

Equal Disappointment Opportunity

Schwab, Pete "Equal Disappointment Opportunity" Newswit (New South Wales Institute of Technology student newspaper) 25 May 1988.

by Pete Schwab

The Department of Community Services is suppressing a report it commissioned on programs for immigrants and their children, in particular in regard to the access to, and availability and appropriateness of them.

At a public meeting held on Broadway campus on May 6th and chaired by Franca Arena MLC, the report's authors, Helen Meekosha and Andrew Jakubowicz, said that the DCS has refused to make copies of it available to department staff, the Fitzgerald commission into immigration, ethnic community councils, academics or the media.

Ms. Meekosha said the DCS gave three reasons for this. That it contained inaccurate information; was misleading as parts of the report covered matters of state, not federal, responsibility, and that it was out of date.

But the authors believe this was a smokescreen, and there were other reasons for the suppression. These were, first that they refused to submit to censorship, as the DCS wanted a chapter on immigrant women cut out, even though this group is the main provider and consumer of services; that the report was aimed at users and field officers and not merely senior officers; and that it put user requirements at the centre of the strategy and pointed the finger inwards at the department rather than saying the problems were all with the immigrants; in particular, that none of department's senior staff were of a non-English-speaking background, and few staff had experience working with immigrants; policy decisions are published in

ethnic languages 12 months after they have been released in English, by which time all the budget has been claimed.

Helen Meekosha and Andrew Jakubowicz said they were aware of the financial limitations the department faces, which is why many of their recommendations were designed to improve communications between the department and groups so that what money there was could be spent more efficiently.

Among the recommendations made was for the regular publication of a Community Services newsletter for community groups and departmental staff, and an increase in the proportion of money spent on publicity; that there should be an Immigrant Access Team to the DCS head office, as there is within the Health Department, and a special radio unit putting out programs in ethnic languages; that the department's policy of Equal Employment Opportunity should be stressed in job ads, along with the importance of experience of working with immigrants; and that there should be training support for non-governmental programs, and that the report should be released in precis form at least.