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1. INTRODUCTION

On the invitation of local service providers, CMYI's JPET co-coordinator and Refugee Policy Officer went to the Goulburn Valley in December 2000 to meet with key stakeholders to discuss and identify critical issues for newly arrived migrants and refugees settling in the region. The purpose of this paper is to assist CMYI in determining a role for the agency in the region.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) has previously undertaken work in rural Victoria including a cultural exchange program ('Culture Jump') for young people and a forum organised with the Gippsland Migrant Resource Centre targeting young refugee students.

2. BACKGROUND – NEW SETTLER ARRIVALS

The Goulburn Valley region is incorporated within Moira Shire and the City of Greater Shepparton. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) Settlement database for the period 7 August 1996 to 31 December 2000 indicates that a total of 304 arrivals have settled in the Goulburn Valley region from a range of countries including Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In examining the age breakdown of total arrivals in the region, approximately 30% are young people. Also, in comparison to other rural regions, the Goulburn Valley has the most significant newly arrived community of an Arabic speaking origin.

According to the *Building Links Project Report* (2001), the number of new settlers in the Goulburn Valley region is as high as 3000 (source: community members and service providers). Consistent and meaningful data is unavailable at this stage due to the continuing movement of families and individuals in the region. Again, the *Building Links Report* indicates that a considerable number of the new settlers are young people.

Most of the Arabic speaking settlers began arriving in the region after 1996. The majority had spent at least five years in refugee camps before arriving in Australia. In comparison to the older established Greek and Italian communities, Arabic speaking communities have a large number of children and adolescents. An average Arabic speaking family living in the region has between six and eight children.

A number of the worlds largest food processing companies are based in the region including Ardmona, Bonlac, Campbell's, IXL, Rosella and SPC. In addition, the region has many specialty fruit farms which offer seasonal employment to new settlers.

3. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR THE REGION

Following consultation with CMYI, key stakeholders raised a number of issues in relation to the settlement and successful integration of refugees and newly arrived migrants into region. Critical issues raised include:

1. Education;
2. Income;
3. Health;
4. Housing;
5. Employment; and
6. Transport.

3.1 Education

Stakeholders stated that a range of factors were impacting on the success of new settlers in the education sector. These included:

- English language difficulties and lack of access to language tuition;
- lack of translated materials about educational system and institutions;
- failure to recognise previous qualifications;
- lack of appropriate academic assessment;
- lack of appropriate information and professional advice;
- the need for better vocational information training and advice;
- the need for appropriate income support and assistance while preparing for employment;
- provision of education for young people;
- the impact of interrupted schooling and resulting low literacy rates;
- lack of clear pathways to further education and training.

English learning is a major priority for many settling communities in the region.

English-as-a-second-Language (ESL) time was considered by the students to be safe, supportive and fun. It was stressed however that the current time allocated to ESL (three periods per week) was not enough for students to learn and practice English.

Many students perceived homework as too difficult and that assistance from teachers was not always available. Students identified homework support as a major factor in successfully completing school tasks.

It was reported that a lack of understanding of cultural issues by teachers affected the self-esteem and confidence of students, especially young women. Students also reported being teased about the clothes they wear at school, especially young women who wear the *hijab*. Older students aged 17 to 20 also experience difficulties integrating into the school system.

Information translated into Arabic in relation to the Victorian education system was also seen as a priority. Some schools have however increased the number of Multicultural Aides employed to assist teachers with these issues.

3.2 Income

Employment and the ability to generate income contributes to the development of a self-esteem and is a significant factor in successful resettlement for new settlers. Income allows individuals to make a social contribution, develop and enhance skills, occupy time during the day and to feel like a useful member of the family and the society. Economic hardships are major factors contributing to family breakdowns in newly and emerging communities.

3.3 Health

In new settler communities, males, as heads of the family, are expected to look after the financial security of the household and make major decisions regarding other family members. Many new settler families however experience a reversal of roles and responsibilities imposed on them by a new lifestyle and new culture in Australia.

Crucial issues which have been identified for the region include:

- lack of female doctors;
- lack of cultural sensitivity within health services;
- lack of access to quality interpreting services;
- lack of translated information;
- cultural diversity training for health practitioners;
- rural retention issues regarding the recruitment of professionals in the region;
- withdrawal of the home-based service.

3.4 Housing

There is a need for more affordable and appropriate housing in the Goulburn Valley region which can accommodate larger families with up to eight children.

3.5 Employment

Adequate English language skills was identified as an important factor to gaining employment in the region. For new settlers gaining employment in one of the commercial fruit processing factories is unlikely, as most of the employers prefer workers who are fluent in English because of occupational health and safety issues. Settlers were far more likely to gain seasonal employment on one of the regions fruit farms. Many new settlers also expressed frustration in relation to the difficulties associated with having their overseas qualifications recognised.

There are a number of services in the region who offer employment and training opportunities. For many new settlers however, these services are very complex to comprehend and access. Many individuals expressed frustration that despite having completed a range of certificate courses, they were still unable to secure employment.

3.6 Transport

This is a crucial issue for many groups living in rural areas of Victoria. Services are mostly concentrated in regional cities such as Shepparton and Cobram. Public transport services to and from regional cities to most neighbouring towns are not available. Individuals who live outside these cities are expected to travel in private vehicles to access these services, a difficult prospect for those who do not own cars.

Outreaching to small towns is a factor for many service providers in the Goulburn Valley region. This is particularly relevant for young people who cannot get access to public transport or a private vehicle and who are therefore further isolated from programs and services.

4. STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE TO SETTLEMENT ISSUES

There are a range of services in the region which work with newly arrived settlers in the region. A brief overview of services is provided below.

4.1 *City of Greater Shepparton*

The City of Greater Shepparton assists newly arrived communities to resettle in the region through crisis intervention. The Council gave the Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) of Shepparton funding to work with the newly arrived settlers.

The Council participated in local meetings where the Victorian Multicultural Commission, ECC of Shepparton, local agencies and State and Federal MP's were invited to develop immediate and long-term strategies to overcome some of the problems in the region.

4.2 *Regional Housing Network.*

There are five houses for temporary accommodation in the region. The Housing Network indicated however that it does not have the infrastructure to deal with the numbers of families settling in the region.

4.3 *Ethnic Communities Council of Shepparton (ECC of Shepparton).*

The ECC of Shepparton assists people with housing, clothing, transport issues and health related issues. The ECC has been dealing with many of the issues which have arisen for newly arrived communities.

ECC is assisting young people with education, recreation and financial issues. ECC does not have a youth specific worker however, and with at least 150 Arabic youth in the Shepparton area at the time of the first visit in December 2000, ECC workers expressed the need for a position which could access young people and co-ordinate services to respond to their specific needs.

The number of young people from the new settler communities has increased dramatically in 2001 (Building Links Report 2001). There are 128 ESL students in Secondary school and 324 of primary school age. In fact, 80% of young people are aged between ten and twelve years.

4.4 Centrelink.

Centrelink has been working with many Arabic speaking settlers and has identified a range of issues. The Shepparton office of Centrelink has Multicultural Officers one of whom is Arabic speaking. Through this officer, Centrelink is supporting and assisting many newly arrived settlers to the region.

4.5 Goulburn Valley Health Services.

Goulburn Valley Health services have developed a community based health promotion strategy to address the needs of the region. They developed links with the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture to support refugee clients. As a result, staff have been provided with training culturally sensitivity when working with clients from refugee backgrounds. The Centre also assisted clients with material aid such as furniture, clothes and food.

4.6 Youth Services

The following programs and activities are available through mainstream youth services:

- Outreach Bus program;
- *JPET*;
- *FREEZA* activities;
- Suicide prevention program;
- *Increasing Connectedness* program.

A number of service providers such as *Cutting Edge Youth Services* and the *Bridge Youth Services* are housed together. These services undertake extensive outreach to isolated young people (especially through the bus program) throughout the Goulburn Valley area. Special activities such as *FREEZA* are organized to encourage participation of young people in activities which support and assist them to reconnect with their community.

The Outreach bus is staffed by key service providers in the area. The program provides Internet services, career counselling, employment and training advice and specialist services to young people in isolated areas of the region. This service is funded by Department of Human Services (DHS) and is very successful.

The Job Placement Employment Program (JPET) is funded to service 70 clients per year. It has a holistic approach to working with young people and activities vary from training and employment advice to adventure camps. The JPET service does not have a refugee focus.

Rural staff retention rates are a structural problem for many services in the Goulburn Valley. Key agencies face many challenges when it comes to attracting potential employees to the region, especially workers skilled in working with refugees and newly arrived young people.

5. REGIONAL PROJECTS

5.1 *'Building Links Project'*

The Building Links Project was established by service providers and members of the Goulburn Valley community. A Reference Group was formed to develop a co-ordinated service delivery model for the region designed to assist newly arrived refugees and migrants to settle successfully in the region.

The project aimed to identify the needs of new settlers, increase access to services in the region (with particular focus on Cobram and Shepparton) and to provide a coordinated approach to service delivery and planning.

A report has been written documenting the extensive issues identified by the consultation process. The report makes specific recommendations regarding service delivery to address the issues of concern, which were raised by the different players. A final draft of the report is available on the Centrelink website.

5.2 *'Country Welcome' Project*

The *Country Welcome* project has been funded by VicHealth as part of the Mental Health Promotional Plan to support and assist new settlers in the Cobram area. The project is very successful and the information is still used by services to assist new settlers in the region.

1. YOUTH SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION

6.1 *Goulburn Valley New Settlers Network*

This Network is made up of individuals from a range of local services including the City of Greater Dandenong, Centrelink, EEC and the Health Service. CMYI was instrumental in sourcing funding for a one day a week position for the region. The ESL Co-coordinator from Cobram is undertaking this role and has been employed to undertake the following:

- provide workers with introductory sessions in relation to working with young people from new settler communities;
- support to develop options for integrating young people into programs such as *Freeza*, the after-school program and *JPET*.
- support ESL co-coordinators to initiate activities via ESL classes in the Shepparton Cluster;
- meet with leaders of key New Settler Associations and Activity Groups in order to present information about the New Settler Network activities.

The Project will also provide opportunities for young people to:

- develop and maintain friendships and contact one another;
- gain information;
- gain leadership and peer mentoring skills through group activities such as Student Councils;
- change negative stereotypes.

To date, sixty young people have joined the network. Most network members attended the CMYI Refugee Youth Pathways workshop held earlier in the year.

Western Young People in the West (WYPIN) ran a one-day workshop on leadership and peer support training for young people. The co-ordinator of the Network is also considering a training workshop similar to the WYPIN model.

6.2 Mutual and Peer Support Groups

The Arabic Youth Network and Islamic Women's Council have facilitated the development of mutual peer support groups for young people in new arrival communities. The purpose of these groups is to:

- provide mutual support to one another;
- develop ways of supporting peers in the community;
- exploration of on-going settlement issues;
- building social networks;
- having fun including going out for coffee, trips or other affordable activities.

6.3 Youth Camps

The Young Muslims of Australia hold youth camps to bring together young people. They seek to celebrate youth and its future role in the community and to promote affinity across the group of young people including recognition of their diverse backgrounds (as new settlers, second generation migrants, rural, urban etc.)

6.4 Newsletter

The Arabic Youth Newsletter is produced by Arabic Australian Youth in Melbourne and aims to provide a medium of communication for Arabic youth (aged 16 to 25) to network, exchange ideas, gain support, form friendships and change negative stereotypes. An editorial team has been trained in newsletter production resulting in skills in PR, marketing, design, layout and desktop publishing.

6.5 Indigenous and Ethnic Youth Arts Project

The Bridge received *Living in Harmony* funding in July 2001 to run an arts project for youth from indigenous and CLD backgrounds. The aim of the project is to assist young people from diverse backgrounds to develop programs and activities that suite their needs. The project was still in the formative stages when the Refugee Youth Policy Officer visited the Goulburn Valley in August 2001. Further information will be provided once the aims and objectives of the project has been established by the young people.

6.6 Victorian Arabic Social Services (formerly Arabic Network of Victoria)

Thirty young people have been trained by Victorian Arabic Social Services as youth facilitators. These young people have completed a 40-hour training on how to assist their peers who are newly arrived in their new country. The training involved skills in information resourcing, problem solving skills, familiarity with key services, cross cultural issues, communication skills, networking and mentoring.

The training has introduced young people to potential ways in which they can contribute to their communities and to link them with agencies they may contribute to on a voluntary basis. It also provides innovative ways of addressing isolation among new settling youth through their contributions to their community and through mentoring from other Arabic youth.

6.7 Stepping in Stepping Out – VicHealth – Active for life Grants

The project runs aerobic classes for Muslim women in the City of Greater Shepparton. There are a considerable number of young women who have shown interest in attending these classes

Cutting Edge Services is in the process of putting together a submission for a JPET position focusing on Refugee and Migrant Young People.

1. CMYI INVOLVEMENT IN THE GOULBURN VALLEY REGION

As stated earlier in this paper, CMYI was involved in discussions with workers on the ground and assisted with the young people's consultation in October 2000. Key stakeholders in the region were able to clearly articulate critical issues for new settler communities, particularly in relation to young people. A range of activities and programs designed to support and assist new settler communities in the region were also identified. Driven by interested individual workers it became apparent that there was a lack of co-ordination across the region regarding the response from key service providers to the influx of newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Implementing a strategic plan to meet the needs of the region will require a coordinated and collaborative partnership between key stakeholders in the region and CMYI staff. CMYI needs to prioritise and engage the most appropriate staff to deliver initiatives in collaboration with individual local workers with whom the agency has developed strong and effective working relationships. The key areas requiring CMYI support include:

- local coordination of service delivery;
- cultural diversity training;
- a Youth specific position.

8. FUTURE ROLE FOR CMYI AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Recommendation 1: Co-ordination

That CMYI coordinate and facilitate discussion with key stakeholders to address some of the issues in the Region.

CMYI can play a positive role in bringing some of the key players together given that we are a statewide agency and therefore perceived as neutral. The agency needs to be careful that it limits its role to facilitate discussion and develop projects and initiatives rather than dictate the process or become involved in local implementation issues. CMYI could be a clearinghouse for information and ideas through the Refugee Youth Policy Officer.

CMYI could also be instrumental in co-coordinating discussion between key educational providers in the region to address concerns about the absence of an English Language School/Centre in the Goulburn Valley region. Holistic English language tuition is needed in the region due to the fact that the present allocation of ESL time is insufficient for students who are from newly arrived refugee and migrant communities.

8.2 Recommendation 2: Cultural Diversity Training

That CMYI in partnership with other statewide agencies, facilitate and coordinate cultural diversity training workshops in the Goulburn Valley Region.

Cultural diversity training has been identified as a need by a number of service providers across the region. The training material developed by CMYI to target different services could be modified in negotiation with each service so that their respective cultural diversity training needs may be met.

Other statewide agencies and organisations have run workshops and forums in the region on a needs-only basis to date. CMYI could be instrumental in bringing these organisations together to work in collaboration and partnership. This would ensure that all services are well informed *vis a vis* other services, thus eliminating duplication and overlapping of service delivery.

