Strategies for engaging families through out-of-school-hours

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Who We Are

We are a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.
MY Education programs

Learning Beyond the Bell (LBB)

• CMY offers support to organisations and schools to provide high quality learning support to children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

• Can also support organisations to help families to better support their students.

Refugee Education Support Program (RESP)

• RESP aims to improve the educational outcomes of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds

• Holistic and targeted support to selected schools

• Aims to strengthen the connections between student achievement and wellbeing, and

• Increase connection between student, family, school and community.

CMY MY Education programs are funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training
A note about terminology

Families

The term families is used in place of parents and/or guardians as it is important to recognise that children and young people live in a diverse range of family types:

• one or two parents,
• multigenerational households with one or more grandparent,
• living in the care or guardianship of grandparents, older siblings, aunts or uncles or other family members,
• living with foster or other carers,
• older siblings taking an active role in supporting young siblings’ education, including homework.
“Education is an essential part of successful integration for migrant and refugee youth and is crucial for preparing youth of all backgrounds to be productive and well-adjusted members of society.”

(CALD Youth Census 2014:33)
Barriers to education for students

- Limited understanding of the Australian education and training system
- Limited access to intensive English language support
- Difficulty finding space and time to study because of crowded living environments, supporting family, and pressure to earn an income
- Difficulty in building social relationships due to limited English skills
- Disrupted education pathways and time spent away from school
- Lack of support for learning at home due to family members having limited English skills.
Barriers for families

• Impact of migration
• Families’ fears
• Experience of schooling
• Understanding of Australian schooling system
• Expectations of young person and schools
• Career expectations and pathways
• Language barriers
• Stigma of school contact
• Family breakdown
• Cultural expectations.
Barriers for schools

- Staff resources and support
- Increased student welfare role of staff
- Unfamiliarity with family and student backgrounds/life experience
- Cultural diversity in schools
- Complex needs of student populations
- Lack of access to appropriate resources/professional development.
“Feelings of connectedness to family, friends, community and school have been shown to be the most significant factors underpinning an individual’s resilience.”

Commonwealth of Australia, 2001
Out-of-school-hours learning support programs

These programs provide high quality tuition and learning support to children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families. They also assist families to better support their children’s learning at home.

The two key components are the focus on learning outcomes and on social and emotional wellbeing.
How can OSHLSP help?

“It gives me courage for putting my hand up in class.”

Musa, Grade 6

“It’s fun, you get to do work with everyone, your friends are here and it’s fun to work together.”

Rafi, Grade 7
OSH LSP models for family engagement

- Family learning group
- Family workshops
- Family learning space
Family learning groups

• Parents and carers meet regularly at the school to build knowledge and skills to support their children’s learning, such as English language skills.

• These groups provide an ongoing opportunity for families to connect with each other and the school.

• Supported by school staff such as MEAs, principals, and teachers, and community organisation staff such as bilingual workers.
Case study: Family learning group

Braybrook College

• Many students arrived in Australia in the last 5 years and were EAL.
• A large and growing proportion from Burma, mainly Chin or Karen.

The project

• The College recognised the need to support these families to feel strongly connected to the school and more engaged with students’ learning.
• As part of RESP, they partnered with New Hope Foundation, to facilitate a group for refugee background parents and carers from Burma.
• The aim of the program was to build the capacity of parents to engage with their children’s learning at home.
Impact
Family workshops

Parents and carers attend a series of interactive workshops focused on increasing understanding of school, the education system, transitions, educational and career pathways, and ways that families can support their children in their learning.
Case Study: Family workshops

Brunswick Secondary College

• Families were eager to discuss career plans with their children, to support good decision making.
• Some families lacked familiarity with Victoria’s education and training pathways to best support their children.

Project

• Language specific careers information workshops presented for families.
• Families attended with their children, to explore career pathways and demystify school and training systems.
• There were interpreters for the workshops and translated resources used including DET’s Engaging Parents in Career Conversations (EPICC) resource.
Impact

**Case Study: Brunswick Secondary College**

**ENGAGING PARENTS IN CAREER CONVERSATIONS**

**The need**

Brunswick Secondary College (BSC) is a secondary school in the inner north of Melbourne and has a very diverse student body. BSC enrols a high number of students with refugee backgrounds and language backgrounds other than English.

Many families with refugee backgrounds were eager to discuss career plans with their children and wanted to support good decision making. However, some families lacked the necessary familiarity with Victoria's education and training pathways to best support their children. BSC found that students and their families often made decisions about schooling and career pathways that were not in line with their expectations for the future.

**The response**

As part of REAP, BSC ran language specific careers information workshops for families. Parents and careers attended these workshops with their children, with the intention of exploring career pathways and demystifying school and training systems.

BSC engaged the services of the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service to provide interpreters for the workshops and to translate generalised resources, including DET's Engaging Parents in Careers Conversations (EPCC) resource.

The workshops were delivered using resources and activities translated into Arabic, Persian, Somali, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

School careers staff and the school’s English as an Additional Language (EAL) coordinators worked together to modify and adapt EPCC resources for parents with refugee backgrounds and to create a communication and promotion strategy to invite and engage families in the workshops.

**Challenges**

At first it was challenging for school staff to find the time to plan and coordinate activities associated with the project. Leadership at the school stepped in to prioritise the project and allocated extra planning time to staff.

**Student outcomes**

Students and their families developed more insight into career pathways and planning. Families also became more familiar with BSC and the broader education and training systems, which their children can engage in. This better informed discussions on possible career trajectories between students, parents and the school.

**Social and wellbeing outcomes**

Parents said they felt better informed, confident and positive about their children’s career pathway options and the new insights helped them have more informed conversations with their children and school staff.

“The EPCC framework was great to use because the slides, activities and resources could be modified to fit into the format and time that the school allocated for the workshop.”

School Careers’ Counselor

**Outcomes for families**

Feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive. Parents said that the sessions were very informative and provided useful resources. Parents were also grateful the school took the time to plan their specific workshops, especially for them. This initiative has helped parents to gain a deeper understanding and level of engagement with the school system, and increased their confidence in talking to their children about pathways.

All case studies referenced can be found at [www.cmy.net.au/my-education](http://www.cmy.net.au/my-education)
Family learning space

Schools create a welcoming and culturally appropriate space for families at school.

The space provides an environment where children and families can work on learning tasks together and where families build their social networks through informal interactions with school staff and other families.
Case study: Family Learning Space

Clayton North Primary School

• Majority of students were from language backgrounds other than English.
• A number of these students needed substantial English literacy support.
• Many families faced barriers to engaging with the school including limited confidence and English language skills.

The Project

• Clayton North created a homework club and a Family Learning Space.
• The space provided an environment where children and families could work on learning tasks together and where families could build their social networks through informal interactions.
• A launch event was held for parents, and structured activities included English conversation classes and prep orientations.
Impact
Good practice

1. Student centred
2. Family-aware
3. Through partnership
4. Social connections
Student centred
Family-aware practice

- Recognises the critical role families play in a young person’s life
- Acknowledges that for refugee and migrant young people the concept of family may be broader and more complex than traditional Western constructs
- Family expectations, responsibilities and commitments are often key priorities in a young person’s life
- Involves engaging with family wherever possible as a key component of supporting a young person.
Social connections
Through partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Community Organisation</th>
<th>Partnership: school and community organisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reaching Students</strong></td>
<td>Able to directly target students with the most need</td>
<td>Able to attract ‘difficult to reach’ and disengaged students.</td>
<td>Greater resources (human and physical) availability than if operating alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources and links to services</strong></td>
<td>Well-resourced classrooms, learning materials and teaching staff</td>
<td>Well linked to other relevant community services.</td>
<td>Opportunity to ‘capture’ the benefits of both (or more) settings and organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student learning and wellbeing outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Established learning environment</td>
<td>Use of own resource/staff base including volunteer recruitment and retention.</td>
<td>Convergence of learning and community wellbeing outcomes</td>
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<td><strong>School, family and community engagement</strong></td>
<td>Greater opportunity for liaison with school on student progress</td>
<td>Parental engagement skills and links with communities</td>
<td>Greater scope to address gaps in learning support for students in a more sustainable way</td>
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In conclusion

• Families from migrant and refugee backgrounds may experience barriers to engaging with their children’s education.
• Family engagement is a key factor in successful educational outcomes for these students.
• OSHLSP help by providing tailored learning support to students and their families.
• CMY has identified a number of successful models that can be used by OSHLSP to increase family engagement.
• Good practice includes being student-centred and family aware, focusing on social connections and working through partnerships.