Multicultural Services
Hen Friends

The Power of Chickens to improve health and wellbeing of Bhutanese elders.
Project overview

• Chicken keeping project aims to promote health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation amongst Bhutanese Elders in Cairns

• Based on key learnings from a project in the UK called ‘HenPower,’ which was established to promote health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation amongst disengaged older people living in residential homes
Key Achievements So Far…

• Coop has been established at Mercy Place, Woree, with 2 “friendly hens” (Curious Georgia and Sofia Le Hen)

• Residents regularly care for the hens – resident “chicken whisperer” Gail tends to the hens on a regular basis and encourages other residents to interact with them

• 3 sharing days held so far, including participation of 17 Bhutanese elders and 22 residents
Sharing day 1 – making chicken ornaments
What makes Hen Friends innovative?

- Uses animals (chickens) as a platform to bring people from different backgrounds together
- Builds on previous experience/skills of Bhutanese elders in farming and chicken keeping
- Brings out nurturing qualities of elders and residents
- Opportunities to extend to other groups in the community e.g. schools
Sharing day 2 – chicken bingo and colouring

Residents helped Bhutanese elders to cross off Bingo words

And we have a WINNER!
Challenges and how we overcame them

• It was difficult to find a home for the chickens in an accessible location - limited options in terms of nursing homes in Cairns

• After 2 months there was a problem with one of the residents with dementia chasing the chickens with a stick - coop had to be relocated

• We were able to find a new home for the chickens at Mercy Place, Woree
Sharing day 3 – chicken dance & Bhutanese dancing

Residents enjoyed learning about Bhutanese culture
Recommendations

• Don’t underestimate the power of chickens!

• Find a project partner (nursing home) who is committed to long term benefits of the project

• Persistence – may take time for participants and residents to warm up to the chickens

• Be creative – opportunities to link with other community groups e.g. schools
Some comments

• “I don’t have any family in Cairns. I come from a farming background so the hens have given me something to do. I take care of them and I help the other residents to interact with them.” (Gail, resident)

• “This place is good. The hens are happy, the residents are friendly and we are happy too.” (Bhutanese elders)
Thank You