Handout 13: Mental Health Issues for People with a CALD Background

1. People from Non English Speaking Backgrounds

The 1997 Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that overall, migrants from non-English speaking countries had a lower rate of common mental disorders than both migrants from English speaking countries and the Australian born population. However, we need to remember that while most new arrivals to Australia settle successfully in the long term, the process of migration, settlement and integration into a new culture can be very stressful, and could trigger an existing vulnerability to mental illness.

Factors that make adjustment stressful include:

- limited proficiency in English (which can lead to social isolation, and difficulty in accessing mental health and other services);
- grief associated with loss of the country, culture, family and friends left behind (even if migration is voluntary);
- limited social networks and support in Australia;
- conflicting cultural values;
- housing and employment difficulties;
- racial discrimination.

Refugees in particular face a high risk of developing a mental disorder. Many have suffered severe physical and emotional trauma, both in their country of origin and in refugee camps. Consequently, they may suffer from clinical depression or other symptoms of other mental ill health, but find it difficult to seek help because of loss of trust. They may present to general medical services with physical complaints such as headaches and insomnia, which actually mask mental distress.

Young people usually adjust quicker to a new language and culture, but may find themselves in conflict with their parents where the attitudes, behaviours and values of the Australian community clash with those of their parents and older family members.

2. Aboriginal People (will write a summary here)

A good video to watch here is "Last Night I Heard a Voice" which you may be able to access via your TAFE library.