Education pathways for socially isolated refugee and asylum seeker parents

A scoping study

HMSTrust

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victoria takes the highest proportion of refugee and asylum seekers in Australia. Approximately '4,000 refugees settle in Victoria each year through the Humanitarian Programme' and an additional 10,000 asylum seekers live in Victoria on bridging visas (health.vic).

A significant number of these people will need access to appropriate adult education programs that will enable them to participate in their communities; move on to further education or pathway into work.

Pre-arrival experiences

Increasingly, refugees and asylum seekers are entering Victoria from countries that are riven by conflict or recovering from conflict (Demirdjian, 2012).

Many refugees and asylum seekers have pre-arrival experiences that 'are characterised by exposure to violence and loss, persecution, perpetration of human rights violations and forced displacement' (Wiseman, & Cassidy, 2019; Glen, Onsando, & Kearney, 2015). They may have experienced deprivation of health services, food, education, shelter and general safely. As a result, the impact of these circumstances has far-reaching effects, which are not neatly resolved in a short period of time or without intervention.

Once families arrive in Australia, the resettlement process is complex and ongoing. Along with managing the effects of trauma and separation, families may face challenges gaining stable employment, securing affordable housing and learning an additional language. (Wiseman, & Cassidy, 2019, p. 8)

Learning pathways

Education is recognised in research as pivotal to social and economic advancement. It also supports employment, civic participation, social inclusion and stability (Borrell, 2014; Cooper, 2018; Hirsch, 2016), and is a recognised basic human right (UNHCR, 2016).

Without access to appropriate educational opportunities, refugees and asylum seekers may struggle to participate in and contribute to their communities and find meaningful work.

Refugees and asylum seekers who are parents need specialised support so they can 'fully participate in the educational experience of their children at school' and in the economic and social life of their communities (CMY, 2015).

The aim

The aim of this scoping study is to identify the enablers of effective and sustainable participation in education opportunities by socially isolated refugees and asylum seekers who are also parents.

It also explores the barriers that have inhibited their participation, with a view to developing effective, engaging and appropriate adult education programs for this cohort.

Methodology

This scoping study focusses on education opportunities for asylum seeker / refugee parents who are located in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

The study has been framed using a qualitative methodology, which includes:

- A review of contemporary Australian and international research literature
- Data gathered from the voluntary participation of 30 adult refugees / asylum seekers; eight adult educators with experience in teaching this cohort and eight representatives from stakeholder organisations with expertise in settlement or wraparound services
- Case studies of effective and innovative adult learning programs that support the participation of adult asylum seekers and refugees in educational opportunities.

Findings

This methodology identified a broad range of influencing factors that act as enablers and barriers to participating in adult education programs. The primary data gathered through this research confirmed many of the findings outlined in the literature review; particularly in relation to the participants':

- general lack of confidence in their abilities (with over 50% of respondents having completed no schooling or just primary schooling)
- low proficiency in English language (with over 70% indicating no or basic English language skills)
- lack of social networks (with over 73% having no or limited social connections)
- unstable financial situation and the pressing need to secure work (with over 50% indicating they couldn't afford education programs)
- poor understanding of how to access educational opportunities in Australia
- restrictions on availability largely due to commitments relating to family (with 70% indicating family responsibilities were a major barrier).

Recommendations

Fostering formal partnerships

This research highlights the importance of fostering formal partnerships between schools with large numbers of students with refugee backgrounds and adult education providers.

A formal and ongoing partnership arrangement would provide a framework for sustainability, leadership, collaboration, communication, accountability and shared culture and values.

Meeting needs

A formal partnership of this nature would offer refugee and asylum seeker parents, with school-aged children, access to low-cost education programs that could be tailored to meet their specific needs and delivered at the school, where the parents may already be attending on a daily basis, and may also offer access translation services.

Adult education programs delivered on school grounds would encourage participation and offer a familiar and non-threatening environment for the parents to re-engage in learning.

Basic adult education courses could be offered to improve the parents'

foundation skills such as English language, literacy, numeracy and basic computing.

Work and life skills programs could also be offered; for example, programs that are focussed on:

- career pathways
- consumer protections
- Australia's legal system
- water and fire safety
- health and wellbeing.

Embedding language and literacy

Creative arts, crafts and gardening programs could be offered with embedded language and literacy skills. Participants could take a role in co-designing the curriculum or at a minimum participating in a process that identifies the types of programs that would be most suitable for them.

Building complex social connections

Adult education programs for this cohort should extend social connections within family networks, across communities and with institutions through the inclusion of; for example, cross-cultural social / community events, mentoring programs, work experience, volunteering opportunities and excursions.

Adult education providers must also link in with or build connections with other human services providers in their communities, enabling an even greater level of support for participants with complex needs.

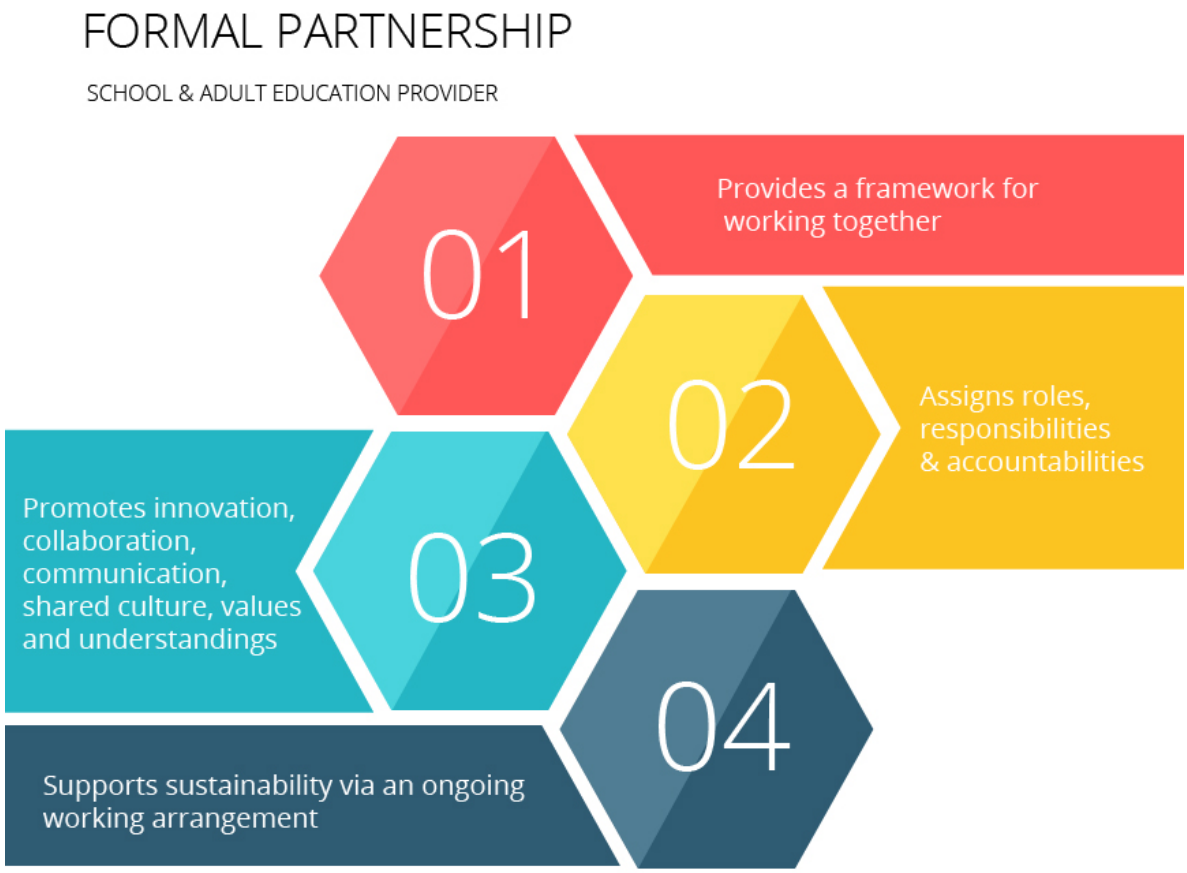

Figure 1: The features of a formal partnership between stakeholders

Drawing on business connections

A formal partnership arrangement should draw on the business connections of the stakeholders to build job skills, offer work experience and mentoring, and ultimately provide job opportunities.

Family and intergenerational learning

Through a formal partnership arrangement, there is also the potential to provide intergenerational or family learning opportunities, where parents can learn together with their children.

A formal partnership arrangement could facilitate greater involvement by the parents in their children's learning, which is known to contribute to more successful educational outcomes and to building strong family bonds.

Supporting family relationships

A range of family or positive parenting programs could also be offered to provide information and to strengthen and support family relationships in their initial years in Australia.

This research has found that successful adult education programs for socially isolated refugee/asylum seekers parents of low educational attainment must balance needs in three areas:

- **Context** – the underpinning philosophy of the learning design
- **Design** – the elements of an effective learning program
- **Logistics** – the organisational aspects that underpin an effective learning program for this cohort

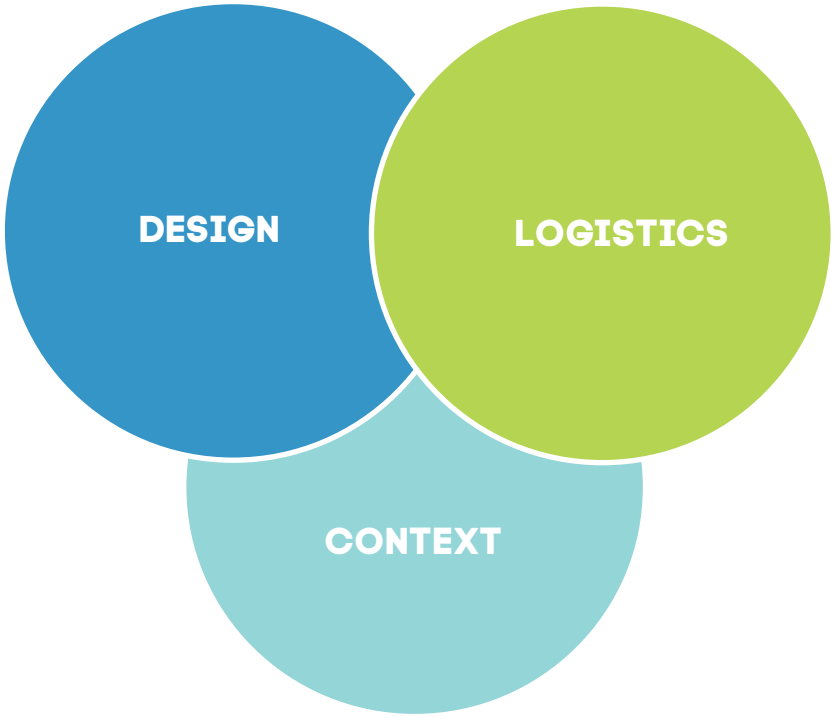

Figure 2: Adult education programs must balance needs in three areas.

Table 1: Features of adult education programs for refugee parents

Context	▪ Values their existing skills, knowledge, experience and education ▪ Affirms their existing identities and practices ▪ Takes an intercultural approach allowing them to bring their own voice to their learning ▪ Avoids focussing on their perceived needs and encourages their contribution
Design	▪ Includes English language learning or mentoring opportunities ▪ Includes opportunities for intergenerational or family learning ▪ Is non-threatening and non-formal ▪ Facilitates 'positive interdependence' in collaborative settings e.g. teamwork in small groups – where the success of one person is dependent on the success of the group ▪ Supports people to understand the Australian employment landscape and highlights work opportunities ▪ Offers learning that is embedded in or operates alongside a creative or recreational focus ▪ Offers opportunities to plan and coordinate their own learning ▪ Facilitates collaborative discussion and dialogue ▪ Supports people to set short- and long-term goals ▪ Builds social connections
Logistics	▪ Is free or low cost ▪ Includes translation services ▪ Offers counselling services and referrals to other supporting services ▪ Includes childcare services ▪ Offers flexible timetables that fit in with childcare responsibilities or other needs such as attending appointments, etc. ▪ Offers places to retreat to if things become overwhelming

Over 73% of participants in this research, identified that they had no or few friends or only had friends within their own cultural communities.

Transformative adult education programs must include ways to build authentic social interconnections.

They must build social capital in families, across neighbourhoods, within communities, in workplaces and in institutions that can be maintained as people transition beyond the program and become more independent.

Adult educators must value the life experience of participants; have strong cultural awareness and some expertise in trauma informed practice.

INTRODUCTION

About WELS

Western English Language School (WELS) is a Victorian Government school that operates across six sites in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, covering three municipalities Maribyrnong, Wyndham and Brimbank:

- Wyndham (Years 7–10)
- Manor Lakes (Foundation – Year 6)
- Laverton (Foundation – Year 6)
- Braybrook (Foundation – Year 10)
- St Albans (Foundation – Year 6)
- Footscray (Foundation – Year 6)

WELS offers English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for primary and secondary school aged students. Programs offered by WELS include full-time intensive programs, outpost programs and visiting outpost programs of varying lengths. Education programs offered at WELS are for newly arrived students, and English is embedded across all curriculum areas including maths, science, music, art, technology and humanities.

WELS education programs are aligned to the Victoria Curriculum. The School's English language program prepares students for 'mainstream schools and life in the Australian community' (WELS 2019). It develops English language skills as well as broader cultural understandings that enable students to navigate mainstream Australia's formal education system and society more broadly.

About YCC

Yarraville Community Centre (YCC) and the Western English Language School (WELS) have worked together informally to engage the parents of enrolled WELS students in adult education and training opportunities.

YCC is a not for profit, community-based organisation located in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. YCC is a registered training organisation and an Adult, Community and Further Education funded Learn Local provider.

YCC is also an approved provider of the Commonwealth Government's:

- Adult Migrant English Program
- Skills for Education and Employment program.

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) offers 510 hours of foundational English language tuition to eligible humanitarian entrants 'to enable them to participate socially and economically in Australian society' (DET, n.d.). There are eligibility criteria and participants must register with a nominated AMEP service provider within 6 months, commence the program within 12 months and complete it within 5 years.

AMEP tuition is offered through full- or part-time study. Learning streams include Pre-employment and Social English.

The Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program offers up to 650 hours of training that is designed to build language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills of eligible job seekers registered with the Department of Human Services, including some AMEP clients. The SEE program also has a flexible design but is largely delivered face to face. It offers initial, basic and advanced accredited English language training, and basic and advanced literacy and numeracy training.

AMEP and SEE services in the Western

suburbs of Melbourne are currently provided by Learning for Employment. Learning for Employment is a consortium of community-based, not for profit registered training organisations, of which Yarraville Community Centre is one along with:

- Djerriwarrh Community and Education Services
- commUnity Plus Services
- Laverton Community Integrated Service
- Wyndham Community and Education Centre
- Williamstown Community Education Centre
- WCIG

YCC delivers adult education programs and services to the local community, including:

- language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills programs
- engagement programs for adolescents, early school leavers and long-term unemployed and people with disability
- pathway programs to further education or work
- a wide variety of short courses and personal enrichment programs.

They also offer volunteering opportunities that build employability skills and provide occasional childcare services, which enable their community members to participate in their learning programs.

An evaluation of programs previously offered by YCC for WELS showed that while some aspects worked really well, engagement wasn't as strong as they had hoped.

YCC and WELS want to explore new and innovative place-based approaches that will engage this cohort in education programs and build strong social cohesion in their communities.

This study provides a framework for these goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

According to the Dept of Home Affairs, the main groups resettled in Australia in 2017–18 were:

- Syrians – from Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey
- Iraqis – from Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria
- Myanmarese – from the Thai–Myanmar border, Malaysia and India
- Afghans – from Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia
- Bhutanese – from Nepal
- Refugees – from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia – located across a number of countries

Victoria settles over 30% of the total national refugee intake (DHHS, 2016) and just under 8% have had no previous education and are also more likely to be unemployed (DEECD, 2011).

Research clearly shows that education 'enhances settlement outcomes' (SCOA, 2018, p. 4). According to the World Bank, 'education delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income and is the most important factor to ensure equality of opportunities. For individuals, it promotes employment, earnings, health, and poverty reduction ... For societies, it drives long-term economic growth, spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion'.

By default, refugee and asylum seekers that are socially isolated and therefore denied access to education and training opportunities may be 'condemned to a lifetime of poverty and disadvantage' (Hirsch, 2016, p. 22).

Purpose

Much of the available literature focusses on migrant populations rather than the specific experience of refugee or asylum seekers, and the literature on asylum seekers and refugees tends to be concerned with the needs of school aged children. However, it is clear that the educational needs of refugees and asylum seekers are diverse.

Some have little formal education; others arrive with 'at least high school level education'. Some have formal qualifications such as technical or university qualifications, others do not. Some have limited English language skills, other have English language proficiency. Some have low literacy in their first language, others have high levels of literacy (DSS, 2011).

'Refugee populations are not homogenous' (Glen, Onsando, & Kearney 2015, p. 12).

The factors that impact their level of engagement in educational opportunities will vary according to their individual contexts; which include differing socio-economic backgrounds, visa arrangements, family support structures, living conditions and their access to social support structures (2015).

These complexities exist within individuals and also across cultural groupings.

Recent research in the US found that despite the stereotype, refugees typically have higher levels of education but lower English proficiency than other US immigrants (Perry, & Mallozzi, 2017, p. 492). However, a longitudinal study by

the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which traces the settlement journey of humanitarian entrants in Australia, found that 'around 15% of adult respondents reported having never attended school, and a further 34% had fewer than 10 years of schooling' (Jenkinson, Silbert, De Maio, & Edwards, 2016, p. 3). Notably around two-thirds expressed a desire to get a technical qualification, with another 30% wanting a university degree. When asked to rate their English language proficiency prior to arrival, three-quarters indicated that they had little to no proficiency in English (Jenkinson, Silbert, De Maio, & Edwards, 2016).

In Australia, your employment prospects are primarily based on your education level, technical skills and experience, and your capacity to communicate in English. (SCOA, 2018; Glen et al, 2015).

Access to English language education programs for refugees and asylum seekers provides support 'in all aspects of their new life in Australia' (SCOA, 2018, p. 6). Pathway education, more broadly, offers support to refugees or asylum seekers to get 'additional qualifications, vocational employment or a proficiency in English language' (p. 4) by providing the necessary foundation skills to build a bridge to further learning and/or work.

Low confidence, poor self-concept and a sense of inadequacy all have a role to play in whether or not someone chooses to pursue new educational opportunities. However, research consistently shows that 'English language acquisition provides refugees with a greater degree of confidence' in terms of pursuing educational opportunities and success in resettling in Australia (Victoria University, 2008, p. 13).

At this stage, Commonwealth policy enables refugees on temporary and permanent visas access to the full 510 hours of free English language tuition through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Further support is available with 650 hours of language, literacy and numeracy tuition through the Skills for Education and Employment program (SEE) (Dept of Education and Training). The sufficiency of these hours for a new arrival to attain proficiency in English language is widely debated.

Asylum seekers are not entitled to access English language tuition through the SEE or AMEP programs, which significantly impacts their ability to look for work or access education opportunities. However, in Victoria, the State Government offers subsidised pre-accredited programs through a network of community education providers (called Learn Local providers), such as Yarraville Community Centre.

Pre-accredited programs are short courses that focus on creating pathways to further education, training or employment. Pre-accredited courses include foundational literacy, numeracy and English language programs for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

A recent amendment to enrolment eligibility in government subsidised pre-accredited training indicates that asylum seekers with particular visas and who are referred by Jobs Victoria Network providers are now eligible to participate in pre-accredited training.

Building a sense of belonging

Being able to speak English, is a 'key element in integration' and in building 'a sense of belonging' in refugee populations (Smith, 2016, p. 2). Given the complex barriers that many adult refugee and asylum seekers experience, 'holistic approaches which address well-being, as well as access to services, integration and functional language skills' are urgently needed (p. 2).

Community organisations have been identified as 'opening spaces' that challenge the 'marginalisation, segregation and racism' that refugees or asylum seekers may experience at work or in their daily lives (Morrice, Shan, & Sprung, 2018, p. 130).

A small study on female African refugees with low literacy showed that formal classroom models that included worksheets, whiteboards and written texts, in effect, excluded 'pre-literate' learners because their 'tradition of learning' was based on 'interdependence' (Trevino & Davis, 2001 cited in Ben-Moshe, Bertone, & Grossman, 2008, p. 15). Positive interdependence takes place in collaborative settings – 'where the success of one person is dependent on the success of the group (Laal, 2012, p. 1433). An individual is only able to meet their goals when the group meets its goals. Trevino and Davis' research found that non-threatening, informal programs in community settings were the most appropriate for female African refugees with low literacy because they encouraged cross-cultural awareness; built confidence, facilitated collaboration and established rapport between educators and learners.

Figure 3: Features of positive interdependence

Research from Canada on learning pathways for adult refugees in inner city Winnipeg found that while refugees valued education and were motivated to succeed, they faced a number of barriers that impeded their progress, including social isolation, a lack of recognition of their prior education and experience, financial difficulties, a lack of affordable and safe housing, racism, changing family dynamics, and no access to appropriate social and community networks that could hook them into services that could support them (Magro, & Ghorayski, 2011).

Research conducted in Australia by Victoria University (2008) identified similar barriers, and also highlighted issues for refugees in terms of access to and participation in vocational training and higher education, including:

- a lack of access to and affordability of public transport
- poor English language skills
- psychological trauma, concentration problems, and mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, flashbacks and guilt
- a lack of access to childcare
- an inability to access publicly funded services that are available to Australian citizens
- gender barriers
- uneven division of labour in the household
- a lack of familiarity with Australian education, training and employment system.

According to the Victoria University research, initiatives that could be employed to alleviate these barriers included:

- recognising and celebrating diversity
- creating links between support services, community members and educational institutions
- waiving fee and resource costs
- providing transport support
- providing role models and mentors
- assisting with childcare
- offering English language programs beyond government subsidised training
- providing cultural awareness training for both participants and educators
- vocational mapping to support learners in their career path planning.

(Ben-Moshe, Bertone, & Grossman, 2008)

Other factors

Magro and Ghoraysky's research in Canada found that while there are contributing factors around the difficulties of recognising prior skills, education and experience; for example, lost documentation, many newcomers were 'shattered' to find that their skills and education were 'not valued' (2011, p. 8). And that this sometimes resulted in a relinquishment of their previous identities and practices, and a 'repositioning' of themselves in another context (Morrice, et al, 2018, p. 131). They develop a public face that is more aligned with the values of their new home – a pragmatic gesture that can have damaging effects in the longer term.

This research also found that holistic and transformative adult education supports

new arrivals to build their language and literacy and become 'engaged citizens'.

Transformative teaching and learning is holistic and draws upon the emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Learning is not compartmentalized, and educational programs are rooted in the aspirations and needs of adult learners.

Transformational learning produces more far-reaching changes in the learners than does learning in general, and that these changes have a significant impact on the learner's subsequent experiences (Magro & Ghorayski, 2011).

Other findings highlighted the importance of:

- ensuring cultural diversity in both the teaching staff and in the learning program
- tapping into the skills, knowledge and experience of the learners
- developing learning programs for parents to participate in at schools
- ensuring teachers and service providers are acutely aware of the issues that refugees may face that impede their learning and wellbeing
- offering easy access to information on 'wraparound' services that can support refugees
- supporting individuals to reach their own goals by assessing their needs and interests in different areas
- striking a balance between 'structure and creativity' in the learning program
- offering places to retreat to if things become overwhelming
- supporting the learners to set short- and long-term goals
- providing childcare support
- supporting teachers with professional development on trauma informed practice and transformative learning strategies
- offering opportunities for broader community participation that supports 'intercultural understanding and cooperation'.

(Magro, & Ghorayski, 2011)

Some literature critiques education programs that reinforce the deficit view of newcomers' prior skills, knowledge and education — or programs that focus on 'the perceived needs of migrants' and ignore the contribution to learning in the community that can be made by the migrants themselves (Morrice et al, 2018).

One example cited in Australia is the Welcome Dinner Project (WDP) (Flowers, & Swan, 2017). WDP enables new learnings, new practices and improved social relations for all participants by connecting newly arrived and established Australians over dinner in their homes. The dinners facilitate learning across all cultural groups through the sharing of stories, especially with established Australians. The Welcome Dinner Project aims to promote community connectedness and to alleviate social isolation.

Complex family relationships are another compounding factor, where children and parents feel alienated from each other – where parents don't understand the school system and, as a result, they feel like they are living in different worlds

(Magro, & Ghorayski, 2011, p. 11). This lack of connectedness within the family can result in disharmony, stress and 'feelings of vulnerability', all of which impacts their confidence and ability to even consider participating in education and learning (2011, p. 11).

In some instances, largely due to a lack of proficiency in English language, parents become 'dependent on their children for everyday activities' such as banking, going to the doctor or paying the bills, which can erode their 'parental authority' and leave them 'ill-equipped to provide the emotional support and positive models that their children need to succeed socially and academically'. (Kanu, 2008 p. 933).

Kanu recommended coordinated refugee support services; extended English language and community support programs, and professional development for educators (p. 936).

Research conducted by Deakin University in 2011 found that Australian cultural values and practices are often inconsistent with parenting practices in some refugees' country of origin. And that there was an unrealistic expectation that refugee parents will quickly dismiss previous cultural norms and adopt new practices.

This research recommended a parenting program that was sensitive to people's culture but also included skill development and education sessions that supported parents to understand new cultural norms; allowed children more independence in a way that did not reject their traditional and cultural identity and incorporated education on Australian family law and its impact on parenting (Renzaho, Green, Mellor, Swinburn, 2011).

The following section provides new data gathered through interviews with newly arrived refugee / asylum seeker parents, educators and key stakeholders.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

For this scoping study, we interviewed 30 asylum seeker / refugee parents; 8 educators and 8 stakeholders. Stakeholders were representatives from organisations with significant experience in settlement services for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees.

Asylum seeker / refugee parents

The asylum seeker and refugee parents interviewed were supported by WELS interpreters. All parents interviewed lived in the following Western suburbs of Melbourne:

- Altona
- Ascot Vale
- Braybrook
- Flemington
- Footscray
- Hoppers Crossing
- St Albans
- Sunshine
- Sydenham
- Wyndham Vale.

Of the 30 asylum seekers / refugees interviewed, over 95% were female. Most respondents were aged between 31–40 years of age (see Table 2); 40% were born in Burma and over 85% arrived in Australia between 2018–2019 (see Figure 4 & 5).

Table 2: Age span of respondents

Age span	No.
20–30 years	4
31–40 years	17
41–50 years	8
51–60 years	0
61–70 years	1

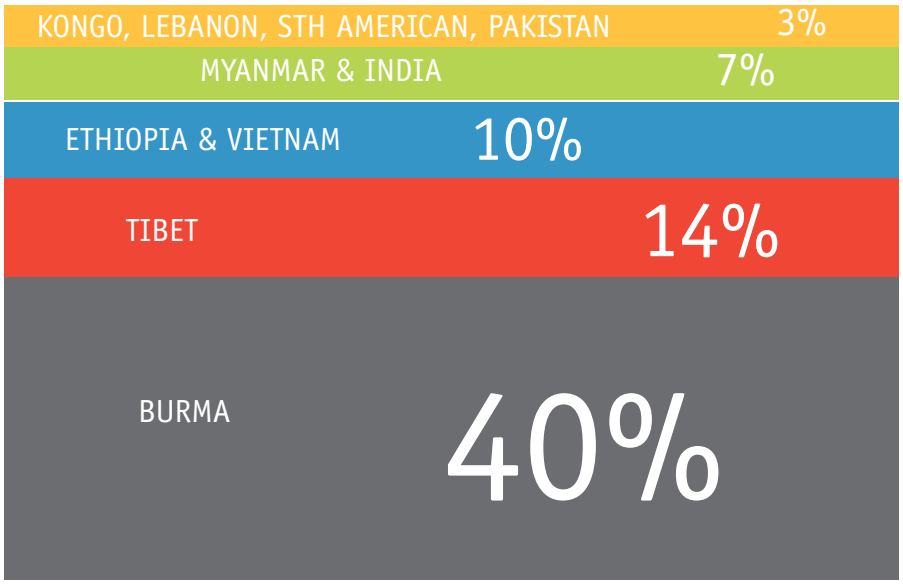

Figure 4: Respondents nominated country of birth

The majority of parents interviewed were permanent humanitarian entrants (70%) and the balance had other visa arrangements including Immicards, which are issued by the Australian Government when people don't have and can't obtain a recognised passport. An Immicard gives holders evidence of their 'Commencement of Identity' (COI) in Australia. COIs are required by government agencies such as Medicare and Centrelink before people can be registered for government services.

The major languages spoken were Karen, Tibetan and Vietnamese (see Figure 6).

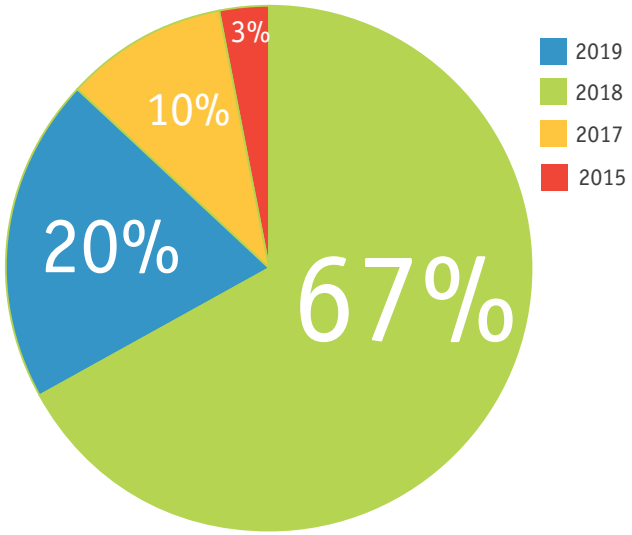

Figure 5: Year of arrival in Australia

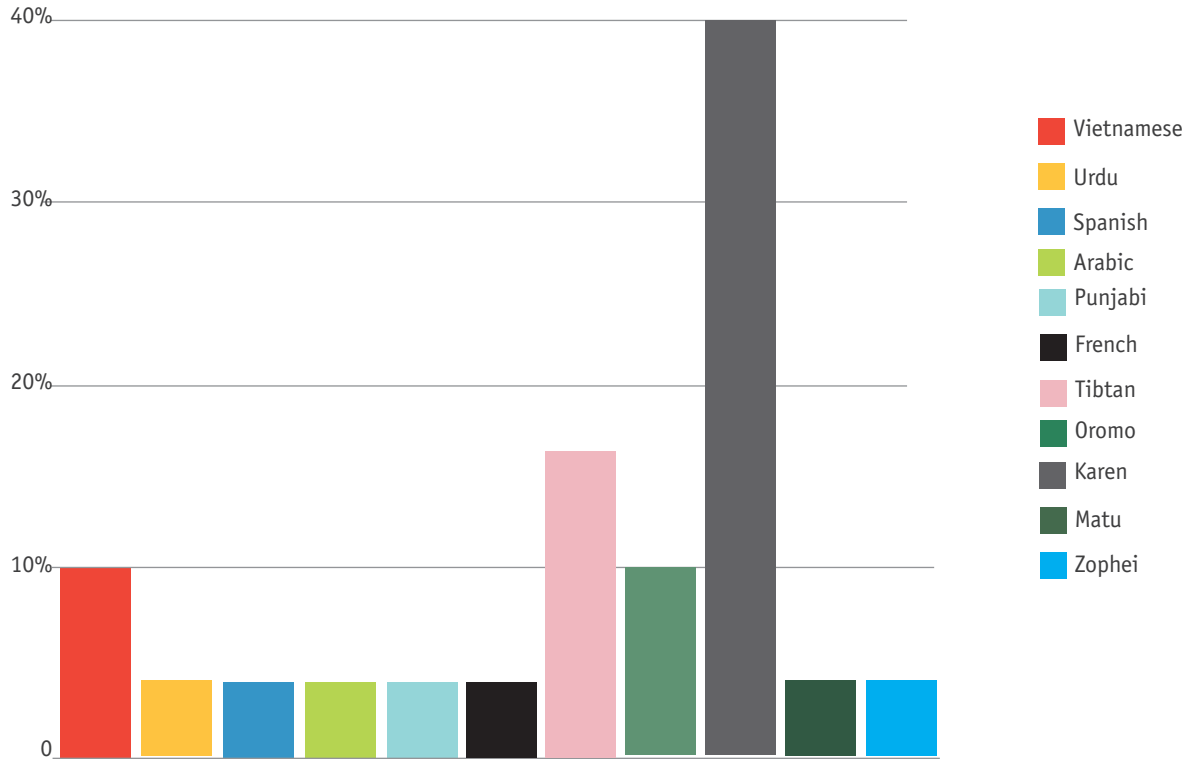

Figure 6: First language of respondents

Twenty one of the 30 respondents had secure long-term housing arrangements in place; eight had short-term housing arrangements and one of the respondents did not have housing and was temporarily living with a friend.

None of the respondents were employed full time; and just 7% had secured casual employment.

The majority were unemployment (33%) or not seeking work (30%) due to family responsibilities (over 90% of respondents were the primary carers in the family).

A small number were involved in volunteering activities.

Thirty per cent of respondents had three children and 27% had 4+; two respondents had no children and one was pregnant at

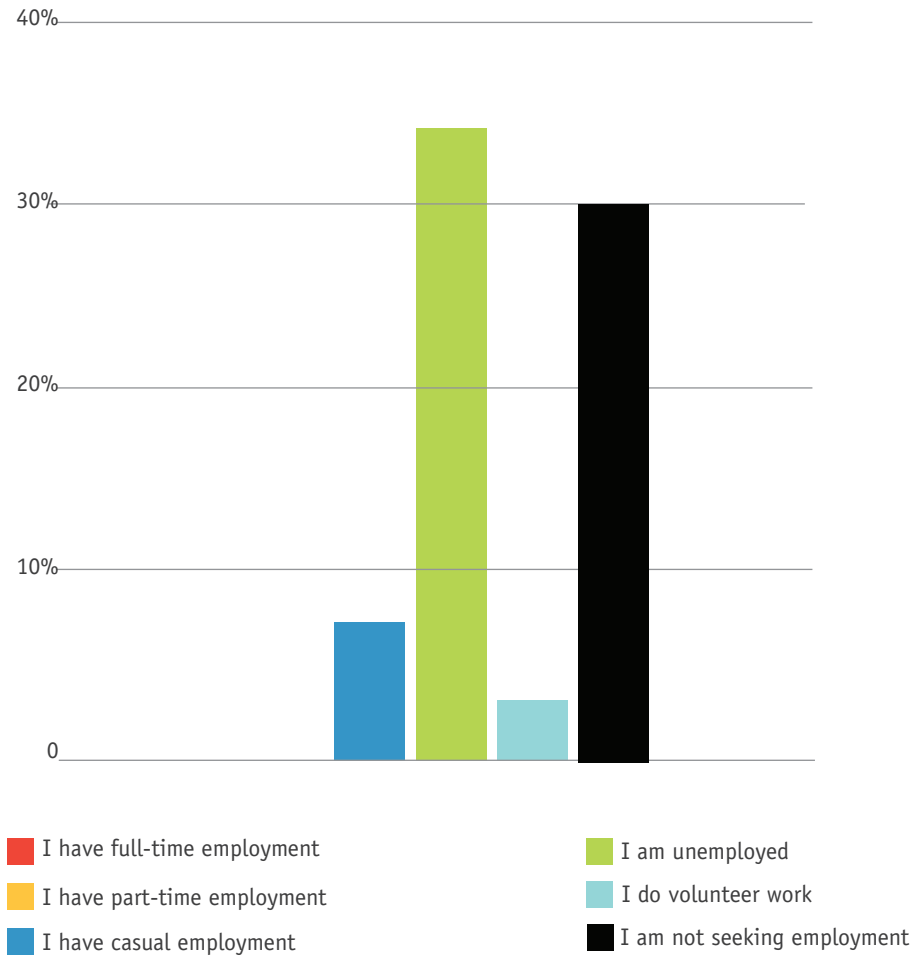

Figure 7: Employment status of respondents

the time of the interview. One respondent was caring for her adult son who had a disability.

Respondents were asked about the education they have received in their own country. For the purpose of this study, only full completions were recorded. For example, 33% of respondents had not completed any schooling – however two respondents had completed Year 1 and 2 of primary school but were marked as 'No schooling' as they hadn't completed their primary education.

Also, three respondents had completed up to Year 9 of secondary school in their own country but had not completed their secondary education so were marked as primary education only (see Figure 9).

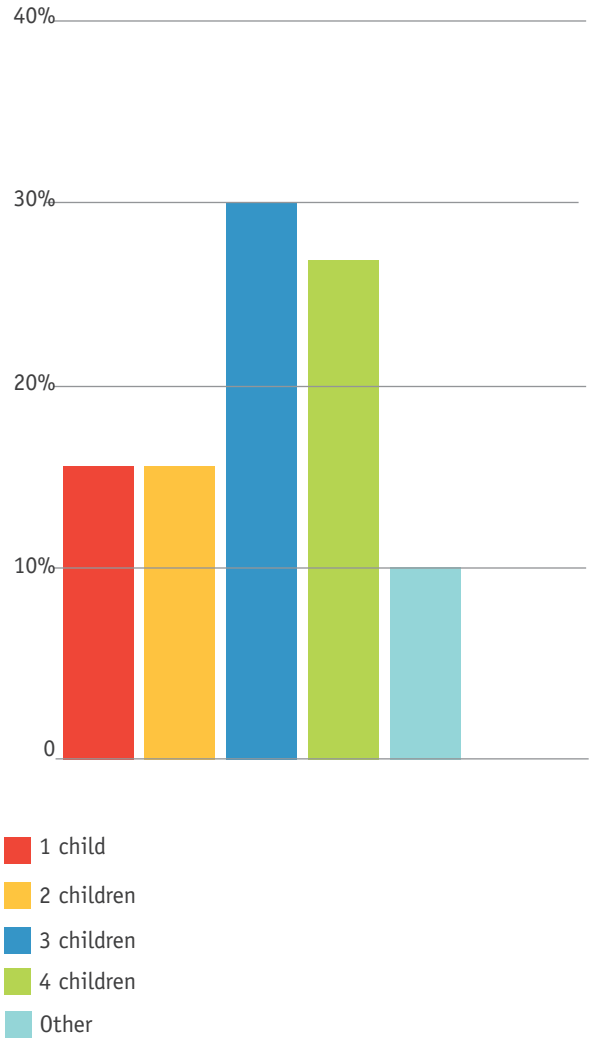

Figure 8: No. of respondents' children

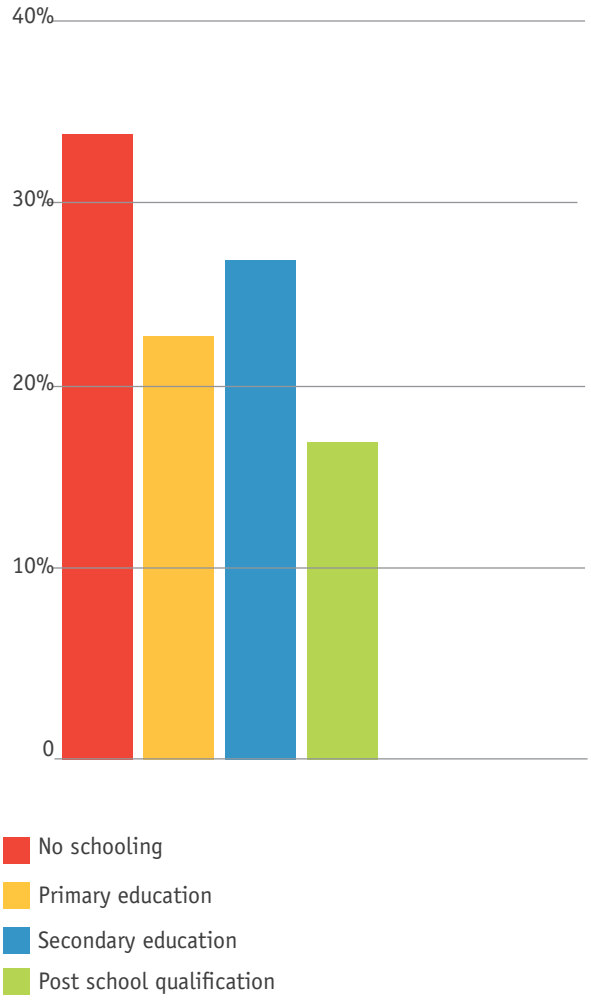

Figure 9: Education completion before arriving in Australia

Over 53% had participated in education programs after arriving in Australia – 75% of which were English language classes.

Respondents were asked to self-assess their current English proficiency as:

- No English language skills
- Basic (can use simple words and phrases, has limited reading skills, struggles in conversation)
- Conversational (can hold a conversation but is not fluent)
- Proficient (is comfortable with English)
- Fluent (can read, write, converse and speak English as a native speaker

Thirty-seven per cent assessed themselves as having no English language skills and 33% rated themselves as having basic English language skills.

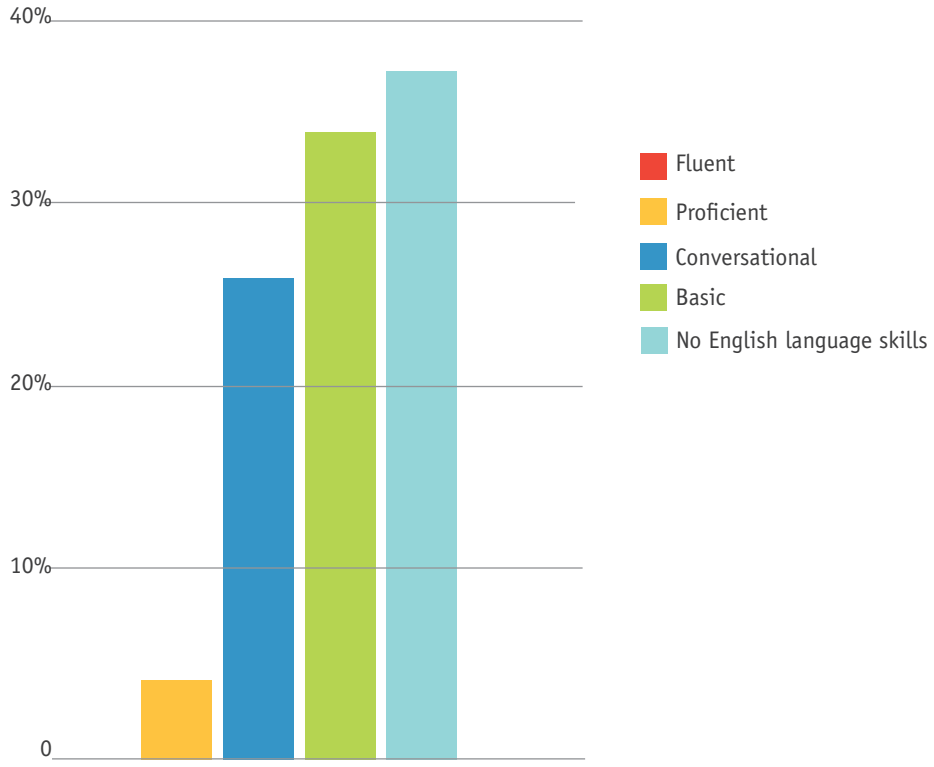

Figure 10: Respondents' English language proficiency

A scaled question was used to ascertain respondents' attitudes to engaging in education programs. Similar questions were posed in a positive and negative way in order to validate responses (see Table 3).

Over 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that building their education was important for their future in Australia. But only 38% felt they currently had the skills they needed to participate in education and training, less than half of the respondents felt they knew where to find education and training opportunities and 50% lacked the confidence to pursue education and training.

[I am] not in doing classes/education … I am scared to go places alone.

Nearly 70% of respondents felt that their family responsibilities were a barrier to them participating in education and training – with just under 50% indicating that childcare was an issue for them. The difference between these two figures may indicate a sense that caring for the family is ultimately their primary responsibility – ahead of their own education needs. Regardless, over 85% felt supported by their families to participate in education.

If I was single, I would have no problems.

Childcare is a big problem whether you are shopping or doing education – you need someone to take care of your child. Now I only have myself or my husband. This is a block for me.

My biggest concern is where to keep my children. I need a place for them.

I have a baby. I really wish to have a childcare centre where I can put my kids. Only then I can go to school to improve my education. My year 3 kid was not able to get into childcare centre so that's why I can't go to school.

I will have to wait until my kids grow up before I can access English.

Even if I could put my kids somewhere – after coming back from school I would need help to study and this is hard. I need inside and outside help.

Over 55% of respondents indicated that they couldn't afford further education, and that for them to participate in education it must be free, subsidised or very low cost.

I don't have enough money to pay for that and if the govt doesn't pay for it. It's a problem.

If the education is free there is nothing to prevent it. Paying for it makes it very difficult.

Fee is a big problem so keeping that down would work.

Over 75% of respondents indicated their English language skills were a major barrier to participating in education.

I want to be able to read by myself.

Can't start at advanced – need to start at the beginning.

Need more English hours to learn.

I find it hard to learn. I don't understand the alphabet. When I go to school, the teacher asks me to read the sentence. But how can I? Need more help to understand alphabet. Manager would want me to speak English before I can get a job.

Just difficulties with language and being able to communicate with others. I go to my community for help.

Even my name how to write P. Upside down, turn left, turn right.

Very hard.

I would like to start at the basics – alphabet and start learning step by step.

Very difficult not understanding so this is a problem for me.

For some respondents, there were issues with the flexibility of the English language classes that they attended; particularly when class times conflicted with important appointments.

I would like to learn English. We have appointments at Centrelink but we can't get to them because our English teachers say we can't go. When we miss out on appointment, we lose our money. We don't want to miss out on school and teacher says, 'No you cannot go'. So we miss our appointment and we have trouble with our rent. We have no interpreter there. How can I say No, Yes, No.

A small minority felt age was a barrier.

I am too old.

My age is big gap for me to cope or go into education and training

Many respondents made strong links between learning English and work. They also indicated that work was very important to them in terms of improving their social circumstances. They also indicated that they wanted their learning to link them in with work opportunities.

I would like to go to school until I can speak English then I will look for a job.

I want my learning to better connect me with job. We need money.

When I finish cleaning course, I need a job. A job is really important.

Finish course, then we get a job or not, is nervous. At that time, I need to have a job.

I move from one place to another. It is very difficult. I need a job.

Some respondents wanted more translators to support them to engage in learning. Others wanted a counsellor that could guide them with educational and confidential emotional issues.

Very good to have a counsellor who can guide me in terms of emotional issues as well as education. Like a case manager who we can ask for any guidance on emotional things.

We have a lot of thoughts which we would like help to sort out and how to handle these things. Someone we can talk to confidentially.

Table 3: Respondents' attitudes to engaging in education and training

	Agreed / strongly agreed	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagreed / strongly disagreed
I can't afford further education	56%	3%	41%
It is important for my future to build my level of education	93%	7%	
My family encourages me to participate in education and training opportunities	86%	10%	4%
I am not confident that I can be successful in education and training	49%	10%	41%
I already have education and training plans in place	76%		24%
I have the skills I need to participate in education and training	38%	7%	55%
I know where to find education and training opportunities	45%		55%
My family responsibilities prevent me from participating in education and training opportunities	69%		31%
I don't have the time to participate in education and training opportunities	52%	7%	41%
My work prevents me from participating in education and training opportunities			100%
I have the support I need to participate in education and training opportunities	62%	7%	31%
My English language skills prevent me from pursuing education and training opportunities	76%		24%
I don't know where to find education and training opportunities	66%		34%
I need a job rather than education and training opportunities	24%	7%	69%
A lack of childcare prevents me from participating in education and training	48%	7%	45%
My health prevents me from participating in education and training	34%		66%
I can confidently help my child/ren with their homework	27%	28%	45%

Seventy-four per cent of respondents indicated that they had no friends or that their friends were mainly within their own communities. One person indicated that they had just one 'Australian' friend through the church. Not one respondent felt at home and connected in Australia (see Figure 11).

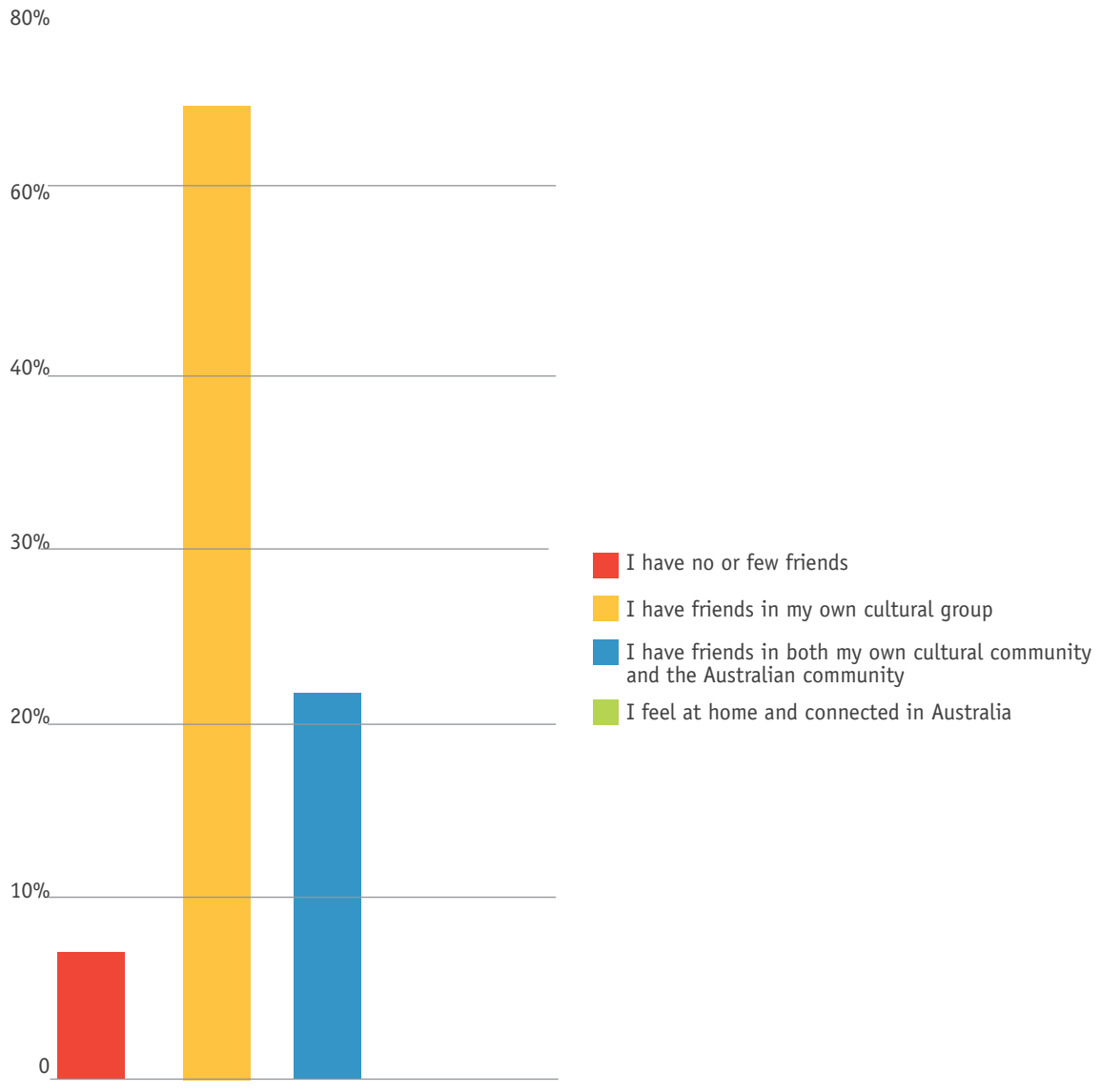

Figure 11: Education completion before arriving in Australia

Adult educators

Eight adult educators were interviewed as part of this scoping study. The adult educators interviewed were selected due to their knowledge, skills and experience in working with asylum seeker and refugee cohorts.

The educators were asked what in their experience were the barriers for socially isolated asylum seekers / refugee parents in participating in education and training (Figure 12).

Some of the areas highlighted by the educators were not consistent with the data provided by the parents for this scoping study. The adult educators identified as major barriers mental and/ or physical health issues, a lack of family support, housing issues, and cultural or religious barriers.

The educators also indicated that work commitments often prevented people from participating in education opportunities, however, none of parent respondents for this scoping study were currently working.

The differences identified between the parents' and the educators' data may be due in part to the parents not feeling as comfortable revealing personal information about themselves to the researchers. The adult educators may have established closer and stronger relationships with their asylum seeker / refugee cohorts where they were more comfortable revealing personal information about themselves.

Findings that were consistent with the data gathered from our respondents included the following barriers to participating in education programs:

- poor English language skills
- a lack of confidence
- lack of access to information
- poor financial situation.

Both datasets supported that this cohort had positive attitudes towards learning and education and felt it was important for their future.

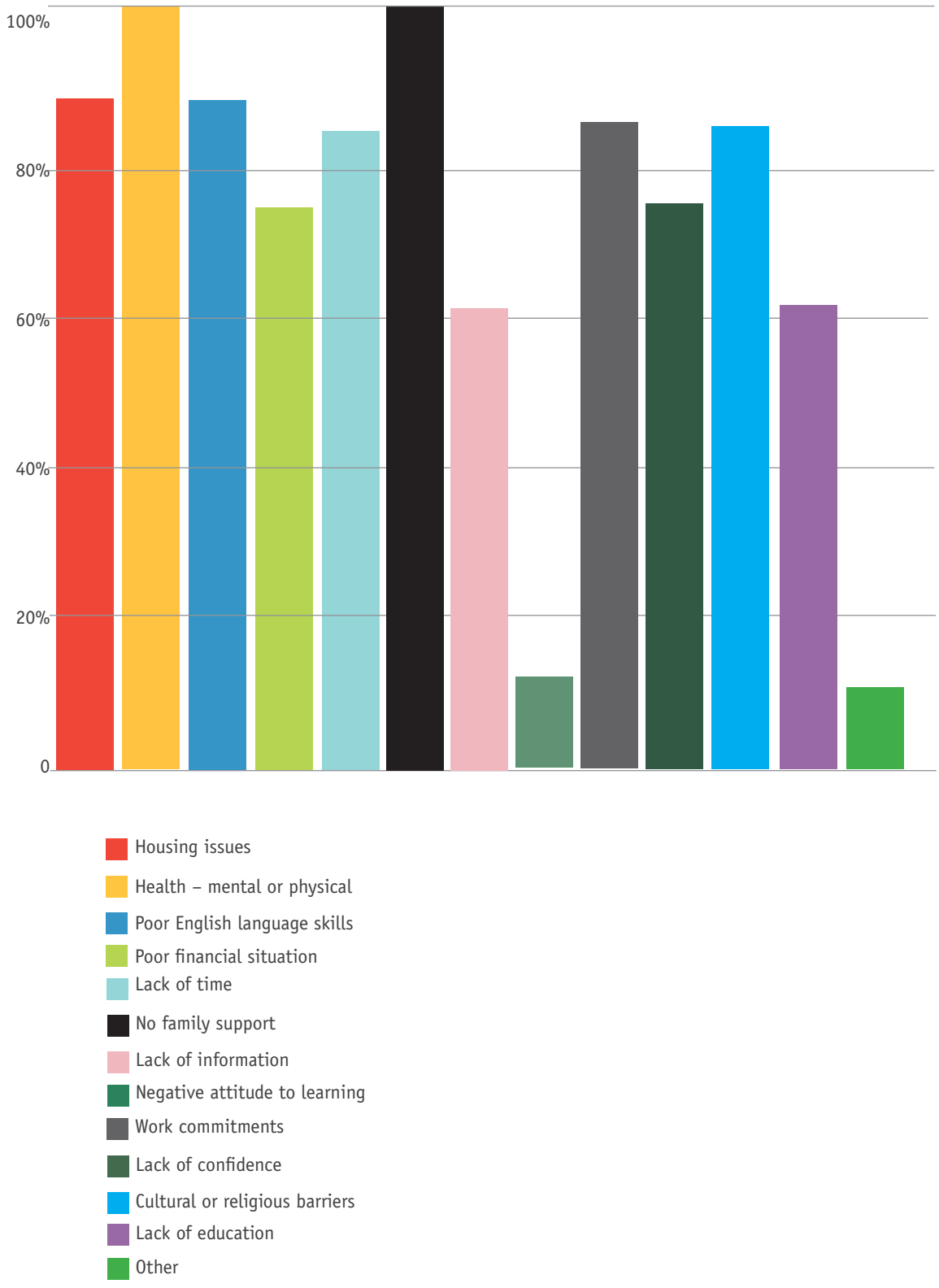

Figure 12: Barriers for asylum seekers / refugees to participating in education programs identified by educators

The educators were asked to describe aspects of an education program that they believed would engage the target cohort. Some focussed on practical aspects such as childcare:

Must have childcare or [be run in] hours that allow either the mother or the father to collect their children from school.

When childcare is made available this needs to be reinforced over and over so that the parent understands it is available to them.

Running classes from 9 to 3 is problematic because this doesn't give parents any time to collect their children from school.

However, it's more complex than simply providing childcare while you run an education program, with one educator indicating that 'some mothers just don't want their children in childcare' or that there are issues for some cultures with being in 'mixed gender learning environments'.

One educator indicated that a flexible approach is important.

You go into a classroom where they are required to attend 15–20 hours each week and they say I can't do this.

Smaller hours each week would better cater for the clients.

A number of educators indicated the importance of a safe and familiar environment.

Many female parents who are asylum seekers or refugees are very shy and hesitate about engaging in learning.

A familiar environment is very important for newly arrived people.

They need time to feel comfortable in new surroundings … once they are comfortable, they can extend into learning from there.

It would work well if the learning took place in an environment where they feel very comfortable.

The educators indicated that learning spaces must be welcoming, where a level of comfort is established before people undertake new learning.

To reach those clients you need a soft approach. Their confidence is unbelievably low. They are also impacted by other students doing better than them.

There should be communal areas where people can be social outside of class. It should invite a sense of community.

The classroom space should be inviting. People should feel connected. Changing the physical layout of the space so students can see things differently. People need to know that they are valued.

Interesting and fun learning programs are essential but it's important to ease participants in before setting tasks that are outside their comfort zone.

If the student arrives and the next thing they are being dragged out on an excursion – it makes them uncomfortable. You need to make them feel comfortable first before they go on. Also make it fun, interesting and enjoyable.

A scaffolded approach where students extend from 'the known to the unknown' is important in learning programs for newly arrived adults. Programs that meet an external goal were also identified as effective

It's little things like I've got one student whose first language is Portuguese, so I

ask her to tell me in Portuguese and other students may know what she means or we get out Google Translate. We allow and encourage this. If you can't write it in English – write it in your first language first, This helps students have a voice.

There were common threads around giving the participants a voice, and a level of autonomy in their learning.

They can feel really socially isolated and feeling voiceless can be scary. I do a lot of singing. We wrote a song for refugee Week about their reasons for coming to Australia.

Programs [need to] relate specifically to the interests and needs of the cohort. It has got to be related to real life and it needs to build from what they know and their strengths. They need to see the relevance of its in terms of their actual goals.

Other educators cautioned against creating learning environments that replicated formal institutionalised learning.

Many of the people have negative schooling experiences. I think the programs should be as unlike school as possible so practical activities, art, music, gardening, travelling to different places. Have people come in to speak with them or have a meal with them to encourage interaction. Then we talk, listen, read and write about those experiences.

One educator expressed the importance of attending to the 'whole' needs of the learner – including their social, emotional and phsyical needs.

Programs need to look at the whole picture – and the whole person. They can't just operate in isolation of the person's other needs.

We are developing a program to lead them into a Cert I Kitchen Hand. The program includes making date scones and Mulligatawny soup – one class teaching another. Embedding literacy and numeracy.

We must respect what they know. For example, some are farmers – so horticulture programs really bring them to life. They need to be aware of the value that I place on ethnicity. One size does not fit all.

Things must be relevant [and] important to them. I look at the clientele and what their needs are. For example, if you had a group of refugee women who have perhaps not ventured out, you need to teach them Myki skills. You are trying to teach them independence.

The essential tools would be actually looking at the client and understanding what their needs are. It might be about confidence. Get them outside. For example, 'I'd like you to go into your community or the library and get something'. We hook them into community resources that they can access. Get them out and get them confident. If we can, we match them with a volunteer. What you are slowly trying to do is give them the confidence to get out and into the nearest community centre. Show them where they can do English. Take them to a mothers' group or something like that. We had a list of all the local community houses.

They also indicated the importance of learning that is relevant to their lives and can potentially provide pathways to work.

English language courses should take into account the type of career the person wants.

Creative ways to learn

‘We must not deny the students the right to use their first language. We are now acknowledging the linguistic skills that they already have. Once people feel like they are allowed to – using drawings and gestures – things flow a lot better. I use a lot of drama and music. The drama didn’t come as easily for me. But I am finding my way. Using stories and process drama techniques. Like hot seating. Where the teacher takes on a character. There is no external audience. I am still finding the best way to do that.

With adults that have come from a very different cultural background this can be challenging. But you have to build confidence and trust first. The worst thing you can do with drama is just throw people into it. You need to ease them into it. Really building them up to it gently with non-threatening activities first. Really gentle warm-ups. Warming up the voice. Physical things without putting people on the spot.

There are lots of things you can do with images or tell the first part of a folk tales. Then you say OK let’s think of something from the story that we can create a picture of. They will do that picture independently. Working together without talking. Then they come back together to show what they have done. They all look at the picture to develop language skills.

Another thing you can do is thought tracking. The teacher, for example, taps someone on the shoulder and points to someone in the picture and asks them to verbalise what they are thinking. They start laughing. They are laughing together to create confidence and it helps people relax and brings their guard down. A fear of being laughed at is shown in research as creating problems so it is important to make sure the laughter is about having fun together. Helping people to relax and do things as a group rather than independently. Working on anything together really works – it doesn’t have to be drama, it can be cooking or creating something. It can very bonding. My students performing songs and sometimes their families come along.’

The adult educators were asked how they needed to be supported to work more effectively with refugees and asylum seekers.

My masters helped me better understand how it feels to be socially isolated. I've also done sessions on trauma, which helped me with things I needed to be aware of. It's about changing your mindset.

Always reminding yourself that you don't know what this person has been dealing with in their life or even in the past half hour.

Accessing peer support, advice and being trusted as a professional were highlighted as significant.

Being trusted by the clients and the management. Being given the freedom to pursue what it is that I think needs to be done. Not only my expertise as a teacher but also trusting that I am doing the job that I should be doing. That I am a trusted person.

Peer support and advice from other teachers helped the educators to feel more confident in their role. Some indicated that they found it useful to 'throw ideas around' and say 'hey look I'm having a problem here, have you experienced this?'. The educators also stressed the importance of knowing your own limitations.

Educators need to understand trauma and how it can impact how someone learns in an education setting. They also need to know how to take care of their own wellbeing.

The stories I've heard as a teacher. You've just got to learn to hear, understand but not take it home. Know your boundaries. Don't ask questions. As they get confident, they will share. And then if they come to you for advice with say domestic violence – you need to refer them.

We have a variety of agencies we can refer to. Teachers need to learn not to advise or solve but support them to get the right help.

It's really hard to do this stuff in isolation.

All of these people have suffered trauma and mental health issues. They might look as if they are coping but they are not.

It's about being sensitive. You don't ask about their lives and backgrounds. I mean you don't. When they get confident, they will tell you some stories.

The adult educators were asked to identify support services that are required to engage socially isolated refugees and asylum seekers.

Learning providers need to make local connections if they want to engage socially isolated refugees and asylum seekers. They should come to us rather than waiting for us to come to them.

We have interpreters so we can communicate with the parents, so they clearly understand what's on offer.

We have lots of things like counselling services. We have morning teas at a Centre every Thursday morning. Staff and students. Our education manager is fantastic. If they need help with a Centrelink issue for example, she helps them out. She helps them make phone calls and fill in forms.

Housing very important for new arrivals, Centrelink (financial services), health care services, doctors so you can hook them in. [You] need information that links them with other organisations.

Educators need to know how to manage a wide array of issues outside of their students' educational needs.

It's about knowing who to go to. The teacher is the first port of call. For example; Centrelink has stopped my money what can I do?'. Sometimes you can help the student and sometimes you have to refer them on. My manager has years of experience and I can go to her and she will know what to do. To try this or that.

You need to know about housing and accommodation agencies. [You need a] good relationship with JAs [Job Active providers]. If you have a good relationship with JAs, you can work together to understand the client's needs.

A register of community assets was identified as a useful tool for educators working with refugee and asylum seeker cohorts.

Our CEO knows where everything is in the area. But something that identifies community resources in a particular region would be really useful.

Community houses are the places to go to see if they have identified socially isolated people. You should also ask current students about others that they are aware of. Support agencies can help.

The relationships that you have with others can really help you become aware of socially isolated people. Different cultural groups can provide assistance as well.

Dealing with complexity

'Many people have issues within their own cultural communities. They need mental health support. I have set up programs where the mental health support, e.g.Foundation House, came to the new arrivals. We set up learning programs, where we take the learners to them.

The difference in terms of their visas and the uncertainties that flow through their communities. While our students have permanency – their friends and other family members may not – and this uncertainty flows through. We need teachers who can empathise.

One student has a family member in jail – so she gets very distracted as visits get closer. I didn't know why she was getting distracted for months. After we had developed a professional relationship, she told me about this. It is that relationship that allows people to talk about their issues.

Teachers must be non-judgemental. In my class, I have someone who is autistic, one who is visually impaired and another who is deaf. And that's just a normal class.'

The stakeholders

We interviewed the following stakeholders with experience in settlement and education service for asylum seekers and refugee cohorts:

- Asylum Seekers Resource Centre
- Brimbank City Council
- Australian Multicultural Community Services
- Network West
- Victoria University
- Settlement Services International
- Sydney Theatre Company
- Maribyrnong City Council

These stakeholders identified the following major barriers:

- No or low English language skills
- Lack of confidence
- Financial issues
- Lack of family support

They also identified other barriers.

Caring for children and parents is a major factor.

Access to transport – they can't get anywhere without a Myki card or eligibility for a concession Myki.

[They need] adequate and appropriate childcare

Lack of confidence is a major factor and disempowerment. Mental health and trauma impact on their confidence.

Sometimes they have to battle through attending several agencies not under the same roof.

The stakeholders supported the idea that refugees and asylum seekers generally have a positive attitude to learning but some indicated that visa eligibility and study rights were the first major issues to address.

The first major issue is actually visa eligibility and study rights. The second major issue is work rights and work placement. If they don't fit the eligibility criteria then they don't have much chance under funding arrangements.

There are three types of eligible visas under Victorian Government: Bridging Visa E, Safe Havens and Temporary Visas.

Our ACFE funded programs are limited to certain types of visas so they have to be eligible under ACFE criteria for any of those programs.

Celebrating and valuing abilities

‘I think first of all for people who don’t have their immigration status confirmed, they really need to have some certainty about their lives.

Especially working with people who have been in that limbo state for years now that uncertainty and stress is very debilitating because they can’t plan for their lives. The worst thing is being kept in uncertainty for so long. It really has an effect on engaging with education programs because they have so many more pressing things to do with.

I think that comes back to if you’ve only got temporary protection or any visa then how can you invest in more long-term things?

I find it frustrating when a lot of the government funded programs want to funnel people into menial labour regardless of their skillsets, aptitudes, talents.

I guess because our approach is much more about the whole person.

There is a lot of education that is focussed on preparing people for these menial jobs whether or not that will suit them or work for them, or whether that is what their best contribution to Australia would be.

I see it from more of a personal point of view. What a shame that their abilities aren’t being celebrated.’

Taking charge

‘It would be a great thing to identify some people who can take on leadership roles from each refugee community. A person who speaks their language – the person who is refugee or seeking asylum – so we build their capacity and so they can have a close relationship with a member of the community without any language barriers and just identify what they would like to learn and do.

It would be really helpful to identify the skills that people already have through a strength-based approach. And look at what they are passionate about and try to develop that capacity. Give them opportunity to offer those skills to the community. For example, if they are good at cooking, give them opportunity to cook. They will see you value their skills. They might then go “Now I will do my certificate”. It doesn’t need much English.

We should not be telling them what they should be studying. Identify what they are really interested in. We should engage them in a community. With members that take on leadership role. Then when engaged, encourage them to build up their skills. What we do is try to create a safe and friendly environment. We have people who speak a community language. We also have volunteers who speak English. TAFE partners with us. But our community centre is an informal environment. It is like their home. We’ve got a kitchen here, and places where people can commune. I let them do what they like.

We work in collaboration with them. We are not here to manage things for them. Let them manage things rather than doing everything for them. For example, we are currently running a program to help women become swimming instructor or lifesavers. The most popular programs are those that refugees or asylum seekers run themselves. The most popular one is dance and yoga and cooking projects – again it is wholly project managed by community members. We also have arts classes completely run and designed by refugees and people seeking asylum – which is for community people. We want to empower people, change the balance, give them the confidence and show them that they can contribute to society.’

The stakeholders highlighted that many socially isolated refugees and asylum seekers tended to 'stay in their own communities, which resulted in their having little knowledge of the broader community'.

The data from the parents about their own social connections also confirmed this.

The stakeholders stated that asylum seekers and refugees need to deal with competing demands in their lives – without knowing the access points to vital service and information.

Many come from subsistence farming, agriculture or have been farmers so they understand basic transactions but do not have the language, literacy and numeracy.

Cultural nuances play a big part: gender complexities, fear of exposure and losing face, transport. They may already speak English or they may not have any awareness of education systems.

Asylum seekers are left alone to deal with many barriers which makes it extremely difficult.

Work impacts as they may be employed in shift work or driving jobs. There is also the potential for some to be seen as betraying their family if they leave their work in the family home to get an education and this can lead to anxiety.

The stakeholders were asked to identify important factors that they believed would enable socially isolated refugees/ asylum seekers to participate in education opportunities.

Inclusive connections where they can create their own communities. They need to connect to their own communities and their educators need an understanding of trauma informed practice and have empathy.

It's important to foster independence using a CD [community development] approach that is underpinned by social justice.

They need opportunities for social inclusion and learning concurrently, such as outings, events.

Practical skills; i.e. how to fill out forms, celebrations, informal connections both with own community members and broader community.

Getting language skills is very important but they often need time to settle and adjust.

Sharing successful stories back into their communities and through their networks tends to work best.

Using their social events as a focal point can provide opportunities to relay examples of what can work and how people did it. For example - look what X did? You can do it too!

Offer resources and deliver programs like simple computer knowledge courses. Also encouraging people working with them to use a mix of language so that they get used to some English.

Some stakeholders confirmed data from the educators around going to where the people are rather than expecting them to come to you. They also reiterated the importance of culturally appropriate learning that is meaningful and useful.

Need good role models and to have learning in context.

The stakeholders listed the following engagement strategies as important:

- Empowering people to make their own decisions
- Ensuring educators have training in trauma informed practice and cultural awareness
- Linking them directly into neighbourhood houses
- Proactively building links and relationships across the community

'We have some lovely people who accepted to be community leaders. They go to their old communities and say this program is about to start and invite them along.

We need to create motivation in people. They need to know the value. It must be based on their passion.

We need to show them what they can do with the learning.

The qualification is not the motivator – it's what they can do with it.'

Working in context

‘For us it is very important to work in the context of other services. We always partner with an organisation that is working with that community every day. And offer other programs to meet their needs.

Any education program working with vulnerable people needs to be delivered in the context of all of these other services – such as job advice, legal assistance, healthcare, etc. All of those things support the outcomes of education programs like Connected.

If they are unwell or overwhelmed they won’t be able to participate. I think why people keep coming back to our workshops is because it takes a different approach, which can end up focussing just on job seeking skills.

We take a utilitarian approach to learning language, which has an important role to play but Connected also offers something different. It looks at the whole person. The whole life experience and brings that into the room. It is about big universal human ideas that we all share and connect. We do that through stories. We work with myths and folktales and any kind of story that has universal archetypal things.

We use drama where people are going into role and creating characters, settings and making choices about the story and co-creating the story as a group. On that level it is much more interactive and active than most learning classes tend to be.

We have people that come back again and again. We all want to engage as autonomous individuals – not just passively receiving services. Assuming people are adults. People respond better to that.’

CASE STUDIES

Australia

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Innovation Hub

Ideologically the Innovation Hub model is underpinned by empowerment principles that strive to ensure people seeking asylum are not passive recipients of a service, but have agency over their lives. The IH programs work in interdependent ways to provide a holistic, wrap-around service model. The programs include Empowerment, Education, Employment, Entrepreneurs (Small Business) and the two social Enterprise programs – ASRC Catering and ASRC Cleaning, which provide paid employment to people seeking asylum. Currently 50 people seeking asylum are employed across the two social enterprises, with plans to scale up the businesses and ultimately create more employment opportunities. The integrated range of programs strives to identify and address each individual member's unique needs.

Harmony House at Auburn North Public School

Refugee students comprise 20% of the enrolments at Auburn North Public School. With research identifying that parental engagement builds students' academic, social and emotional development, engaging refugee parents became a significant priority at the School.

Harmony House emerged as part of the NSW Government's Schools as Community Centres initiative. Harmony House is located onsite at Auburn North Public School. The House's facilitator designs and coordinates a series of programs aimed at engaging refugee parents including English, computing, maths, and positive parenting. The School also has a new arrivals program that helps new families settle into the community.

Along with the Harmony House events, the Auburn Schools as Community Centre initiative includes a Parents Friendship café, community garden, cooking and craft groups, and a family literacy program.

Families in Cultural Transition program

STARTTS is the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors. STARTTs' Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program supports newly arrived refugees to learn about Australia and offers strategies and techniques on how to successfully settle in Australia. In addition to this, FICT offers a forum for participants to talk about how their traumatic experiences have affected them and their families (STARTTS, 2019).

The program offers ways for participants to begin a process of recovery from traumatic experiences. It supports new arrivals experiencing challenges around parenting and family relationships as a result of an acculturation gap (or the changing values and culture between child and parent/ guardian).

The 9-week FICT program explains Australia's political system, multiculturalism, democracy and the welfare state. It covers parenting, gender and youth issues, employment, financial literacy and worker's rights. The program assists refugee families to better understand the concepts that underpin Australian society and explores the challenges relating to cultural transition. FICT offers tools and frameworks that help people deal with these challenges.

The program is offered to groups of 12 from the same ethic background. Evaluations have shown that after completing the program participants demonstrate greater confidence in their

parenting, are more satisfied with their social connections and better understand how systems operate in Australia.

Parents café at Fairfield High School

Many different cultural groups reside in Fairfield NSW including African, Syrian, Burmese and Sri Lankan communities. The area also has the biggest intake of Iraqi refugees in Australia.

The Parents Café was initiated by Fairfield High School's Intensive English Centre (IEC), which provides support for students from diverse language backgrounds. With funding from the Department of Health and Ageing, the Parents Café was initially a breakfast club because the IEC discovered that 30% of its students were not beginning the day with breakfast. From there, it became a place where parents were able to connect and share experiences.

Since that time and in response to the needs of its community, the Café's purpose has evolved significantly. Initially the Café provided information sessions to newly arrived refugee parents to help them adapt to Australia's education system. Services have since been expanded to include programs for refugee parents on social inclusion, Australian lifestyles, welfare, health, education, and the law. It also offers skills development in conversational English, digital literacy and with its commercial kitchen and office spaces it also offers vocational skills training in hospitality, horticultural and hair and beauty.

The Parents Café is now an independent not for profit facility that has contributed significantly to the development of well-adjusted, resilient and independent community members.

Learning English through song

The Peacemakers Ensemble received funding through Settlement Services International to run a program called Learning English Through Song.

The Peacemakers Ensemble is a community choir in Fairfield NSW with members of refugee backgrounds from Mesopotamian–Australian communities. Learning English through Song is designed to help recently arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees in south-west Sydney to acquire English language through understanding and performing songs.

The program helps newly arrived refugees to acquire conversational English language by learning three songs over 12 fortnightly sessions. The songs: I Am Australian, Let It Be and Advance Australia Fair are ultimately performed by the group at a graduation ceremony.

When learning the songs, the learners focus on particular words and apply them to a real-world context. This creative program supports people with little or no English to engage in learning, promote wellbeing and establish new connections.

The program uses music and the arts as 'therapeutic tools for healing' and is especially effectively with people suffering from trauma.

Wise Women

The Wise Women program supports women seeking asylum through professional development workshops and activities, including English language classes, education and training and other community-based activities to foster creativity and social engagement.

Participants have access to the Women

in Business program where they receive mentoring to support them to start their own businesses. The program includes a 9-week Sisterhood Journey, which is 'a self-growth program' run in partnership with MIND Australia and Hope Inc.

The program is designed to build confidence and self-esteem and to help the women to interact and communicate effective with women from different cultural backgrounds.

According to ASRC, in 2016 the program supported 135 women to enrol in professional courses and many women gained Australian workplace experience through volunteering opportunities.

The Connected program

The Connected program is a collaboration between the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and MTC Training Australia – a not-for-profit employment services and education provider. The Connected program uses drama to improve language and communication skills for adult Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) students.

For 6 weeks, an STC teaching artist work with MTC educators to incorporate drama activities into everyday language classes. The program uses imaginative stories and folktales to explore character, place and meaning.

The program takes place in a relaxed atmosphere where learning English becomes a fun activity. As well as building English language skills, the program also aims to develop participants' self-confidence, social connectedness and general wellbeing.

Students come from a wide variety of language groups including Syria, Iran, Vietnam and Afghanistan.

The program is delivered through weekly workshops where participants have fun, make social connections and gain confidence in speaking English.

STC has partnered with others to deliver this program including the Australian Red Cross and the Asylum Seekers Centre. Program evaluations are currently be conducted by Western Sydney University and The University of Sydney.

Foundation House: UCan2

The first pilot of the UCan2 program was back in 2007. Foundation House received philanthropic funding to support the increasing numbers of refugees who had severely disrupted education and loss of social networks – both in their own countries and in Australia where they were seeking to rebuild their lives. The program targeted refugees between 16–25 because this age group often doesn't seek out counselling to support to their recovery from trauma.

UCan2 supports people to develop social networks. The program was based on Ager and Strang's model of integration in the United Kingdom (2008).

Ager and Strang identified that employment, housing, education and health are the market and means of good social integration but in order to achieve those you need to have six underlying domains working successfully from basic human rights through to social networks (Figure 13).

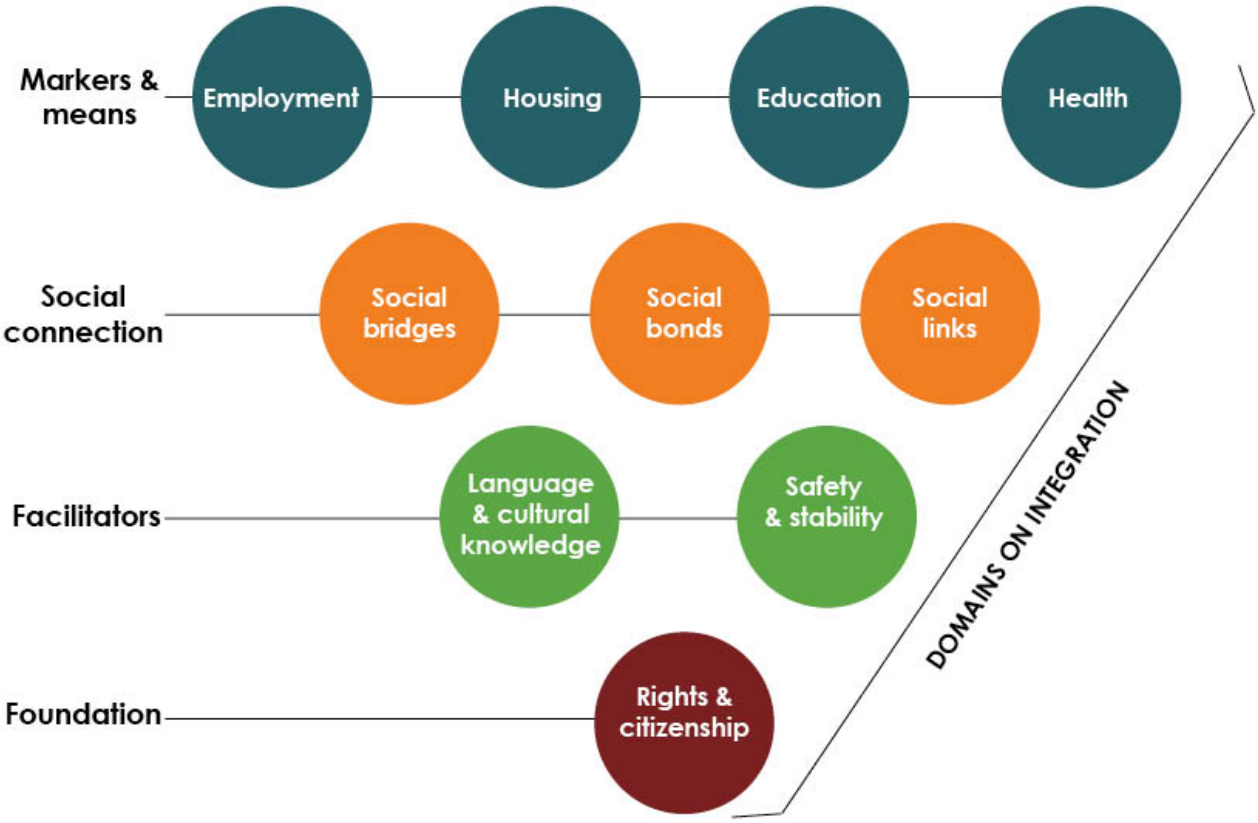

Figure 13: Ager and Strang's domains of integration

According to Ager and Strang's model, social connections must include:

- Social bonds – connecting through proximity to family and cultural connections
- Social bridges – connecting different groups in social activities and networks
- Social links – connecting individuals with institutions such as government services, Centrelink, TAFE etc.

The UCan2 curriculum is divided into four parts:

1. Language, life skills and learning about Australia
2. Work skill curriculum
3. Psycho-education, which explores who they are; where have they come from and where are they going in the future
4. Social connections

Using a strengths-based approach, the program acknowledges that people aged 16 and above have had life experiences but it doesn't ask people to share anything they don't want to share – it is more about giving them the opportunity to be proud of who they are and to share that.

Questions that asked through the program include:

- Did you work in your own country – what was that like?
- What were the expectations of your boss?
- What did you do when you were sick?
- How was it different to how things are here?
- Tell us something you remember about one of the countries you've lived in before you've come to Australia?
- What surprised you about coming to Melbourne?

The questions are general and vary according to the group, ranging from thoughtful and deep, to superficial aspects of the city. The program gives people the opportunity to talk at the level they are at, about what's going on for them.

Discussion topics range from talking about and managing emotions, to pathways and assertiveness. Topics are often linked to work skills – which are integrated into the whole program. Participants do 24 hours of work experience, usually 6 x 4 hour blocks after school. Foundation House has partnerships in place with Coles and Woolworths.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) recruits, trains and supports volunteers to support participants in the UCan2 program – many volunteers are under 30 but there are also older volunteers. The volunteers apply to and are trained as mentors by CMY then they are allocated to individuals in the UCan2 program. This also create a lot of cultural exchange and participants learn to connect to Australians.

Through UCan2 participants are taken to services. They are linked into youth programs in their local areas – such as sporting programs.

There is also a mentoring program available for participants after they complete UCan2. The mentoring program is offered in partnership with Australian Post and Telstra – where participants have the opportunity to be mentored for up to 12 months. Mentors help the young people with updating resumes, applying for jobs or cold calling for work.

International

Refugee Action Kingston: Centre for Community Resilience and Engagement

Refugee Action Kingston (RAK) is a charitable organisation that provides support for refugees and asylum seekers in Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. RAK's Centre for Community Resilience and Engagement (CCRE) offers pre-entry level ESOL support and social activities that integrate language learning. The Centre also introduces refugees and asylum seekers to the labour market through career guidance, training, volunteer placement and employment.

Through the UK Government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), upon arrival the Centre provides ESOL assessment for, in this example, Syrian refugee and asylum seekers. Clients are introduced to the Centre's services and also to other Syrian VPRS families. Those with adequate levels of English are referred on for ESOL. But with many arrivals at pre-entry level and with little to no education, the Centre offers pre-entry ESOL classes supported by the availability of childcare.

The pre-entry level program consists of language classes in the morning, followed by 'lunch at the Centre'. After lunch a broad array of additional activities that support health and wellbeing are offered at the Centre; including fitness classes, yoga, sewing, a news club as well as scheduled visits from service providers in areas such as public health, policing, finance etc.' (Stevenson, Kings, & Sterland 2017).

The Centre also offers refugees and asylum seekers employability projects, which include volunteer placements pre-arranged at local businesses such as the local hairdresser's, garden centre or school. RAK has found that many of refugee and asylum seekers struggle 'with the transition into paid employment' so the Centre offers various intervention to help them 'successfully navigate' this transition.

English: The key to integration in London

Various projects designed to support non-EU mothers with their English and to participate in their child's schooling have been piloted as part of the UK's English: The key to integration in London initiative.

English skills development through outdoor learning

One program led by Springfield Community Primary School involved taking pupils and their non-EU mothers 'out of the classroom and into the natural environment' where they worked on school projects together.

The idea was that outdoor activities created a more relaxed environment where mothers and their children could spend time together conversing in English.

The sessions alternated between mother–child learning activities in the outdoor sessions – where they participated in various activities aligned to the school curriculum such as growing vegetables together or building 'a water proof shelter'; along with formal English classes led by a teacher and ESOL tutor.

English for family and community

The English for Family and Community project involved a partnership between Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service and local schools in order to provide high quality English language training. The goal of the program was to enable non-English-speaking community members to integrate more with their local community, with a particular focus on 'their children's school community'.

The learning program included training sessions on healthy eating on a budget; navigating and using local health facilities and promoting local cultural opportunities for parents and children to enjoy together.

The English language training was delivered through 16 x 25 hour Family Learning courses. The courses enabled participants to integrate with their community; to better understand the education system; to use local facilities and services more effectively and interact better with their child's school.

The program incorporated local trips to various facilities and services and provided childcare services, which was noted to have significantly improved participation and attendance.

CONCLUSION

Building a formal partnership

A notable feature of the existing arrangement between Yarraville Community Centre and the Western English Language School is that it is informal.

The parameters of this relationship should be strengthened through a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU).

A high-level MOU should:

- articulate YCC and WELS' shared vision
- establish a framework for collaboration
- provide access to the target cohort
- pool resources to share
- support the development of social networks that would enhance wellbeing across family networks and the community
- facilitate transition of parents into education programs
- support and encourage the participation of parents in their child's education.

Parent engagement strategy

The parents will need to understand why it's important for them to build their language skills and engage in education programs.

A parent engagement strategy should be developed by YCC and WELS that:

Strengthens – by developing warm relationships with parents that support their learning and their children's education.

Facilitates – by connecting parents with peers and mentors who can faciliate smooth transitions into education programs and support their learning.

Empowers – by ensuring that their learning programs empower them to become advocates for their children's education.

Supports – by supporting the parents to keep their families healthy and safe and to achieve their own life and career goals through education and training.

Effective learning program

This research identified the following features of an effective learning program for socially isolated refugee and asylum seekers.

These features have been categorised into three key areas:

- Context – The underpinning philosophy and context for the learning design
- Design – The elements that should be factored into an effective learning program
- Logistics – The organisational aspects that should underpin an effective learning program for this cohort

Context

Adult learning programs for socially isolated asylum seekers and refugees should:

- Value their existing skills, knowledge, experience and education
- Affirm their existing identities and practices
- Take an intercultural approach that allows them to bring their own voice to their learning
- Avoid focussing on perceived needs and encourages their contribution.

Figure 14: Learning program design elements

Design

From a design point of view, they should:

- Include English language learning or mentoring opportunities
- Include opportunities for intergenerational or family learning
- Be non-threatening and non-formal
- Facilitate 'positive interdependence' in collaborative settings e.g. teamwork in small groups – where the success of one person is dependent on the success of the group
- Support people to understand the Australian employment landscape and highlights work opportunities and build digital skills
- Offer learning that is embedded in or operates alongside a creative or recreational focus
- Offer opportunities to plan and coordinate their own learning

- Facilitate collaborative discussion and dialogue
- Support people to set short- and long-term goals
- Build social connections

Logistics

From a logistical point of view, they should:

- Be free or low cost
- Include translation services
- Offer counselling services and referrals to other supporting services
- Include childcare services
- Offer flexible timetables that fit in with childcare responsibilities or other needs such as attending appointments, etc.
- Offer places to retreat to if things become overwhelming.

Figure 15 outlines an adapted framework for skill development that may be effective for newly arrived Australians.

This research has identified that there are significant but not insurmountable barriers to engaging socially isolated refugee and asylum seeker parents in education and training.

This research has found that developing a sustainable and clear framework for engaging this cohort is an important first step, which could be achieved through a stakeholder memorandum of understanding.

A key way to promote a child's well-being and education is to engage the parents

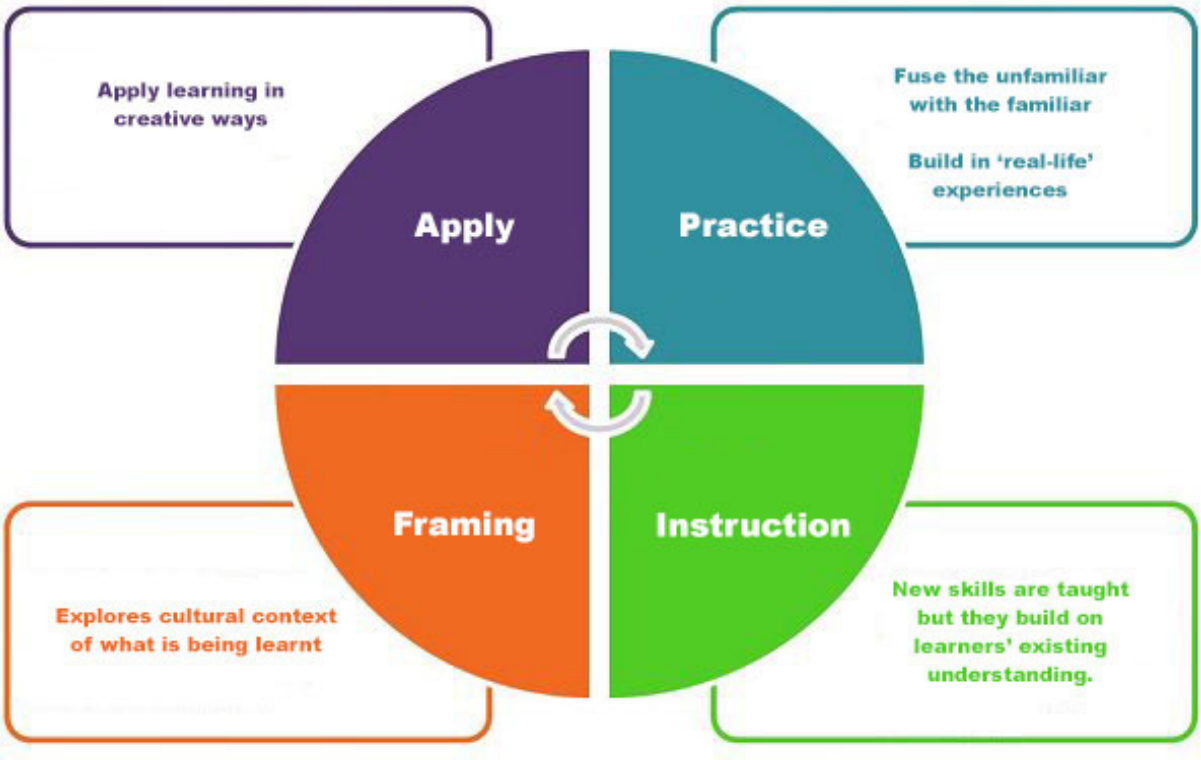

Figure 15: Skill development processes

in their learning. This research has found that a family engagement strategy that supports the learning of both the parents and their children would be a meaningful way to support the education of both parties.

This research has shown that this cohort needs multi-layered support to ensure:

- they feel confident and able to engage in learning programs
- they can continue looking after their families and keep their family networks strong
- their learning has the desired impact
- they feel connected to and can navigate their communities
- they have access to appropriate support mechanisms
- their learning improves their language, literacy, health and wellbeing
- provides pathways into work or further education
- supports them sufficiently so they can adapt to living in a new country.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a mapping exercise primarily across the following municipalities but also takes in other state-wide services:

- Maribyrnong
- Wyndham
- Brimbank
- Hobsons Bay

This map identifies significant community assets that could referred to in order to better support socially isolated asylum seekers and refugees.

The map identifies 160 sites in Melbourne's West that offers support and resources for asylum seekers and refugees. It could also support the development of collaborative relationships with key sites within the local community and makes relevant community organisations more visible and accessible by providing contact details and location information.

Recommendations

As a result of this scoping study, we strongly recommend formalising the relationship between YCC and WELS. We also recommend developing a pilot program that allows for flexible participation, with a strong focus on building confidence. It should support learning in many forms and act as an entry point or stepping stone to further learning opportunities (refer Appendix 2).

The program should be ongoing and located onsite at WELS. Ideally the pilot would run over a 12 month period, and be supported by childcare and translation services. Social activities should also be a regular feature of the program.

The program should be provided free of charge or at a minimal cost (gold coin). Where possible, it should allow participants to 'dip' in and out to support individual needs. It should be strength-based and support a measure of autonomy.

The program should embed the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills but also seek to improve wellbeing, parenting, job and digital skills. Ultimately, it should convey information about the educational landscape in Australia and promote supported pathways into further learning or meaningful work. The pilot should be independently evaluated for efficacy.

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APPENDIX 1

Community assets map

Refer attached Community assets map.xlsx

APPENDIX 2

LEARNING TOGETHER:

A PROGRAM THAT SUPPORTS FAMILIES TO ENGAGE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND BUILD THEIR OWN LEARNING PATHWAYS

PILOT

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YARRAVILLE COMMUNITY CENTRE (YCC) & WESTERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOL (WELS)