

Engaging Parents - Bus Tour to local facilities

Key words: access, refugee, clubs, parents

Background

In partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), the Catholic Regional College (CRC) organised a bus tour for parents of children attending the school. The objective of the program was to expose parents to existing services commonly accessed by their children in the western suburbs. The tour included not only sport and recreation facilities, but also libraries located in the same local government area. It coincided with Bilingual Week at the St Albans library.

On the day approximately twenty people took part, including Vietnamese, Sudanese and Australian parents.

The program

This was a collaborative effort, with CRC and the CMY Project Officer booking the bus and the guided tours of the facilities. CRC promoted the tour to children and parents.

The timing of the tour was arranged to make it as easy as possible for parents to take part. They were picked up at the school gate just after dropping off their children. Once the tour started, facilitators from CRC and CMY used the opportunity of being on the bus to speak with parents about the services available to them locally. The guided tours of the community facilities (such as the St Albans library and YMCA) provided parents with an opportunity to meet staff and learn of the range of services available to them and their families.

The group then stopped off at a local park to discuss with the CMY facilitators the benefits of sports and recreation for young people. This allowed the facilitators to provide additional information about the services and answer questions.

The tour ended with lunch, after which parents were dropped back at the school.

Benefits of the program

This program has produced many positive outcomes for the participants and stakeholders.

- The parents became more familiar with local services and facilities. For example, as the group arrived at St Albans library, bilingual story time in Dinka (a Sudanese language) was taking place. The parents commented on how this was a sign of inclusiveness of the diversity of the local population on the part of the library.
- Parents learned about services available for their children and gained greater insight into youth services and practices. After being introduced to the range of programs offered by the YMCA, several parents mentioned that they were pleased that their children were involved in such programs.
- Parents expressed interest in becoming more active and involved in local activities: some parents joined the library; many expressed an interest in participating in swimming lessons; some suggested the establishment of a mothers' walking group.

CMY Multicultural Sport Case Study

Challenges

- It is important to check with parents what time and location are convenient for them. In this case, the fact that the tour started at 9am and that parents and facilitators met at the school was a key factor in the success of the day, as it did not interfere with parents' 'drop off' and 'pick up' times.
- After touring three of the agencies, several parents were tired; the list of agencies visited and the duration of the guided tours may need to be revised. The program ran from 9am-2.30pm, which, based on this experience, made for a long day; in the future the tour may be shortened.
- Refreshment breaks could be extended over the scheduled time as many of the parents wanted a chance to rest. Given that some had not had breakfast, in the future the tour may start with a light breakfast.

Next steps

The Catholic Regional College is keen to replicate this and offer further tours for parents of children in its primary and secondary schools.

After this first 'low cost tour', which took parents to free or low cost activities and libraries, CRC is considering including local sports clubs in a further tour. This would give parents an idea of where the clubs are located, joining procedures and costs involved. However this approach presents its own challenges, as many clubs are staffed by volunteers and not open during the day. CRC is considering bringing club representatives together to meet parents in one place, rather than take parents to clubs.

The selection of clubs will also be crucial, and clubs with a strong reputation for inclusiveness and healthy behaviours will be sought.