To attract and retain staff and improve services to aged and disabled people in residential care, an innovative culture, communication and relationships training program is being delivered to more than 160 aged and disability care employees at three pilot sites; ‘Onslow Gardens’ Subiaco aged care facility, Marangaroo disability facility (both operated by the Brightwater Care Group), and ‘The Residency’ Northam aged care facility operated by Juniper ‘A Uniting Church Community’ (formally known as Uniting Church Homes). The program has been funded by the Premier’s Social Innovation Grant through the Department of Communities.

With the ageing population and steady increase in people with disabilities, it is imperative to reduce staff turnover and enhance service delivery to people in residential care. To some extent the emerging staff shortages within this sector are being mitigated by newly arrived migrants from many nations entering this workforce. The project will assist with supporting these workers and our existing workforce whilst enhancing staff engagement, retention and effectiveness.

During a presentation relating to this program, Dr Penny Flett, Chief Executive Officer of Brightwater Care Group, commented that the organisation’s 2000 staff working in our aged care and disability services are from over 60 different cultural backgrounds, only 11 of these come from a country where English is their first language, so it is vital that steps be taken to address cross-cultural communication and relationships in the workplace.

Mr Vaughan Harding, Chief Executive of Juniper ‘A Uniting Church Community’ (previously known as Uniting Church Homes), commented that the cultural composition of Australian society has changed dramatically in recent decades and is reflected through the increasing diversity in the aged care workforce. He emphasised the importance of improved cross-cultural understanding and communication from care worker to care worker, care worker to supervisor and care worker to aged care resident.

A suite of training materials has been developed for the program consisting of a Facilitator’s Guide, Participant’s Workbook, a raft of highly interactive activities and a number of film clips depicting workplace issues relevant to the culturally-diverse workforce in the aged and disability sector today. The design of the materials was informed by a thorough training needs analysis (TNA), feedback from surveys (over 600 returned), plus a series of focus
groups and interviews at the three sites for the pilot program. The rich information gathered has directed the focus and content of the training program.

Pilot delivery of the program will continue until mid December 2012 after which a thorough evaluation of all feedback received will be undertaken. The content, materials and delivery strategy will then be reviewed in light of this feedback to produce a program of the highest quality which most effectively meets the targeted needs of the aged and disability care sector. As the program is being funded by a Social Innovation Grant from the Western Australian Government, the materials will be available to the aged, disability and broader community sectors and their widest possible use is actively encouraged. These will be able to be downloaded free of charge, or at ‘cost price’ if hard copies are requested.

Program materials and resources have been developed by Fortis Consulting in collaboration with Brightwater Care Group and Juniper – A Uniting Church community. Fortis Consulting is a boutique education, training and management consultancy noted for producing effective, client centric solutions.

For further information about this innovative program please contact Mary Gurgone, Director of Education and Training, at Fortis Consulting on (08) 9467 2490 or 0413 619 748.