and often do not discuss their issues or concerns with other people, including family and health practitioners. The tendency is to seek help when a crisis point is reached. This has resulted in many participants missing out on valuable information that could have had a positive impact on their lifestyle, or improved their situation.

• Transport issues

A large number of those surveyed stated that the lack of transport assistance, which may include community buses or use of taxi vouchers, restricted their movements, making it difficult to stay connected and informed, resulting in social isolation.

• Lack of culturally appropriate information and services

Survey participants stated that they were not satisfied with the services they received because they were treated with prejudice and workers lacked a basic understanding of Finnish culture. They also felt that information being provided by some service providers was not culturally appropriate.
Awareness of Aged Care Community Services

Based on this survey, it appears that many Finnish elderly have at least some direct knowledge of the services that are available to older people, or know of someone within the community that has been linked to these services. There are, however, significant proportions who appear to have no real understanding that such services are available.

Amongst surveyed participants, there generally appeared to be some confusion around access eligibility and costs, including government subsidies. This confusion appears to have prevented many from accessing services, assuming that they could not afford those services.

Some of the services that Finnish Elderly have a comparatively high awareness of include assistance with shopping, meals and home maintenance, personal care, visits by nurses at home, friendly visiting services for people who are living alone and respite services. However, it was not entirely clear whether participants had attempted to access these services themselves.

Dementia Awareness

The survey indicates that many Finnish elderly have a good understanding of dementia and its symptoms, with only a few of the survey participants appearing to have a very low level of knowledge in this area. This latter group appear to believe that dementia is a normal part of ageing and there is nothing that can be done to reduce the risk of dementia. This group also appeared to believe that any sign of forgetfulness was an indicator that a person has dementia.

The majority of those surveyed felt that they needed further information regarding dementia risk reduction and the different types of dementia, to enable them to make informed decisions for the future.

With regards to the level of knowledge about support services available to people living with dementia, the majority of participants indicated that they have a good awareness of such services through the Finnish Friendly Visiting Service, but that they had not attempted to access these services due to language and communication difficulties.

Resource Development

In terms of resources needed to address these issues, survey participants suggested the following as being useful approaches.

1. Provide a simple booklet, or brochures, with key contact information regarding dementia, aged care services, Centrelink and personal safety. These should be written in both English and Finnish languages.

2. Increase awareness about interpreter services to encourage the community to use these services, as well as encouraging service providers to use qualified professional interpreters.

3. Service providers to work in collaboration with the Finnish Friendly Visiting Service when translating materials into Finnish language to help ensure documents are meaningful and accurate.

4. Information about costs associated with services should be more clearly communicated. If applicable, include any concessions, fees waiver, or payment options that may be available.

5. Service providers could utilise community media, such as the Finnish Newspaper and SBS Finnish radio, so as to better raise awareness around issues and services.

6. Service providers to provide information sessions to the community. These sessions should be conducted using professional interpreters.
7. Increase awareness among service providers of Finnish culture and traditions so that services, initiatives and communication can be tailored to suit the specific needs of this segment of the community.

8. Service providers to up skill bicultural workers and volunteer staff through education, networking and partnerships, in order that they are better able to support older Finnish community members.

14. References
Prepared in consultation with the Finnish Friendly Visiting Service Inc and Alzheimer’s Australia Vic.
Finnish community consultations and CPP survey
Atlapedia online, Where is Finland, Sep 2010  http://www.atlapedia.com/online/countries/finland.htm
Community Information Summary, Australian Government: Department of Immigration and Citizenship(DIAC)
Victorian Community profiles: 2006 Census
Appendix

Finnish contacts in Melbourne, Victoria

Finnish Friendly Visiting Service Inc.
Melbournen Suomalainen Ystäväpalvelu
Provides information and support for the Senior and Disabled Finns, volunteer visitors to homes.
Part of the Home and Community Care Services,
PAG (Planned Activity Group) every Monday 9am onwards
1st Monday of the month ‘Aivoriihi’ (‘Brain training’)
Contact coordinators:
Office times: mon 9am- 3pm, wed 9am- 1pm
Address: 119 Pier Street, Altona, VIC 3018
Postal address: PO Box 117, Altona, VIC 3018
Tel/Fax (03) 9315 0601 Mob 0412 316 467
Email: ffvs@bigpond.com

Finnish Lutheran Church in Melbourne
Melbournen Suomalainen Luterilainen Seurakunta
Pastor: Mr Jorma Jormakka
Sunday worship at 11am. Small groups: Monday evening and Tuesday daytime.
Mother-child group meets once a month.
Takes part/organises yearly Suvipäivät (Summer Conference) for all Australian Finns, the location alternates every year between the state capital cities.
Office, Chapel: 143 Brown Street, Heidelberg, VIC 3084
Tel (03) 9457 1314 Fax (03) 9457 4559
Email: j_jormakka@hotmail.com
www.finnishchurchmelbourne.org.au

Finnish Pentecostal Church in Melbourne
Suomalainen Helluntai-seurakunta
Meetings at the Uniting Church, Cnr Lower Heidelberg Rd & Maltravers Rd, East Ivanhoe
Sunday worship at 2pm
Pastor: Mr Auvo Karjalainen Mob 0448637179
Elder Eero Suomalainen Tel (03) 5781 0059
Takes part in yearly Easter Conference for all Australian Finns

Finnish Society of Melbourne
Melbournen Suomi-seura
Finnish Hall, 119 Pier Street, Altona, VIC 3018
Tel (03) 9398 4143
Email: f.s.m@bigpond.com
www.fsmelbourne.com.au
Seniors Wednesday Club 10am-12pm.
Other functions: library, shop with Finnish products, folk dancing, choir, baseball, groups for children and young people. Celebrations for Independence Day May Day, Midsummer and Christmas. Takes part/organises yearly Finnish Easter Games for all Australian Finns the location alternates every year between the state capital cities.

The Finnish Language School in Melbourne
Melbournen Suomi-koulu
143 Brown Street, Heidelberg, VIC 3084
For children and youth, meetings every second Sat 10am- 1pm.
www.home.vicnet.net.au/~finsmelb/
Interpreter in Melbourne (tulkki)
Ms Tarja Papantoniou
Tel (03) 9841 9306     Mob 0413 519 455
Email: jtpapantoniou@iprimus.com.au
Also Finnish language lessons and courses.

Suomi Newspaper (Finnish Newspaper, bimonthly)
PO Box 303, Malvern, VIC 3144
Tel (03) 9572 2543    Fax (03) 9563 6223
Email: suomi@hotkey.net.au
www.suominewspaper.com.au

Australian Hyvä Sanoma (Australian Good News-magazine, 6 times/year)
A Publication of Finnish Pentecostal Churches in Australia
PO Box 489 Kippax, Holt, ACT 2615
Tel (02) 6253 0607    Fax (02) 6251 1058
Email: ahs@tpg.com.au

Australian Finns (Australian suomalaiset)
Website for Australian Finns providing information, contacts, events calendar, notices etc.
www.dundernews.com

Radio programs in Finnish
SBS Finnish program, in Melbourne FM 93.1, every Sun 5pm- 6pm
Contact: Mr Karl Mattas Tel (02) 9560 2768 Mob 0411 139 961
www.sbs.com.au  (choose from the language sites Finnish)

Embassy of Finland
12 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla 2600, ACT
Tel (02) 6273 3800   Fax (02) 6273 3603
Email: sanomat.can@formin.fi
http://finland.org.au

Finnish Honorary Consulate, Victoria
Consul office:
DLA Philips Fox, level 21, 140 William Street, Melbourne 3000
Tel (03) 9274 5000

Consulate of Finland
537 New South Head Road, Double Bay, NSW 2028
Tel (02) 9327 7904    Fax (02) 9327 7528.

Finnish Australian Rest Home Association (AFRHA)
Australian Suomalainen Lepokotiyhdistys
343 Cleveland-Redland Bay Road, Thomlands 4164, QLD
Tel (07) 3829 4800   Fax (07) 3829 4899
Email: info@afhra.com.au
www.afhra.com.au

Alcoholic Anonymous (Finnish AA Service)
Contact: PO Box 211, Potts Point, NSW 2011
Diversicare
Provides assistance (information, resources and cultural briefings) to the service providers for culturally appropriate care of the clients/residents from CALD background (including Finnish).
PO Box 5199, West End, QLD 4101
Tel (07) 3846 1099   Mob 0434 143 813
Email: epp.bne@diversicare.com.au
www.diversicare.com.au

The Alzheimer Society of Finland (Muistiliitto r.y.)
Provides help and assistance for people with Alzheimer’s disease and their carers. The society is a member organisation of the Alzheimer’s Disease International and Alzheimer Europe.
Email: toimisto@muistiliitto.fi
www.muistiliitto.fi

Finland’s national radio and TV broadcasting company YLE (Suomen Yleisradio)
Programs available on internet in Finnish and in Swedish.
http://yle.fi/