

# 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 Serbian Welfare Association Victoria 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 2006)

	City of Greater Dandenong	City of Kingston	City of Casey	Cardinia Shire
<b>Total population of LGA</b>	125,520	134,622	214,961	57,116
<b>Total no. of Serbian speaking residents</b>	2,867	400	2,132	60
<b>Total no. of Serbian born residents</b>	847	162	650	27
<b>Serbian speaking residents, 55+ yrs.</b>	624	95	391	15
<b>Serbian born residents, 55+ yrs.</b>	251	55	206	8

- Greater Dandenong has the highest over 55 population of Serbian speakers in Victoria. Casey has the 3rd highest
- 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.

## 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
- 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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

## 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.

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## 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.

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

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

<p><b>Serbian Welfare Association Victoria</b></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"> <li>• Women’s Group activities –Wednesday 12.00 - 2</li> <li>• Employment services</li> <li>• Information, referral and advocacy</li> </ul> <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Casey &amp; Cardinia</i></p>
<p><b>Serbian Social Services &amp; Support Inc.</b></p> <p>Shop 7 Vanity Court Arcade 249-253 Lonsdale Street Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9793 2100 Contact: Maja Trazivuk</p>	<p>Services provided include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dandenong office is open Monday &amp; Thursday 9-5pm</li> <li>• HACC Friendly Visiting Scheme</li> <li>• Focus on providing information and support to Serbians 65+ and Serbians with a disability</li> </ul> <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Casey &amp; Cardinia</i></p>
<p><b>South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre</b></p> <p>Level 1 314 Thomas Street Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9706 8933 Fax: 9706 8830</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multicultural PAG core Monday Dandenong and Friday Doveton</li> <li>• Multicultural PAG high Tuesday Noble Park</li> <li>• Multicultural PAG core-high Wednesday Noble Park</li> <li>• Carer Support Program</li> <li>• Volunteer Visiting Program</li> </ul> <p><i>Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Casey &amp; Cardinia</i></p>
<p><b>New Hope Foundation</b></p> <p>40 Grattan Street Prahran 3181 Ph: 9510 5877 Fax: 9510 8971</p> <p>Contact for PAG : Peter Kalathas. Contact for ESL: Warren Brewer</p> <p>Ph: 9510 5877</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multicultural Planned Activity Group High needs people</li> <li>• Multicultural English Classes (Tues &amp; Fri)</li> <li>• Seniors Gym</li> </ul> <p>Venue: Moorleigh Multicultural Centre Bignell Rd, East Bentleigh</p> <p><i>Eligibility: Kingston</i></p> <p>Community Visitors Program</p>

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<p><b>Serbian Australian Pensioners Association</b></p> <p>310-322 Perry Road Keysborough, Vic, 3173</p> <p><b>Contact:</b> Mr. Stev Gajdobraski (President) Ph: 9796 3006</p>	<p>Services provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group meets every second Thursday 12pm - 2pm for lunch and a social gathering.</li> <li>• The group is connected to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Keysborough.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Serbian Pensioners Club “Ravna Gora”</b></p> <p>672-682 Frankston – Dandenong Rd, Carrum Downs.</p> <p>Contact: Steve Boskovic (President) Ph: 9782 0403</p>	<p>Services provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serbian Pensioners Club meets fortnightly on Thursdays.</li> </ul>

**\*This resource list of services (other than Council HACC), has been prepared for aged care staff in the Council areas of Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia. Some services and activities listed are in fact available to residents beyond these four municipalities.**