PATHWAYS AND PITFALLS:

The Journey of Refugee Young People In and Around the Education System in Greater Dandenong
Published by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and South East Local Learning and Employment Network, November 2004

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Adult and Community Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>AENAPYR</td>
<td>Analysis of the ESL New Arrivals Program for Young Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Migrant Education Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGD</td>
<td>City of Greater Dandenong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMYI</td>
<td>Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE&amp;T</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELS/C</td>
<td>English Language School/Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAP</td>
<td>New Arrivals Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non English-speaking background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELEN</td>
<td>South East Local Learning and Employment Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPV</td>
<td>Temporary Protection Visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research could not have been undertaken without the support and assistance of the CMYI-SELLEN-City of Greater Dandenong reference group. The reference group members provided useful feedback regarding the research process and were vital sources of information and links to other service providers and young people. Their support and commitment to this project made it possible to achieve a large amount in a very short period of time.

Particular thanks must go to Rosemarie Iera, Coordinator of the Young Refugees in the Picture project, and Jen Couch, who took over from Rosemarie in July. Paul DiMasi, CEO of the South East LLEN, and Carmel Guerra, Director of CMYI, must also be thanked for their tremendous support and commitment to seeing this project through.

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Louise Olliff
Researcher

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for new arrivals have a crucial role to play in providing young refugees with the necessary English skills to be able to make a successful transition into mainstream education and employment. The central role that English proficiency plays in determining the successful integration of migrants into Australian society is well demonstrated in this and other research.

Government-funded ESL programs catering for newly arrived young refugees take three main forms:

- **The ESL New Arrivals Program (NAP)**, in government primary and secondary schools, is provided in the context of Commonwealth government funding and guidelines. Educational jurisdictions in states and territories receive once-only per capita funding for each eligible new arrival student. The purpose of the funding is for the provision of the student’s initial course of intensive instruction. The Commonwealth Guidelines state that eligible students are expected to receive a minimum of 6 months intensive English language instruction either in intensive language centres/units or in schools. In the latter case it is expected that students will be provided with a minimum of ten hours of ESL assistance per week. (Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines p 80).

- The second major form through which ESL programs are administered is through **ESL in schools**, whereby index funding is provided to individual schools for the ongoing provision of ESL programs to eligible students, including refugee young people who have transitioned out of the ESL New Arrivals Program.

- **Young refugees who are of post-compulsory school age (16+) are also entitled to access ESL programs through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)**, provided in a non-school setting for a standard 510 hours. Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) runs a number of youth programs within this setting.

Due to the pivotal importance that initial intensive language learning experiences are likely to play in the settlement trajectory of newly arrived young people, the central focus of this research has been an analysis of the ESL New Arrivals Program (ESL NAP) in the City of Greater Dandenong. In particular, this research explored whether or not the ESL NAP was equipping young people with the necessary skills to make a successful transition into mainstream education and employment through interviewing service providers who work with young refugees and by interviewing some young refugees themselves. This research was designed to provide a snapshot of one region in Victoria where there are a significant number of new arrivals settling in order to canvass emerging issues and to point the way to future directions in ESL provision. It needs to be clearly stated, therefore, that this research was not designed to provide a comprehensive review of all ESL programs for new arrivals across Victoria, although there will undoubtedly be common threads of experience.

In reviewing transition pathways, this research focused predominantly on young refugees of post-compulsory school age (16+). Young refugees of compulsory school age (12-15 year olds) have a compulsory pathway into secondary school, and thus the ongoing English language learning needs of this group can only be accommodated through the special needs and ESL index funding provided through schools, an area not explored in any depth in this research. The post-compulsory school age cohort, however, have very different and varied needs in terms of transition pathways, and it is the gaps in existing and potential pathways that are explored in this research.

Findings

The educational and ESL needs of a young refugee in Australia will depend greatly on their past experiences in their country of origin, especially on their educational background. The current intakes in Australia’s Humanitarian Program, from the Horn of Africa and Middle East, provide challenges for ESL programs in terms of catering to the needs of significant numbers of young people with severely disrupted schooling. This is a concern that has been raised particularly within the ESL New Arrivals Program and by mainstream schools in the City of Greater Dandenong, where a sizeable community of Sudanese and Afghans are currently settling.

A major research finding of this project was that, anecdotally at least, many young people who are exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program are struggling to cope with mainstream education and are either ‘dropping out’ or achieving low outcomes. This is despite the fact that many newly arrived young people have extremely high expectations of educational outcomes and are experiencing immense family pressure to succeed. Interviewees also highlighted the difficulties that young refugees are facing in finding employment in areas other than casual, low-skilled positions.

One of the main reasons given for this lack of success in both education and employment outcomes is the low English proficiency being achieved by young refugees who have participated in the ESL New Arrivals Program. In terms of program challenges, the enormity of the task lies in equipping students from diverse backgrounds with not only English
language skills, but also curriculum knowledge and an understanding of general school behaviours (this particularly applies to students who arrive in Australia with little or no formal education), as well as ensuring that appropriate support is given to young people during their transition out of the ESL NAP into different education and employment pathways.

Gaps and barriers in the ESL New Arrivals Program that contribute to the low English proficiency outcomes of young refugees’ and their general lack of preparedness for mainstream education and employment include:

- Inadequacy of the education system in catering for young people with disrupted schooling, including having unrealistic expectations of the time it takes for a young person to learn English;
- Concerns regarding the kinds of education and training pathways open to, and utilised by, refugee young people of post-compulsory school age (particularly those with a history of disrupted schooling);
- Young refugees’ and their families’ lack of understanding of the education system in Australia, including having unrealistic expectations of outcomes;
- Lack of attention and resources given to the transition period when young people exit the ESL New Arrivals Program and enter mainstream schools; and
- Lack of literacy and numeracy pre-requisites for young refugees entering mainstream schooling and alternative programs.

In identifying positive practices in the ESL New Arrivals Program, it was found that the English Language Schools and Centres (ELS/C) have commanded a great deal of respect among service providers working with refugee young people and among young people themselves. The high quality and caring of teachers at the ELS/C’s was given particular commendation. Other positive practices included:

- Orientation/information sessions given to different service providers about newly-arrived communities;
- African settlement workers working within the ELS/C’s;
- The Kaleidoscope Programme run by Foundation House;
- Excursions and camps during the ESL New Arrivals Program, and;
- The Parents Program at Noble Park English Language School.

Possible recommendations for ways forward include:

- Pilot a new intermediatory framework for supporting and integrating new arrivals into appropriate education, training and employment pathways in which young people can achieve success. This may include introducing or promoting different phases for young people to learn English (e.g., TAFE phase, VCAL or VET in schools with literacy focus, AMES pilot project);
- Allow greater flexibility in the ESL New Arrivals Program for young people to move in and out;
- Develop a strategic framework for ESL in schools;
- Provide a minimum 12-month entitlement to young refugees in the ESL New Arrivals Program, with the possibility of extending for a further six months;
- Ensure the infrastructure needs of the ELS/C’s are being met in line with the numbers of new arrivals settling in the Greater Dandenong area;
- Review existing frameworks and engage in greater debate about how to ensure adequate English proficiency levels are reached through the ESL New Arrivals Program;
- Develop a comprehensive transition program for young people exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program and moving into mainstream schools;\(^1\) and
- Develop a targeted approach to engage and inform parents about the education system and culture in Australia.

Although there was a general consensus among interviewees that current ESL programs and pathways for new arrivals were not adequately catering to the needs of many young refugees, the limited timeframe for this snapshot analysis prevented a more thorough and representative survey of the issues. It was identified that there is a lack of comprehensive data and analysis available on the outcomes of the ESL New Arrivals Program (i.e., tracking young people after they have left the ESL NAP to identify pathways taken), suggesting a need for a further longitudinal study.

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\(^1\) Since this research was conducted, the Department of Education and Training has introduced transition coordinators into all English Language Schools and Centres, an initiative welcomed by CMYI and SELLEN.
1
INTRODUCTION
1.1. Background to the project

The ‘Analysis of the ESL New Arrivals Program for Young Refugees’ (AENAPYR) project is a southern region research and community consultation project initiated by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) in partnership with the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELEN). The analysis, of which this report is the end product, is one element of CMYI’s Young Refugees in the Picture Project, a project that aims to assist the development of a coordinated service response to newly-arrived young refugees through the implementation of strategic planning, training and support, and the establishment of partnerships with key agencies across Victoria.

The motivation behind this analysis of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for new arrivals should be apparent considering the crucial role that English proficiency plays in ensuring the smooth transition of refugees and recent migrants into life in Australia. A well-structured and flexible ESL New Arrivals Program is needed to provide the first stage of English language learning for newly arrived students in order to increase their participation in mainstream schooling, training and employment. At the same time, the composition of Australia’s refugee intake is constantly changing and there are frequently new issues that arise due to the pre-migration experiences and different backgrounds of the communities that are arriving.

The CMYI-SELEN-City of Greater Dandenong reference group, representing a wide range of service providers working with young refugees in Greater Dandenong (Appendix 1), initially identified some issues around how the current intake of new arrival students are being prepared for mainstream schooling, education and employment, and this snapshot analysis became a vehicle for further exploration of these issues.

The AENAPYR project aims to resource and support the CMYI-SELEN-City of Greater Dandenong reference group to be in a position to advocate on behalf of young refugees about the ESL New Arrivals Program and subsequent ESL learning pathways open to refugee young people.

1.2. Project partners

This is a partnership project between the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELEN), with a project reference group comprising of key youth, settlement, education and mainstream service providers within the City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) area.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues is a statewide community-based organisation that aims to strengthen and build innovative partnerships between young people, support services and the community to enhance life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds living in Victoria. The Centre has a priority focus on young people from refugee and newly arrived communities. CMYI represents a range of individuals and organisations from CLD communities, government and non-government organisations, with a commitment to improving the social and personal status of young people from CLD backgrounds.

The South East Local Learning & Employment Network is an incorporated community partnership comprising schools, universities, TAFE, ACE providers, employers, employer bodies, members of the indigenous community, local government, people from the local community, and organisations providing employment assistance, training and other community services for young people in the South East, all of whom are committed to creating an environment of maximum benefit to young people in post-compulsory years of schooling.
1.3. Objectives and research design

The ‘Analysis of the ESL New Arrivals Program for Young Refugees’ project was designed to achieve a number of central objectives (Appendix 2). Within the framework of these objectives, this research report seeks to address a number of key questions:

- Is the ESL New Arrivals Program equipping young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences with the language skills necessary to make a successful transition into mainstream education, training or employment?

- What are some of the positive practices taking place in ESL programs for new arrivals and what are some of the gaps and barriers as experienced by young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences?

- What are the current transition experiences of young people moving out of the ESL New Arrivals Program and into mainstream education?

- What information is already available on participation in and outcomes of ESL programs for new arrivals, and where are there gaps in data?

The research design adopted for this analysis involved a number of components:

Component 1:
Review of national literature
The literature review identified existing research on best practices, background information on ESL NAP and other ESL statistics, definitions of refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences, government policy on services offered to refugees.

Component 2:
Interviews with relevant service providers in the City of Greater Dandenong area
Using an interview schedule (Appendix 3), 19 service providers who are working directly with young refugees and recent migrants with refugee-like experiences were interviewed to identify positive practices and gaps and barriers in ESL programs for new arrivals as they perceive them. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Approximately 13 hours of audio was recorded. Interviews took from between 25 minutes and one-and-a-half hours.

Service providers included representatives from migrant welfare organisations, ESL NAP providers (ELS/C’s, AMES), mainstream secondary schools, TAFE ESL provider, community organisations, government departments and employment agencies. Service Providers were selected by convenience directly from the project Reference Group (Appendix 1) or through recommendations put forward by Reference Group members.

Component 3:
Interviews with young refugees and migrants who have been through the ESL New Arrivals Program.
Eight young people were identified using a convenience sample (i.e. those known and nominated by Reference Group members). Interviewees were selected on the basis of the following criteria: aged between 12 and 25; had already finished an ESL New Arrivals Program; had been in Australia for less than 24 months.

The sample of young people included:
- Ethiopian female, 16, with disrupted schooling;
- Russian female, 22;
- Cambodian male, 22;
- Bosnian female, 17;
- Malay male, 16;
- Cambodian male, 15;
- Afghani female, 19, with disrupted schooling;
- Serbian male, 22.

An interview schedule was used (Appendix 4) and interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Parental consent was acquired for all participants under the age of 18. Each interview ran from between 10 and 20 minutes.

1.4. Research limitations

It should be noted that the limited timeframe for this project restricted the undertaking of comprehensive qualitative and supplementary quantitative research, which would have been the preferred approach.

Organising interviews with young people, particularly where parental consent is required, proved especially difficult within the project’s timeframe. The consequence of this was that all of the young people interviewed were still engaged in some form of education (either at secondary school, TAFE, or an ESL program) as it was much harder to track down and obtain parental consent from those who had disengaged from the education system. Ideally, a much broader sample of young people would have been interviewed. Another major limitation relating to the interview sample was that no Sudanese young people were interviewed (although one service provider did represent this community), and only two of the young people interviewed had a history of disrupted schooling.

Issues surrounding young refugees in the education system became more of a focus of this research than employment issues. This was largely due to the types of service providers sampled (only one employment service provider was interviewed).

Recognising the limitations of this project, this research was still able to successfully provide a snapshot of issues relating to ESL programs for newly arrived young refugees with a view to highlighting major issues and identifying future research needs.
E.S.L PROVISION FOR NEWLY ARRIVED YOUNG REFUGEES
2.1. Defining young refugees and the ‘refugee experience’

The conventional definition of ‘refugees’, as defined in the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, are people who:

…are outside their country of nationality or their usual country of residence; and are unable or unwilling to return or to seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and among other things, are not war criminals or people who have committed serious non-political crimes.

Australia ratified this UN Convention in 1954 and, despite a number of revisions to the Australian interpretation of this UN definition, it remains central to Australian refugee and humanitarian resettlement policy.

There are a number of different categories of visas given to refugees and humanitarian arrivals based on this definition of ‘refugee’ and other determining factors (e.g. method of arrival into Australia). The two main streams of the humanitarian program are the offshore and onshore components (see Figure 2.1), and with the different categories within these two streams come different entitlements to government support and services. Without going into the politics of these categories and corresponding entitlements (for a good discussion on this debate, see Coventry et al. 2003, Chapter 2), this study deals only with those young people who successfully receive the entitlement to participate in a government-funded ESL New Arrivals Program.

To clarify, this study refers to young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences. This clarification seeks to include not just those young people who are classified as ‘refugees’ by their visa category, but also young people who have had refugee-like experiences. That is, we do not wish to exclude young people who have arrived in Australia on a variety of different visas not necessarily associated with refugee or humanitarian arrivals, but who have gone through similar experiences to those arriving on any of the visa categories listed in Figure 2.1.

According to Coventry et al. (2003), services and support for young refugees in Australia should not be completely dependent upon their visa status, as many migrants who have arrived on non-refugee visas (e.g. family reunions) share the refugee experience. Thus services and support should be provided on a needs basis. ‘Refugee experience’ can be defined as:

...including exposure to political, religious or intercultural violence, persecution or oppression, armed conflict or civil discord which incorporates the following basic elements:

• a state of fearfulness for self and family members;
• leaving the country of origin at short notice;
• inability to return to the country of origin; and
• uncertainty about the possibility of maintaining links with family and home.

- Coventry et al., 2003, p.14-5

In terms of what defines a young refugee, our client group includes young people aged 12 to 25.

Figure 2.1

Young people 12-25 years, entering or staying under the offshore and onshore components of the Humanitarian Program in Victoria, by visa category, FY 2003-04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanitarian Program</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of intake</th>
<th>Entitled to ESL NAP funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offshore Component</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian - In Country Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) **</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian – Global Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women at Risk</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offshore subtotal</strong></td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Onshore Component</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore Protection - Permanent Protection Visas (PPV) (authorised arrivals) and Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) (unauthorised arrivals)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Onshore subtotal</strong></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMIA Settlement Database, 2004
2.2. Current trends in Australia’s refugee and humanitarian settlement program

Australia has a long history of accepting refugees and other types of migrants. The post-World War II period was a time when especially large waves of migrants arrived from Europe. Over the 17-year period from 1975 to 1992, Australia formally accepted for resettlement one refugee for every 86 persons in Australia. This is the third highest rate in the world after Sweden and Canada (Coventry et al. 2003, p. 57).

Over the past 10 years, Australia’s intake of migrants has varied in both its size and composition (see Figure 2.2). Of particular note in terms of this research project is the reduction in the proportion and number arriving under the humanitarian category and also the introduction of the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) category. TPV’s are granted for a varying amount of time – usually between 30 months and 5 years - to those who have made successful onshore applications for refugee status. Introduced in 1999, TPVs are a restricted visa type that curb family reunion rights, provide limited access to income support and restrict entitlements to English language tuition. Young unaccompanied males from Afghanistan have been the primary recipients of TPVs (see Figure 2.3).

Another major shift in Australia’s humanitarian settlement program is the increase in the proportion of people arriving on Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) visas. These visas require holders to pay for their own airfare and medical expenses and often involve families incurring debts of $11,000 or more (Heath, 2003, p.23). This trend has implications in terms of placing increased pressure on young refugees to repay debts, and may result in young people wishing to move out of English language schools/classes and into the workforce as quickly as possible, regardless of whether they have acquired the language skills necessary to be able to find long-term, secure employment.

### Figure 2.2


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family migration</td>
<td>49,941</td>
<td>37,078</td>
<td>19,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>42,836</td>
<td>20,210</td>
<td>32,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian (<em>includes refugees</em>)</td>
<td>11,948</td>
<td>13,632</td>
<td>7,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special eligibility</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-program migration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand citizen</td>
<td>13,345</td>
<td>13,618</td>
<td>31,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,934</td>
<td>2,456</td>
<td>1,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>121,227</td>
<td>87,428</td>
<td>92,272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMIA, Immigration in Brief, 2000

### Figure 2.3

**Temporary Protection Visa’s Granted in Australia to People Aged 12-26 by Country of Birth, 1999-2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinian Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>336</strong></td>
<td><strong>1573</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CMYI, Humanitarian Youth Arrivals to Victoria, June 2003
Young people from the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Former Yugoslavia represent the largest components of the recent onshore and offshore humanitarian programs for the 12- to 26-year-old age group settling in Victoria (see Figure 2.4). In 2003, the top countries of origin for new arrival students enrolling in government schools were: Sudan, China, Iraq, India, Afghanistan and Vietnam (DE&T ESL report, 2003).

The key African countries of refuge from which the Australian government has accepted refugee arrivals are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. These countries represent 56.4 percent of total Humanitarian Youth Arrivals. While in recent years the intake from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia has been quite high, arrivals from Sudan have now emerged as the largest proportion of the African intake and represent 44.7 percent of total youth arrivals. In relation to the Middle East, key source countries include Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, reflecting the conflicts of recent years in these countries. Young people from the Former Yugoslavia, previously the largest component of the Youth Arrival intake, now represent 3.8 percent of total youth arrivals. The resolution of the Balkan conflict has been the primary reason for this reduction. (DIMIA Settlement Database, 2004)

In terms of the size of the Sudanese community in particular (of all ages), Figure 2.5 shows the dramatic growth of Sudanese arrivals in Victoria over the past five years.

**Figure 2.4**

Humanitarian Youth Entrants in Victoria Aged 12-26 by Country of Birth, July 2003 to June 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>New Arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovia</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed. Repub. of Yugoslavia</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicates less than three persons.

NB: It should be noted that the countries of birth listed above do not necessarily represent the ethnicity of the humanitarian entrant. For example, it is likely that those originating from Turkey are ethnic Kurds. Similarly, entrants from Croatia are likely to be Serbian.

Source: DIMIA Settlement Database, 2004

**Figure 2.5**

Sudanese Arrivals under Offshore Humanitarian Progrrom in VICTORIA
The data presented in Figure 2.6 illustrates the tendency for newly arrived young people and their families to move to particular Local Government Areas (LGAs) during the initial period of settlement. The City of Greater Dandenong, the focus LGA for this research, hosts the largest number of new humanitarian arrivals (31 percent of total humanitarian youth arrivals in 2003-04).

Figure 2.6
Humanitarian Youth Entrants in Victoria Aged 12-26 by Local Government Area, July 2003 to June 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Area</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Local Government Area</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Local Government Area</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Greater Geelong</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Moonee Valley</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Greater Shepparton</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Moreland</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banyule</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Hobsons Bay</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Port Phillip</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Coast</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Hume</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Stonnington</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayside</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boroondara</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Knox</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Warnambool</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brimbank</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Manningham</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Whitehorse</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Monash</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Whittlesea</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colac-Otway</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Maroondah</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wyndham</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darebin</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yarra</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankston</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Melton</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen Eira</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mildura</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Melbourne (unspecified)</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greater Dandenong</strong></td>
<td>336</td>
<td>Monash</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicates less than three persons

TOTAL VICTORIA 1083

Source: DIMIA, Settlement Database, 2004

Also reflecting this concentration of new arrivals in the City of Greater Dandenong, Figure 2.7 shows the high proportion of the Greater Dandenong population from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) who categorise themselves as speaking English ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’. This has obvious implications in terms of providing settlement and other services to cater for large concentrations of new arrivals and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

Figure 2.7
Local Government Area with the Highest Proportion who Speak English Not well or Not at all

- Victoria: 2001 Census

Source: FECCA, URL
2.3. Government response to refugee new arrivals: the education policy context

Looking at the government’s broader education policy context (see following section) we see that there is a commitment at the policy level to addressing the education needs of culturally and linguistically diverse-, and more generally disadvantaged, young people. Achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks is also a government priority.

**Department of Education and Training: ‘Blueprint for Victorian Government Schools’**

Released in November 2003, the Blueprint for Victorian Government Schools has as one of its priority areas ‘recognising and responding to diverse student needs’. The Blueprint has clear implications for the wide range of ESL learners and for programs and support services for students from language backgrounds other than English. In particular, the report states that:

The Government aims to improve the learning outcomes for all students. This can only be achieved if we acknowledge the diversity of student needs in the development of local and system-wide responses. This applies obviously to curriculum and organisational arrangements, which must cater for different learning styles and challenge all students. It also applies to the manner in which the Government manages and funds the government school system. The funding model should reflect the fact that not all student cohorts in each school are the same.


**Victorian Schools Innovation Commission: ‘Refugees in Government Schools’**

The Victorian Schools Innovation Commission (VSIC) was established in 2001 by the State government to act as an independent not-for-profit educational think tank. Its role is to develop, research and share innovation in public education - locally, nationally and internationally.

Of particular relevance to this research, VSIC has initiated the Refugees in Government Schools Project, which aims to address issues that face refugee children in government schools. The project began in February 2003 and involved the establishment of a working party, a review of the literature and existing research; a consultation process within the government, education, refugee, multicultural, youth and community sectors; mapping and documentation of existing and successful programs and initiatives, and; development of a three year plan.


The State, Territory and Australian Government Ministers of Education met as the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in Adelaide in April 1999. In reaching agreement, the State, Territory and Australian Government Ministers of Education made an historic commitment to improving Australian schooling within a framework of national collaboration. Among the outlined goals of the declaration, and relevant to newly arrived young refugees, was the goal that:

Schooling should be socially just, so that:

3.1 students’ outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students’ socio-economic background or geographic location.

3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students. […]

3.6 all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

(http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm)
2.4. ESL for newly arrived young people: policy & trends

The Australian government recognises that English proficiency is one of the essential factors in determining the successful transition of refugees and migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds into Australian society:

A large body of research confirms that the most significant indicator of settlement need is English language proficiency. English is Australia’s national language, used in commerce and everyday life. A good command of the English language is essential for full participation in Australian society.

- DIMIA, 2003, p.91

Recognising this need, both the federal and state governments have made a commitment to providing a number of direct services to new arrivals to assist them in overcoming English proficiency difficulties. These services include:

• **English language tuition** delivered under contract in classroom settings, through distance learning and through voluntary home tutors...

• **Translating and interpreting services**, provided through TIS for all non-English speaking residents of Australia and for those who need to communicate with them...

- DIMIA, 2003, p.89

The Department of Education and Training defines newly arrived ESL learners as those who meet the eligibility criteria for Commonwealth per-student funding for the target group of students. They include permanent residents from language backgrounds other than English in need of intensive English language tuition. Students must enrol in an intensive ESL program within six months of their arrival in Australia if they are in Years 1 to 12, or within 18 months of arrival if they are in the Preparatory year. In addition to those students who meet these criteria, a significant number of new arrivals who do not meet the residency criteria, as well as students on bridging visas seeking asylum, are able to access an intensive program if they are eligible to enrol as non-fee-paying students in government schools. (DE&T ESL Report 2003)

In 2003, 3673 new arrivals from more than 100 countries enrolled in Victorian government schools. The majority, 2707 (73.7 per cent), including 44 on temporary protection visas, met Commonwealth eligibility criteria. The other 966 students (26.3 per cent) did not meet the residency criterion. These included students on New Zealand passports and students on bridging or temporary visas. (DE&T ESL Report 2003)

**ESL for newly arrived students in intensive programs**

Newly arrived students from language backgrounds other than English who meet eligibility criteria (see previous discussion) are able to access free intensive ESL tuition for between six to twelve months through the ESL New Arrivals Program. Anecdotal evidence gathered through this research suggests that the majority of eligible secondary-level students in the research area attended an English Language School or Centre for two or three terms (6-9 months), with six months being considered the standard length of time. ESL is taught through the content areas of the Key Learning Areas.

There are nine English Language Schools and Centres located within Melbourne’s metropolitan area. The four English Language Schools are stand-alone schools and cater for both primary and secondary students up to the equivalent of Year 10. The five English Language Centres are attached to mainstream primary and secondary schools. In addition to intensive fulltime programs conducted in ELS/Cs, the new arrivals program includes a primary outposting program, programs in regional Victoria, and an Isolated ESL student program for country Victoria.

The Department of Education and Training has also initiated an ESL outreach program. As a result of changing settlement patterns which have seen newly arrived students enrolling in schools not normally accustomed to catering for such students, an Outreach Services Coordinator has been placed in each of the four metropolitan English Language Schools (including one based at Noble Park ELS in Greater Dandenong) to provide services to schools within their regions.

Outreach Services Coordinators, in cooperation with schools, are available to assist teachers to assess the English language learning needs of newly arrived students and recommend the most suitable support program available, such as attendance at an ELS/C, outposting or visiting outposting program. In cases where these options are not appropriate, Outreach Services Coordinators develop an individual/school-based program for the student, provide information to schools and parents about the New Arrivals Program, and ensure schools are aware of the full range of resources available to them to support
newly-arrived students, including materials and professional development. (www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/enew.htm)

Transition coordinators have also recently been put in place in each English language school and centre to further assist the transition of recently arrived students from intensive programs into mainstream schools.

ESL support for students in mainstream schools

ESL index funding is allocated to schools to provide on-going post-arrival ESL programs and support. As not all students from language backgrounds other than English require specific ESL teaching, students are required to satisfy the following two criteria to be eligible for ESL index funding:

- the main language spoken at home is not English;
- students have been enrolled in an Australian school for less than seven years.

A weighted formula that reflects both the length of time in an Australian school and the stage of schooling is then applied to the students identified. If entitled to a place in a government school, young refugees are automatically eligible for on-going ESL support. It is up to individual schools to decide on how to administer this on-going support.

There are several possible models for the organisation of ESL programs in mainstream schools, and programs vary according to the needs of students attending each school. In the annual ESL Survey (2003), schools identified three broad program types for ESL in schools programs:

- Direct intensive instruction – direct intensive ESL teaching in similar-needs or parallel classes, including transition classes for students who have recently exited from an English language school or centre in which the ESL teacher uses content from the mainstream program.
- Team teaching – team teaching and/or support teaching where ESL and mainstream teachers plan and teach together.
- Other – programs not covered by the above.

On top of ESL index funding, more than $7 million was allocated to government schools in 2003 for the employment of multicultural education aides to assist with communication between the school and parents of students from language backgrounds other than English. Multicultural aides also assist students in the classroom on a one-to-one basis. 52 government schools within the Southern Metropolitan region received multicultural education aide funding in 2003.

Interpreting and translation services are also provided by the Department of Education and Training as part of their ESL program.

The ESL New Arrivals Program in the City of Greater Dandenong

Located within the City of Greater Dandenong are two English Language Centres and one English Language School. These are:

- Noble Park English Language School (P-10)
- Westall English Language Centre (Secondary)
- Springvale English Language Centre (Primary)

Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) runs a Youth Program for New Arrivals in Noble Park that is government-funded. This is a standard 510-hour program with the option for students to extend for an unrestricted period of time by paying a subsidised course fee. This program caters predominantly to 16- to 25-year-olds.

Chisholm Institute in Dandenong also runs an ESL Youth Program, although this is administered as a TAFE course and is not funded through the government’s ESL New Arrivals Program.

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2 It should be noted that an advantage of the six-month program is that spaces in ELS/C’s are freed up quickly and newly arrived young people do not generally have to be put on waiting lists. For more details on the actual use of the 6-month or 12-month programs in the research area, see section 3.6.2.
3 For more information, refer to: www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/enew.htm
4 See ESL Report 2003, Appendix 7, for details of ESL index levels, weightings and per capita funding rates for 2003.
5 NB: In 2004, the Federal government increased funding to enable humanitarian entrants aged 16–24 with low levels of schooling to be offered up to 400 hours tuition under the Special Preparatory Program (English language) and supplement existing hours offered to those over 24 years.
A large body of research confirms that the most significant indicator of settlement need is English language proficiency. English is Australia’s national language, used in commerce and everyday life. A good command of the English language is essential for full participation in Australian society.

- DIMIA, 2003, p.91
3
RESEARCH
FINDINGS
3.0. Presentation of the findings

Issues and themes that were raised during interviews with both service providers and young people, as well as issues documented in existing research, have been presented in summarised form and where possible have been accompanied by quotes taken directly from interviews to illustrate points. This qualitative approach aims to provide the reader with a survey of the current issues and concerns surrounding ESL provision for new arrivals from the point of view of young people themselves and the service providers who are working directly with them.

NB: The use of ‘…’ in the notation of quotes is for grammatical reasons only and does not indicate missing words. Use of ‘[…]’ indicates skipped dialogue. Words contained in ‘[]’ are editor’s own.

The findings section of this report has been divided by theme into the following sub-headings:

3.1 The importance of English language and other factors in determining the successful transition of young refugees into mainstream education and employment

3.2 Young refugees’ attitudes toward secondary schooling

3.3 Young refugees’ experiences of mainstream secondary schooling and the transition period

3.4 Young refugees’ attitudes and experiences of employment

3.5 General feedback about the ESL New Arrivals Program

3.6 Gaps and barriers in ESL programs for new arrivals

3.7 Positive practices in ESL programs for new arrivals

3.8 Ways forward

3.9 Future research needs

3.10 Key recommendations

3.1. The importance of English language and other factors in determining the successful transition of young refugees into mainstream education and employment

The importance of English proficiency in ensuring successful participation in education, employment and training is well established. Extensive research has shown the important role that English language proficiency plays in determining the successful integration of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) into Australian society (O’Loughlin & Watson, 1997). DIMIA’s Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants states that:

Studies based on [DIMIA’s Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia] data indicate that English proficiency and the capacity to learn English are key factors in enabling new arrivals to enjoy positive experiences against the range of settlement indicators. Conversely, the inability to speak English places restrictions on full social and economic participation in Australian society and this in turn exercises an impact on economic and physical wellbeing.

DIMIA, 2003, p.78 – emphasis added

This statement was supported anecdotally through the interviews conducted as part of this research. As one service provider related:

“I used to work in the CES in the 1980s [...] and people would come in as refugees from Vietnam [...] and they’d get off the plane and they’d go and work in Nissan and places like that and they would quit going to English language classes [...] and ten or twenty years later you’ve got people coming in [to collect unemployment benefits] who start mature age English classes [...] if you don’t get your language right you’re on the back foot for the rest of your life.”

– Government Service Provider

All of the service providers interviewed stressed the pivotal role that English plays in ensuring that young refugees are equipped to make a successful transition into mainstream education and employment and into life in Australia in general:

“I think that language skills are absolutely vital. They enable social relationships, they enable confidence, they enable [young people] a sense of control over their world...”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

“I think it’s very important. That determines everything. Their language determines their skill levels, and their language also determines their confidence and self-esteem as well. And I
3.2. Young refugees’ attitudes to secondary schooling

A recurring theme that came up time and time again in interviews regarding the attitudes and hopes of young refugees’ and migrants towards secondary school is that it is the educational ideal. It seems that often the expectations of both parents and young people are very high with regards to the outcomes they hope to achieve at secondary school, and many service providers commented on the pressure that young refugees’ are under to finish VCE and to go on to university:

“…that’s where they want to be, they see that they’ll get a good future [...] and mainly it’s the educational ideal for them.”

– Service provider, TAFE

“…if these kids are to get out of their poverty trap and the welfare trap they have to have every opportunity to pick up English and to be able to succeed in the education system and to be able to access pathways, and they need language to do that. So I would say one hundred percent if you want to see the successful integration of new immigrants into our society, and not being a social security burden, then you’ve got to set them up with the tools from the start.”

– Service provider, mainstream secondary school

“…they know education is a road out, a way to better things, so their expectations are high … and they have fragile dreams, if you like, of realising them. So they might want to… I’ve heard kids say: I want to be an accountant. I want to be a computer analyst. They’ve got big dreams and big hopes, whether or not they’ll be realised…”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

Attitudes towards secondary school often change after young refugees have made the transition out of the intensive ESL New Arrivals Programs and into mainstream schooling, particularly if they have found the transition difficult. The sentiments observed by service providers included: “frustrated,” “depressed,” “pretty dark” and “feeling like a failure.”

“…they want to succeed. There’s no question. The vast majority want to go through school and become some sort of professional I think, or trade, depending on what they’re interested in. I think their expectations are often beyond their ability after they’ve been [in Australia] for a short time. But once they get to secondary school they realise, some of them, that it’s not that easy, and that must be very upsetting for them… and that’s when problems arise.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

English language proficiency is obviously not the only factor that will determine the success of a young person in negotiating mainstream education and employment. Other contributing factors that were raised during interviews included: having a strong support network, understanding the Australian education and employment systems, individual personality and initiative, having financial security, and having a welcoming school environment. Some comments included:

“I think for anyone it depends on the support you have around you. And if you’re fortunate enough to have a family when you’re not quite sure where you’re going or what you’re doing. To hold you up when you do something stupid, you know… it’s just a support network.”

– Government service provider

“Also the financial stability… to know that they’re either working or that they have some sort of income that’s stable so they don’t have to worry about having to leave school and get a job.”

– Government service provider

“…that feeling of welcome and belonging and supportiveness in school, from both staff and peers, is crucial I think.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

“…that’s where they want to be, they see that they’ll get a good future [...] and mainly it’s the educational ideal for them.”

– Service provider, TAFE
3.3. Young refugees’ experiences of mainstream secondary schooling and the transition period

For many of the young refugees in the 14- to 18-year-old age group, coping with the transition into mainstream secondary schooling has proved quite difficult. A number of the young people interviewed said they did not feel ready or prepared for secondary school after exiting English Language Schools/Centres. All young people interviewed exited the ESL NAP after six months, and comments regarding their experiences of school included: “Very, very difficult” and “very hard”.

After a year-and-a-half in mainstream school, one 16-year-old boy commented that he still only understood about 65 percent of what was going on in class. Another young woman who was asked whether she felt happy with her level of English after 10 months in a mainstream school, replied:

“I’m happy with how I understand but I’m not happy with how I explain things. Because I’m in Year 10 now and I’m going to be in Year 11 next year it’s going to be so hard, so I don’t think it’s a good stage to be in in Year 10.”
– Young person, exited ESL NAP 10 months ago.

These concerns about many young people being unprepared for the difficulties of mainstream education were shared by service providers, with many relating serious concerns that young refugees were dropping out of school or failing because their English language skills were not adequate.

“A lot of my clients tried school but they couldn’t, they just drop out in the middle of their schooling. After six months or from two terms to four terms in the ESL studies they are encouraged, or more or less forced, to go to mainstream schooling… and they have to accept that and move on, and after a couple of years, or actually after the first year or first semester of Year 10 or Year 11 they have to stop, they have to drop out.”
– Refugee youth welfare worker

“They’re just not ready to go into mainstream…”
– Government service provider

Another concern raised was that many young people are being put in year levels where they do not have the basic skills to cope due to a combination of inadequate English language proficiency, lack of basic educational and learning skills due to disrupted schooling, and the fact that many young people also have to cope with complex social and welfare issues relating to their refugee experience on top of everything else. This is a difficult issue to address, as it requires appropriately juggling both the educational and socialisation needs of newly arrived young people.

“If you ask me the biggest problem, the possibilities for success are very low, because generally kids are coming into our secondary school not at Year 7 or Year 8, they’re coming in at Year 10 level and Year 9 level […] and having to cope with VCE very quickly and so it’s a recipe for disaster. And if you haven’t got the skills to cope in the classroom you’re not going to feel good about yourself. And that’s what happens. You can stereotype, you know, you see it happen a million times… kids start skipping school, they meet kids outside at the internet cafes and they’re easy fodder… And we don’t want these kids, many of who have a good brain, to end up being factory fodder.”
– Service provider, mainstream secondary school

“Well, I suppose it’s not so much about the school itself it’s about their lives, and there would be very few refugee kids that come into our school that don’t have significant issues in their home lives. So many of the kids we’re seeing, especially in the last few years, are coming without families or […] they might be with mum but many of their family are overseas. The African kids […] that we’ve got here… the family breaks down and they’re coming out independently and staying with cousins or whoever is supporting them and they’re real issues. You’re talking about families that are very often living in very poor conditions. There’s often no male role model, the kids are struggling with their language in school, there’s no money, it’s often very difficult to find rental accommodation because they can’t provide the references necessary to get into some sort of reasonable accommodation, you know, and if they’re not succeeding at school… it isn’t easy for them if they’re coming in at Year 10 level to come in with very little English. It’s a bit of a disaster really.”
– Service provider, mainstream secondary school

Through this research it was suggested that ESL in mainstream schools, which is designed to carry on the English learning process that is started in the ESL NAP, often does not adequately cater for the complex learning needs of newly arrived refugee young people, particularly those who have had severely disrupted schooling. Where ESL index funding is allocated through global school budgets, it is up to individual schools to decide upon and administer ESL programs as they deem appropriate. It is thus difficult to measure the outcomes of this funding and whether this part of the program is adequately catering to the needs of refugee young people.

Mainstream school providers interviewed during this research did, however, highlight some of the major difficulties they were facing:

“We’ve got two South Sudanese boys that have just come in from the language school.
Their language isn’t good. They seem quite happy when I speak to them [... but in the classroom it’s hell. You know they’re not managing well. They’re going to do Year 10 again. They’re about six foot four, so physically they look much older… in fact they’re not that young either. We have guidelines from the government that kids have to be out of Year 10 by 18 otherwise we don’t get funding for them, so you’re forced to push kids through.”

- Service provider, mainstream secondary school

The push and pull factors that contribute to the often-premature transition of young people out of the ESL NAP and into mainstream schools are worth briefly noting here. In terms of push factors, the ESL NAP is designed as a six- to twelve-month program and the funding base reflects this. There is a limit therefore put on how much intensive ESL the English Language Schools and Centres (ELS/C’s) can provide. This is a particularly relevant push factor if physical space is also an issue at ELS/Cs.

“We think that some young people should stay longer [than the 12 month limit], but we’ve got so many students waiting to come in and we only receive funding from the government for a certain number of months, so we have no choice. Because we have to say: we can keep this student for one more term or we take on other students that need to start totally.”

- Service Provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

Secondly, parents’ expectations can push young people to move out of the ESL NAP and into mainstream schooling sooner rather than later, particularly if parents do not understand the demands that the Australian education system is likely to place on a young person.

For students who are in the post-compulsory school age bracket, another push factor is the limited time that they have to enrol in secondary school and complete VCE before they are considered too old. That is, a 16-year-old has less flexibility to learn English over an extended period of time because they must enrol and complete secondary school before they reach a certain age.

In terms of pull factors, young people often want to leave the ESL NAP as soon as possible. This has to do with the general attitudes towards secondary school discussed earlier, and also young people’s desire to fit in with others in their age group who are studying in mainstream schools.

 “[Young people] themselves don’t want to stay longer with us. They think that they are missing out and yet when they are faced with reality they realise what a mistake it was…”

- Service Provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

3.4. Young refugees’ attitudes and experiences of employment

One of the findings that became apparent through interviews is that many newly arrived young people are very keen to find jobs, whether this is part-time or casual employment while they are still at school, or full-time employment if they have left the education system. One of the reasons why young refugees are keen to find employment is that many are under pressure to earn money to send to family overseas, or feel they must help their family in Australia repay debts associated with their migration:

“So if you ask the kids, I’m talking specifically about the African kids because they are the most recent arrivals, they’d all like to get a job.”

- Service provider, mainstream secondary school

“… there are also problems that they are seen as having landed in the land of opportunity, basically, and they are under strong pressure to send money back home to their relatives, friends, whatever, in the refugee camps in Kenya or Egypt. […] generally a lot of them have got airfares outstanding as well…”

- Employment service provider

The anecdotal evidence regarding young refugees’ actual experiences of finding employment, however, was mixed. Some service providers commented on the difficulties young people are facing finding casual or part-time employment while still at school, especially for more recent arrivals. Success rates for refugee young people appear to be low, particularly in finding jobs in the service industry where most Australian youth tend to work (e.g. in supermarkets, restaurants, etc.). Some of the recurring reasons given for this lack of success included: poor English language skills, different interaction styles working against young people from certain cultural backgrounds during interviews, lack of understanding of the employment system, limited networks, and racism.

“The whole environment is unfamiliar to them … I think the job network system is complex and accessing all the services that are out there is a big thing… so if their English language skills are a barrier then everything else becomes a barrier as well.”

- Government service provider

“The difficulties are getting through interviews, even getting an interview… given that they sometimes look different, they have different interaction styles, their accents or language skills might wipe them off because of first impressions or because of a phone call, rather than an assessing what their abilities are.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

“And then we get the ones who are going to school who come in immediately after… like now [school holidays] wanting to get work. And they want to work, but they haven’t got the skills to be working
While the limited evidence seems to suggest that newly arrived young people are experiencing difficulty in finding part-time or casual employment in service industries, particularly while they are still engaged in education, there is more evidence to suggest that young people are finding employment once they have left the education system. The kinds of jobs they are finding are as process workers in the manufacturing sector, as manual labourers in the agricultural, meat processing and dairy industries, and in other generally low-skill occupations. Some concerns were raised regarding the limited type of employment open to these young people, particularly due to their limited English:

“Those that have learnt English and think that they can speak it very well […] but when it comes to filling in application forms, they can’t do it. That’s when the whole thing starts to fall down, because they then suddenly realise that they haven’t got the skills that they need to get into even the basic jobs.”

- Employment service provider

“A lot of them who have failed in education – couldn’t concentrate – have found jobs in some sort of factory. […] I don’t think it’s very fulfilling, but it’s a job and they think it’s better than school. And they want to be doing it rather than being at school and failing at everything. … But I think it’s because they don’t know where to go or what to do.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

“They find it more difficult to get work and I believe that’s got to do with their English level… There are jobs that you don’t need a high level of English such as factory work, farm work, delivering papers… but with it comes lots and lots of other problems. If they do get work they are often suited very poorly. They don’t have a good understanding of occupational health and safety… and it comes back to English. So there are multiple problems to not having a high enough level of English.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

The future employment prospects of those young people who have found casual work in the manufacturing and agricultural sector was also raised as a concern through the interviews, particularly for those who had not acquired a necessary level of English.

“No one who do manage to get jobs are only generally getting into what I call the casual, machine-operating and process work, which is never going to give them a secure future. Because in order to have more stability in that environment, unless they’re particularly lucky, they’ve generally got to do a forklift course or some other course to make their skills more attractive to the employer. Of course you can’t do that if you can’t read what’s actually got to happen on the course. So it’s a vicious cycle to be perfectly honest… And I think for a lot of them they get stuck in that cycle of taking one casual job after another.”

- Employment service provider

3.5. General feedback about the ESL New Arrivals Program

The feedback coming from both service providers and young people interviewed was overwhelmingly positive with regards to the English Language Schools and Centres (ELS/C). The ELS/C’s were generally perceived to be nurturing, caring environments for new arrivals, and the teachers were especially credited as being valuable assets to the ESL New Arrivals Program:

“I ask [the students]: what did you enjoy? They say: ‘Oh, everything! The teachers are friendly.’ They have a wonderful experience at the [ELS/Cs] and one of the main reasons they give for that is the teachers.”

- Service provider, mainstream secondary school

“…I’ve heard very good things about [the ELS/C’s]… I think too the genuine care means so much to these kids. It really helps them feel they belong; that they are valued; that they are an important part of that school. So those sorts of things I think are just brilliant.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

The biggest comment or concern that was raised again and again by service providers was the limited time that young people were spending at the English Language Schools and Centres (in the ESL NAP), and the limited English proficiency that was being achieved within this timeframe. This was generally not seen as a reflection on the quality of the ELS/C’s, but on deficiencies in the structure and implementation of the ESL NAP, and on the attitudes and expectations of young people and their families’ resulting in the premature transition of young people into mainstream schools:

“…what [the ELS/C’s] do to get these kids to where they are after six months is more than excellent, and I think it goes back to the teachers. You know, the patience that they have, the commitment, and they do know the kids very well. […] And I think the other factors that come into it – the disrupted schooling – I think they deal with it as best as they can. But, like I was saying before, they need more time at the language centre… But I think that’s outside the language centre’s control.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

“…Although they love their teachers and all of that, the level [of English] that they’re getting is not enough.”

- Refugee youth welfare worker

“I think that [the ELS/C’s] engage well with the young people that come and that they develop that relationship. But I can turn that into a negative and say they’re only there for six months, so they develop that relationship, but what then? It doesn’t necessarily help them in the future…”

- Refugee youth welfare worker
3.6. Gaps and barriers in ESL programs for new arrivals

Although feedback regarding the work of English Language Schools and Centres was overwhelmingly positive, there were a number of key issues raised by service providers regarding how ESL provision was working as a whole for current intakes of young refugees. The consensus seems to be that the system is not set up to adequately cater for certain groups of new arrivals and the outcome of this failure is largely being played out in secondary schools (in terms of low retention rates) and in the future prospects of young refugees finding meaningful employment (see sections 3.3 and 3.4).

This Gaps and Barriers section will be divided into major sub-themes, although a number of them are closely interrelated.

3.6.1. Young refugees with disrupted schooling

A major issue within the ESL New Arrivals Program at the moment is the large proportion of young people arriving with a background of severely disrupted or no formal schooling. These young refugees are coming mainly from countries around the Horn of Africa (particularly Sudan) and the Middle East (particularly Afghanistan), which are currently priority groups in Australia’s Humanitarian Program. As one ESL service provider estimated, the proportion of new arrivals currently coming through the system who have had severely disrupted schooling is the highest it’s been in over ten years.

The ESL needs of a young person who has not had a background of education, or who is not literate in their first language, are obviously very different from those who have had equivalent schooling in their country of origin. In relation to the current intake of refugee young people, who frequently have extremely complex settlement needs and a history of severely disrupted schooling, the challenge of providing effective ESL programs is considerable. The concern raised through this research has been that the very different needs of this cohort (i.e. addressing basic literacy and learning skills) are not being addressed sufficiently within the current system. The English Language Schools and Centres are very aware of this situation, as illustrated in the following quotes:

“Their interrupted schooling has made a huge difference. Where previously we had a large population of Yugoslavs, who’d had an equivalent education, and a Western education, and so they’d be out of here in no time, six months is enough [...] At the moment we’ve got such literacy problems.”
– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

“English really is the first written language for them and it is very difficult because they have not previously had the experience of responding to a bell, responding to school rules, holding a pen, using the scissors to cut a piece of paper or colouring within lines... and this is not talking about primary kids, we’re talking about secondary age children.”
– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

Although the English Language Schools/Centres are aware of the problems facing young refugees with disrupted schooling, they are also operating within a system that expects young people to be able to attain a sufficient level of English through the ESL New Arrivals Program within six- to 12-months to make the transition into mainstream schools. The funding situation therefore obliges the ELS/C’s to push students through to mainstream schools within the maximum 12-month timeframe (and ideally within six months) regardless of whether or not it is believed the young person has acquired the necessary skills to cope with the demands of the Australian education system. And while ESL index funding is designed to provide ongoing support to new arrivals once they have exited the intensive ESL NAP, anecdotal evidence suggests that young people are struggling to stay afloat once they have entered mainstream schooling.

“...basically we don’t have the time to give them the help that they need. I mean, there are five or six in that teenage group who haven’t had any schooling before. I know it sounds awful to start them at prep level, but that’s sort of what we had to do...”
– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

SP: We have in our beginners class a student, this is her fourth term. She’s not a beginner, but she has never been to school. She’s fifteen and a half. She came with nothing. She was very traumatised. She didn’t speak English. She didn’t speak Dinka and [...] none of the other students spoke her tribal language so she was very isolated... and it took a lot of hard work to get her smiling or talking to other students. And she is still in that group that we call beginners. So that teacher has just had three kids from Cambodia arriving, who are beginners, are now sitting side by side with this girl who has been here for a year. So funding is a big issue, we can’t create a class of two so this young lady, who has been here for a year and is not coping, in a class of her own, so that the beginners can get on with their survival English and she can get on with her learning beyond, you know, getting on the train.
LO: What’s going to happen to her?
SP: We have to exit her, and because of her age we can’t put her any lower than Year 8...
– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program
3.6.2. Setting six-months as a standard program

Very much linked to the issue of catering to young refugees with disrupted schooling is the issue that has been raised by both service providers and young people alike regarding the relative inflexibility of the system in allowing young people the time they need to go through the program and achieve desired outcomes. It was unanimously agreed by all service providers interviewed that six months in the ESL New Arrivals Program was insufficient time for a lot of young people, and not just for those who have had disrupted schooling. As one young person recalled:

“No, it wasn’t enough [in the language school], because I remember the first time when I went to the high school and I was sitting in [ESL] class with my friends and the teacher started explaining something and ended up complicating things because the teacher explain so fast [...] Because in my class there are so many students and they’ve been there for a long time, like five years or six years, so they know English very well… so it wasn’t enough.”

– Young person, 16

The problem of setting a six month standardised time for young people to learn English was raised as a concern by a whole spectrum of different service providers. That is, although the program allows for up to 12 months, setting six months as a standard timeframe creates expectations and pressures about what young people should be able to achieve. It also becomes a resource issue if the once-off per-capita funding is based on a six-month program. Some of the comments included:

“...the program is carried out in such a way that it is standard basically, it doesn’t cater for some young people that may need longer because it is harder for them to learn English in such a short period of time. So I have heard some young people say that the program is not long enough… some young people also say that because they are going through that transition to a different culture and country... often they’re not ready or prepared for the change.”

– Refugee educational support worker

“Well it’s like everything with learning, some people take longer. It depends what stage they come in at and how dislocated their education is.”

– Government service provider

“Well the limitations are time; time for the kids who need it. Some kids can be here and gone in three months and they just need a place to build their confidence. But that’s the exception at the moment. As I said earlier, a lot of our kids have huge literacy problems and you’re not going to solve that in a few months… and I don’t think you’ll solve it by sending kids into mainstream schools, where particularly in secondary you’re more concerned about content, not going back to the sort of basic skills of primary level skills needed.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

3.6.3. Unrealistic expectations and family pressures

Another reason why young refugees are thought to be making premature transitions into mainstream secondary schooling despite low English proficiency is the unrealistic expectations and immense pressures that families often put on them to ‘get on with it’ and move on to either mainstream education or employment. A common situation related during the interviews is when parents decide that the young person should start mainstream schooling as quickly as possible and withdraw them from the ESL New Arrivals Program even though a teacher from one of the English Language Schools/Centres may have recommended that the young person stay for another six months.

The pressure to move on quickly stems not only from families, but also from young people themselves. This has partly been attributed to a lack of understanding or appreciation for how demanding mainstream secondary education can be, and also the simple fact that adolescents tend to want to ‘fit in’ with people of the same age.

“Pressure within themselves, pressure mainly from the parents, family members... basically their parents bring them here for them to have a better opportunity so they should utilise it. That’s the pressure they feel they have to utilise the opportunity... and a lot of their expectations are probably unrealistic as well. The parents expect them to become doctors, lawyers, and the parents don’t understand what is involved with that and they think: ‘okay, you came to this country and you can speak English better than us, so therefore you should be able to become a doctor or a lawyer’... so that’s the pressure they face.”

– Refugee educational support worker

“And many, many cases we have telephone calls from schools and they say: ‘Why did you send this kid? Their English is not ready!’ and we say: ‘Yes, we know ... didn’t you read the report: “Against the teacher’s recommendation”? But the parents want them to go [...] The parents think they’re missing out on school and if they stay away for another six months they’re not going to catch up. Or they think: ‘My child finished Year 12 in my country, how dare you say go back to Year 10!’ When I give the information session to the parents I say: you’ve got to understand, you’ve got to build up your foundation. I know it’s not fair on the kids who come to this country at 16 or 17 years... no matter how, they’re going to be wasting one or two years. But it’s not wasting as such, because they’re going to do well and they’re going to be able to go to the Uni or TAFE so quickly and so comfortably, but if you’re pushing them to do Year 11 or Year 12... there’s no failure in VCE as you know, but the marks are not high enough... the ENTER score will be so low that they won’t be able to get into the courses they want, so then they’re back to square one. But it takes a lot of convincing.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

“I’ve seen time and time again a kid who is barely literate, doesn’t realise that school is going to demand more than that from them.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program
3.6.4. Lack of understanding of the education system in Australia

One of the gaps in the ESL New Arrivals Program identified by a number of service providers was the fact that many young people enrolled in language schools lacked a good understanding of the education system in Australia and the pathways open to them prior to exiting. When asked “How well do young people know the Australian education system prior to exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program?”, some of the responses included:

“Extremely poorly... it’s very limited, very limited. Individual teachers try really hard to help, but the system itself is not set up to provide that transition so it’s hard.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

“Not well at all. They don’t know what’s available to them. They don’t know what subjects they are able to do, and for instance if they can’t do VCE they don’t realise there’s VET or whatever... so they don’t realise there are other alternatives. They’re not educated in different alternatives to schooling [...] they don’t realise that there’s TAFE courses, there’s apprenticeships... they think it just has to be school, and because of that high expectation and they’re not able to meet it, they think that’s the end...”

– Refugee educational support worker

This lack of understanding about the Australian education system was seen as a major concern for many service providers because of the anxiety it caused both young people and their families. A number of the young people interviewed also commented on how overwhelming it was when they first arrived in secondary schools and how poor their understanding was of what to expect.

LO: If you could suggest one thing to change about the ESL New Arrivals Program for young people in the future, what would it be?
YP: ...For example, if someone came from another country they have to prepare for high school and they have to tell us what the high school looks like and they have to tell us some information about high school.
LO: The school you went through didn’t do that?
YP: They did, but not that much. They just said it is hard to be in high school and whatever but they didn’t tell us any information about high school and they didn’t tell us there’s some ESL program and everything [...] Because they didn’t tell us anything it was really hard.

– Young person, 16

“I think there’s also a need for the language schools to get these students... sort of build them a background of what mainstream schools are all about before they go into there. From what I can see a lot of them study English and then six months later, see you later... instead of sort of building a better foundation, a background for them to figure out what mainstream school is really about so it’s not so overwhelming once they get there.”

– Refugee educational support worker

The time allocated by transition coordinators at the ELS/C’s to assist young people going on to secondary school may be a factor contributing to this lack of preparedness and poor understanding of what to expect. As one transition coordinator at an ESL New Arrivals Program indicated, sometimes they have to assist the transition of young people to 12 different schools in one day, restricting the time available to spend with each young person.

A problem associated with this is the fact that it is extremely difficult for a young person to go back into the ESL New Arrivals Program once they have exited. So if a young person makes a premature transition into secondary school and finds that they are not coping there, the option for them to go back to an ELS/C and spend more time improving their English is not open. Addressing this transition stage, and the information and support given to both young people and their families prior to and in the immediate period after they exit the ESL New Arrivals Program, was therefore seen as a major gap in the current implementation of the program.

6 Again, it should be noted that Transition Coordinators specifically assigned to assist with transition have been funded by the Department of Education and Training since the interviews for this research were conducted. The comment here regarding insufficient time for transition coordinators does not refer to these new positions, but to the roles that were undertaken by existing MIPS and ELS/C-assigned teachers responsible for transition. It is yet to be seen how these new Transition Coordinators will assist in providing effective information to young people prior to them exiting the ESL NAP.
3.6.5. Low English proficiency outcomes

One of the biggest gaps in the ESL New Arrivals Program as identified by the service providers interviewed, and something that is closely linked to all of the themes previously discussed, is the fact that the English proficiency outcomes of the program are currently quite low. It is worth stating this as a separate point because it is linked to the expected outcomes inherent in the program.

The point that was made by different service providers was that young people are exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program with what is believed to be an insufficient level of English for them to realistically be able to cope with the demands of mainstream education and employment.

“If you tracked kids you would be astounded at the lack of success and that’s a very, very sad situation. It really is, because there are lots of kids that come through the [ESL NAP] and into our school with heaps of potential but they don’t have the time or the skills to be able to succeed.”
– Service provider, mainstream secondary school

“...It’s inappropriate to put them into Year 9 level and expect them to survive when they’re only doing a primary school level of English.”
– Refugee youth welfare worker

The difficulty of setting benchmarks or measures to ensure that there are English proficiency outcomes of the ESL New Arrivals Program is an area of understandable contention. In cases where a young person has been traumatised or has a history of severely disrupted schooling, achieving the minimum proficiency level may provide a significant challenge. However, if we accept that English proficiency is a necessary requirement to ensure that a young person fully participates in Australian society, then this challenge must be met. The question becomes: how can we ensure that young people are acquiring the necessary English skills to reach their full potential?

3.6.6. Transition pathways for newly arrived young refugees

One of the identified gaps in the provision of ESL to new arrivals was the limited number of pathways utilised by, and open to, young refugees. Where the ESL New Arrivals Program has a restriction on the maximum amount of time available to young people for intensive language classes, ELS/C’s are often put in the position where they know that a young person is not ready for mainstream schooling but are forced to exit them anyway. What programs are already available, or should be made available, to those young people who have finished their ESL NAP entitlement but are not considered ready for mainstream secondary school, is an area that warrants some investigation.

Bridging programs that were mentioned by interviewees as options that could be promoted or developed included: ESL at TAFE, AMES Youth Programs, VCAL in schools, a second phase literacy-focused program offered through ELS/C’s but in a different setting.

“I suppose in some ways there comes a point where we can’t offer any more, we’re not offering any more […] If we were to offer another year to help kids pre-VCE or literacy or whatever, we’re going to have to get some more buildings at this moment. […] It would be good… there are all sorts of possibilities…”
– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

3.6.7. Ongoing ESL support in mainstream schools

A question that was not directly addressed in this research, but which may warrant future investigation, is how ESL in schools programs are currently meeting the needs of young refugees who have made the transition out of the ESL New Arrivals Program. Anecdotally, it was clear that young refugees are struggling to cope in mainstream schools, posing the question of how individual schools are meeting the challenges of providing targeted ESL programs to young refugees with low literacy levels.

In terms of broader trends in the Australian education system, the move towards a comprehensive, single-stream funding system (global school budgets) means that individual schools are responsible for deciding on the appropriate form of ESL provision for their ESL learners. While this may provide greater autonomy to schools, it does raise the question of whether or not there is a need for a broader framework to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of ESL index funding.
3.7. Best practices in ESL programs for new arrivals

While the interviews with service providers and young people raised some concerns regarding gaps and barriers in the provision of ESL programs to new arrivals, they also identified many positive practices that are currently taking place within English Language Schools and Centres (ELS/C’s) and within the broader education system. Some of these best practices are specific programs or initiatives run by the ELS/C’s, and some were initiated by outside service providers.

To begin with, having the English Language Schools and Centres in the first place was seen as a positive practice. This was also highlighted through the positive feedback generated and the overall respect that was articulated by a broad spectrum of service providers about these schools and centres (see section 3.5).

“...the critical role of the English Language Schools and Centres in the first place was seen as a positive practice. Having these schools for a start is a positive practice, I think that if the language school didn’t exist everything would take longer and be more difficult for them and they would not get the attention that they need in mainstream...”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

“I think the most important function of a new arrival program is to ensure that kids feel safe, they feel welcome, they feel cared for. I think that if they are successful, little by little that will build their confidence. Unless the children feel confident they will have increasing problems when they enter mainstream classes.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

A well-received program that was mentioned by a number of service providers was the orientation/introduction that was given to different service providers through Noble Park English Language School about newly arrived communities.

“Where there’s new immigrants arriving and new immigrant groups, orientation sessions are a really good source of information because they’re really the first wave there, so the South Sudanese they ran a really, really good program for welfare workers in the area and for welfare teachers to come and learn about the South Sudanese [...] That made an enormous difference to me once the South Sudanese kids started coming I had a much better understanding, so that helped me to work with them...”

– Service provider, mainstream secondary school.

The African settlement workers, based in the English Language Schools/Centres, were also mentioned as having a positive impact on both young people and workers by providing them with a link to the newly arrived community and by providing a culturally sensitive and effective way of disseminating information to new arrivals.

“...they found someone who could speak English very well from the Sudanese community and they take it over there. He tried after the school hours, gathering the Sudanese children and make them understand about what they should learn and what they should do. ...so that when the teacher comes everybody is happy. Even if it is only two days a week, or one day, gathering the children and encouraging them to learn... and linking with the cultural things, and they can learn better.”

– Service provider, South Sudanese community

The Kaleidoscope Programme, initiated by Foundation House and run within the ELS/C’s, was another program that was well-received by service providers and was seen by many as an effective way of assisting young refugees to make the transition into Australian society. The program involved getting young refugees together in a group to discuss and share their experiences with each other and with teachers and welfare workers. As one service provider commented,

“I think a lot of young people come to Australia and they haven’t had someone from outside their family to talk to... or even inside their families or in their schools, and it gives them an opportunity to talk about how they’re feeling, to express some of their culture, to share their culture, to learn about other people’s cultures, and also the normalisation that happens. Often kids from one culture who have been through war don’t realise that kids from other cultures have also been through war and that they have a lot of similarities in their experiences. Maybe they’re missing their mother, or they’re missing the food they grew up with, or how people in the streets used to come out and play until 11 at night [...] You know, they create some of that... Oh, yeah! It was like that for you too... and you’re from a completely different culture to me!” So it creates cross-cultural understanding and a sense of a shared experience and trust in friendships... and enables young people to learn new ways of coping... so it’s very encouraging, very positive. And it also links them with their teachers, with someone from Foundation House, and maybe another worker too, so they can continue their contact and support it needs be.”

– Refugee youth support worker

Another good practice mentioned was the use of excursions and camps to introduce young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences to different places and experiences in Australia. These excursions, whether orientating young people to services available or simply providing a recreational and fun outing, linked the young people with the wider community and assisted with settlement.

“...excursions are a very important component? I think of our program and a very successful part of our program.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

The parents program at Noble Park English Language School is currently being implemented with positive feedback. The program runs weekly sessions over the school term (except during the first two weeks) and representatives from various community and government organisations are invited to speak on particular settlement issues and concerns that are pertinent to new arrivals (for example: Centrelink, AMES, DIMIA, SCAAB, Multicultural Police Unit). These sessions aim to provide parents with information that will assist them in learning about services available, Australian laws, the social...
and education systems. Although the program is not solely focused on providing information on the mainstream education system and pathways for young people, this area is covered in the program by sessions conducted by the school principal and careers coordinator.

3.8. Ways forward

All service providers interviewed were asked to suggest one thing they would like to see changed within the ESL New Arrivals Program that would help improve the success rate of young people making the transition into mainstream education or employment. Although there were a great many suggestions made, there were also some noticeable themes and ideas that reoccurred. Many of these suggestions specifically address the gaps and barriers outlined in the previous section.

3.8.1. Greater flexibility to move in and out of the ESL New Arrivals Program

One suggestion that was raised on a number of occasions was that the system should allow young people the option of moving in and out of the ESL New Arrivals Program as required. This would give young people who have prematurely exited the program, and are subsequently struggling at school, the opportunity to go back to a language school/centre instead of continuing on at a mainstream school and perhaps failing or dropping out.

“My definitely needs to change. We’re watching students continually failing in the system... We need to take the ESL program into schools... but with the flexibility for the young people to be able to step back out of mainstream schooling if they need to further up-skill. We do it as adults, we up-skill, we go on our pathways in employment, if we need some more up-skilling, off we go and do a course. But once in the system we’re locked in because we’re counted in the census and it’s very hard to fix up the funding if, say, Noble Park ELS wants to take them back to give them a bit more experience... positive experience... of learning at a level that is appropriate, and using methodology that is appropriate... that’s what I’d like to see, more flexibility for students to say ‘I’m not coping’.”

– Service provider, mainstream secondary school

3.8.2. An individual needs-based approach

Closely related to this issue of greater flexibility is the suggestion that the ESL New Arrivals Program needs to be administered in a more individual needs-based way.

“I think it should cater for individual need instead of having a standard six month program and putting everyone into the same bucket... some of those young people need to stay longer in an English language school and need to be more flexible and be there longer... and the teachers as well as the welfare coordinators and whoever is involved in the school should make that decision, because they are in touch with that young person and they know exactly where they are at and if they are ready to move to high school...”

– Refugee educational support worker

“To be more sensitive to the needs of the individual. Some young people might come to Australia and be ready in six months. Some might need 12 months or whatever. Some young people I work with have been here for five years and I don’t think they will have their English up to scratch to pass VCE... and if they’re not able to pass VCE or go to university... how will they be able to move out into the workforce?... so they’re not able to move out of the vicious cycle.”

– Refugee educational support worker

One way to cater more to the needs of the individual is through a case management approach. This would mean that somebody takes responsibility for tracking and advising each newly arrived young person for a sustained period of time during the initial years of settlement. A suggestion that was raised as a possibility was to utilise the government’s ON TRACK Connect program with additional resources.

Employing a more systematic approach to supporting and tracking young people as they make the transition out of the ESL New Arrivals Program into different education and employment pathways also addresses the issue of lack of data. Currently, there appears to be no systematic data collected on the pathways taken by newly arrived young refugees, raising the question of how service provision can be seen to be effective if medium- to longer-term outcomes are not being assessed.
3.8.3. A standard 12-month program in two phases

Although there was no consensus among service providers on what the ideal length of time should be for an ESL New Arrivals Program, it was suggested by a number of interviewees that the standard length of time should be extended to 12 months, but not necessarily in the same setting. This two-phase approach would allow the first six-month program to focus more on resource-building and settlement issues and then the second six months to involve more intensive English learning.

“But I also think young people need a certain amount of time to just gather their thoughts and find out where things are that they need, and then they can do a really intense English language program. Without that we’re setting people up to fail.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

“...I reckon six months at the language school and then say six months at another provider... where the six months at the language school is really getting them used to the culture and different ways, there’s not a lot of focus on vocational stuff so much... just getting used to the culture... focusing on discovery for the first six months...”

– Service provider, TAFE sector

Ideally they ought to stay in a new arrivals setting for a much longer period of time, however, not continuing on the same curriculum delivery and timetable. They need to feel that they have progressed and changed, exited that initial program, they are now in a new phase, and then they can go to the third phase which would be the main school. That second phase, which is now missing, supported with other people, persons, agencies... they need to see that they are not being taught exactly the same thing that they covered six months ago...”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

Obviously, increasing the entitlement of young refugees to English Language Schools and Centres will have implications in terms of resources, particularly in the City of Greater Dandenong where the demands on ELS/C’s are already high. The issue of limited physical space available at the ELS/C’s was raised by a number of service providers during interviews, and would have to be addressed if the ESL New Arrivals Program was to allow students greater flexibility to stay longer or to move into different phases of settings:

“So the government and the department have been fairly flexible in moving funds and finance. The only thing is [...] we have run out of rooms. [...] So we haven’t lost the programs, we’ve just lost the spaces.”

– Service provider, ESL New Arrivals Program

3.8.4. Focusing on transition

A recurring theme with regards to ways forward in the ESL New Arrivals Program was for there to be more attention paid to the transition period and preparing students who are about to enter mainstream schools. Some suggestions of how to administer this transition program included: having a worker from the ELS/C’s who tracks and actively follows-up young people for six months after they have exited the ESL New Arrivals Program, giving young people an opportunity to spend a week or a few days in a mainstream school before they have exited the language school, and developing an extensive 5-week transition program similar to the model piloted in Broadmeadows (see Appendix 5 for summary of this program).

“... while they are in the Language school to incorporate mainstream school in with that as well so it’s not such a culture shock to put them into mainstream school.”

– Refugee educational support worker

“I think an orientation program to the school ... not only about, you know, you’re going to be in Year 10 and this is the coordinator and whatever, whatever... but more spending a bit of time there too, so they can see the adjustment. For example, they spend a day at the school towards the end of when the exit [the language school] so they can actually see what’s going on... so that’s basically about the transition.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

“...there needs to be more around that transition time... I know that it’s a time when both young people and their families get really anxious about what is going to happen...”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

It should be noted that transition coordinator positions have recently been put into place by the government to assist with the transition needs of young people. These coordinators will be located in the ELS/C’s. No doubt the success of these appointments will become apparent in the future.

“...there needs to be more around that transition time ... I know that it’s a time when both young people and their families get really anxious about what is going to happen...”

– Refugee youth welfare worker
3.8.5. English proficiency as an expected outcome

It has been suggested that achieving a certain level of English proficiency has to be an outcome of the ESL New Arrivals Program, and that English ability should be tested before young people are allowed to exit the English Language Schools/Centres. This suggestion involves redefining the program’s expected outcomes so that they are measured on levels of language attainment and not on a standardised time-based program. How English proficiency levels are best measured is an area that would obviously require much debate and discussion.

In acknowledging that some students with severely disrupted schooling may not achieve the benchmarks set in any realistic time frame, another possibility would be to have both a proficiency test and maximum time limit set for the program. That is, if a student does not meet the minimum English proficiency level within a 12-month or 18-month timeframe, alternative pathways should be sought, such as TAFE, school-based ESL bridging programs, employing integration aides, etc.

“English level has to be an outcome of an English language school… I mean, that’s what the name implies, that it teaches English! So it definitely needs to be stricter around that… I think they need a further six months of intense English and they need to be stringently tested at that stage so that we know that these young people are ready to go into this school… the comments from the teachers when they’re exiting is ‘Oh, can you please chase up this young person because their English is not enough?’… I mean the teachers are saying their English is not enough, so I think that’s enough for us to be worried, because whatever the system is, it’s not working.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker

3.8.6. Investigating a strategic framework for ESL in schools & Building Local Partnerships

As mentioned in the gaps and barriers section, the provision of ESL in schools to new arrivals is an area that warrants some further investigation. Developing a strategic framework for ESL is schools was raised as a possibility that would ensure that ESL provision is effectively carried on once a young person has exited the ESL New Arrivals Program. A key element of any strategic framework, we suggest, lies in the development of strong partnerships between schools and local community organisations and agencies.

Our research found that schools are already responsible for completing detailed ESL surveys on an annual basis in which they describe their funded programs to the extent of describing and assigning percentages of time spent by their Multicultural Education Aides in the classroom – and yet, a great deal of the good work undertaken by mainstream schools remains unknown and unacknowledged by the specialist non school agencies and community groups who support the community integration of recently arrived youth.

Many agencies agreed that one very effective way of enhancing the experience of mainstream schooling for recently arrived young people was the formation of effective and active partnerships between schools and community organisations operating in this area. The Formation of new, and strengthening of existing, partnerships between schools and community organisations would increase understanding of the issues of both parties, increase transparency of transition programs enable the development of joint innovative initiatives at a local school level.

“[I] mean, the teachers are saying their English is not enough, so I think that’s enough for us to be worried... because whatever the system is, it’s not working.”

– Refugee youth welfare worker
3.8.7. Work experience and further employer involvement in the ESL New Arrivals Program

One suggestion that was made with regards to improving the employment and education prospects of young refugees’ after they exit the ESL New Arrivals Program is to increase the work experience opportunities open to new arrivals as well as facilitate more employer involvement in the ELS/C’s. This would increase young people’s understanding of the employment opportunities that are available in Australia and what skills are needed for them to be able to gain secure and long-term employment in the future.

“I think a lot of what could be done, I mentioned the employers being more involved with these young people, of this particular age group. And I think, perhaps, if they are looking for work the course should give them some work experience […] with a view to making them aware of what is possible in the industry if you have this level of education. […] To show them that this is what you need. And if you don’t do more than that, this is what you’re going to be doing for the rest of your life: picking and packing and whatever. If you get this level of education and go get yourself a welding ticket, a forklift ticket, or whatever, then you could be doing this.”  
- Employment service provider

3.9. Future research needs

It was identified in a large number of the interviews conducted for this report that there is a general lack of comprehensive data and research available on the outcomes of the ESL New Arrivals Program [i.e., tracking young people after they have left the ESL NAP to identify pathways taken], suggesting a need for a longitudinal study to be undertaken in the future to formally assess these outcomes and further explore the issues facing young refugees’ and migrants with refugee-like experiences.

This lack of data was also identified by the Refugee Young People and Transition’s Working Group (2002), who recommended that:

... inadequate client tracking and data collection practices by education sector providers prevent the production of comprehensive reports or statements regarding the service use and transition patterns of refugee young people. This deficiency in reporting hinders the effective planning of educational pathways for refugee young people.

More detailed data on short and medium term destinations of ELS/C graduates will provide better indications, also, of the gaps and barriers that require attention to improve the reception, initial support, language training and mainstreaming & transition of recently arrived youth in the post compulsory education system.

Certainly what feedback the limited timeframe of this snapshot analysis was able to gather from system participants and support agencies indicted a sense of missed opportunities from the former and a high level of frustration experienced by the latter.
4. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Recommendation 1:

**Develop a strategic framework for ESL in schools with School – Community Partnerships at its heart**

A statewide strategic framework for ESL in schools should be developed to ensure that ESL provision is effectively understood and supported by the broader community once a young person has exited the ESL New Arrivals Program. This would require, as a minimum and for an initial period, some additional, and specifically tagged, seed funding for mainstream schools in regions with high numbers of recently arrived youth.

A key element of such a policy would need to be the encouragement, definition and framework for, partnerships between schools and community organisations or groups to ensure newly arrived refugee students are broadly supported to achieve good outcomes once they have made the transition into mainstream schools. A further element of any such strategic framework should be the linking of schools and community agencies to jointly undertake both transition and destination tracking and dedicated support for disengaged recently arrived youth.

Recommendation 2:

**Intermediary Transition Framework**

*Pilot a new intermediary transition framework for supporting and integrating new arrivals into appropriate education, employment and training pathways in which young people can achieve success*

An intermediary transition framework should be developed using Action Research to provide systematic support and tracking of newly arrived young people.

The first element of such a framework – implemented by community agencies in partnership with language centres - would promote multiple pathways out of the ESL New Arrivals Program and develop and regularly review individual pathway plans for newly arrived young refugees.

The aim would be to harness the ardent desire of most refugee students (and their parents) to continue their schooling in a normal school environment with their peers with agreed and realistic pathway plans that fully describe the process for achieving this aim, (including mapping literacy and numeracy prerequisites).

Such an intermediary framework for pathway planning would also act to further inform students and their families about the Australian education and training system in an easily understandable individual context.

The second element of the framework would engage those young people who feel that they should be moving forward out of the English Language Schools/Centres, but are not thought to be equipped for the demands of mainstream schooling. The aim would be to connect them into a linked series of pathways for English learning outside of English Language Schools/Centres but still incorporated within the ESL New Arrivals Program (e.g. TAFE phase, literacy-focused VCAL in schools, AMES bridging program, etc.).

Recommendation 3:

**18-Month Entitlement to ESL New Arrival Program**

*Provide a minimum 18-month entitlement to young refugees in the ESL New Arrivals Program*

A clear message from many individuals and agencies involved in this field is that the standard time of around six months currently spent by recently arrived youth in ELC/S is not adequate for many young people to attain a suitable level of English, particularly those who have a history of disrupted schooling or who are not literate in their first language, and raises an expectation of what is achievable. A standard – mandated - 18-month entitlement would recognise that the first six months of any language school engagement for this particular client group realistically involves resettlement, cultural orientation and familiarisation. Such a standard time period would allow for a full (and necessary) 12 months of focused English language training.

A further aim of a clear statement of appropriate time to access to ELS/c would be to reduce the pressures on ELS/C’s to push students through in a short period of time, and allow greater scope to increase the variety of English programs available (i.e. creating bridging or literacy programs).

We recommend the introduction of greater flexibility for students to move in and out of the ESL New Arrivals Program, the standard 12-month entitlement could be used over a number of years in a range of different settings as a safety net and re-engagement tool. For example: if a student chose to exit an English Language School/Centre after a minimum period (say six months), but then subsequently found they were not coping in the mainstream, they would be entitled to re-enter the ESL New Arrivals Program and receive further intensive language tuition in a familiar, inclusive and accepting environment.

Increasing the standard time entitlement would need to be appropriately resourced in terms of both staff and infrastructure. However, this cost would easily be recouped in the longer term through greater integration of this client group, their improved performance (and consequent satisfaction) in mainstream school, fewer disengaged young people...
Recommendation 4: English Language Proficiency as a central outcome of the ESL New Arrivals Program

The Department of Education and Training, in partnership with relevant stakeholders (DiMIA, statewide organisations, education and community providers) need to work together to reach agreement and implement a framework to ensure that English language proficiency for young students is a central outcome of the ESL New Arrivals Program and any subsequent mainstream schooling.

The project identified low English proficiency as a key barrier to the successful transition of new arrivals into mainstream schooling. It is clear from all of the available research data that English proficiency is the most valid predictor of future success for new arrivals in education, training and employment. Ensuring that English proficiency is attained should be considered one of the central success measures for all students both the ESL New Arrivals Program and the destination schools graduates subsequently attend.

DE&T in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the migrant and refugee community groups, should develop and implement a framework for measuring English transmission to clients, their families, destination schools and teachers. Taken with the other recommendations in this report, including the development of new and suitable transition pathways for the newest cohorts of recently arrived young people this is a complex but important process that should be undertaken by DET.

A key emerging concern is that the most recent cohorts of post compulsory school age recent arrivals are not literate in ANY language and, consequently, face enormous obstacles in learning English. It is the considered opinion many practitioners that many of this recent (and increasing) cohort will not, under the current systems in place, ever gain enough functional literacy in English to manage mainstream schooling. This, in turn, would support the development of better focused and more effective interventions.

Proficiency in English is currently measured, monitored and described. Despite this work by the ELC’s much of the effort and strong language focus falls away once the young person enters mainstream schooling. Destination schools must continue the good work of the language centres. Key transition data that is formally handed over to the destination school and communicated to the client and their family needs to be updated regularly and English language proficiency progress should be reviewed on a term by term basis in a process involving language centre staff, community agencies and destination school subject teachers.

Further, the transition process for young people exiting the new arrivals program should have that client and their family at the centre of the process, and ensure that high quality and comprehensible proficiency and progress data is provided to both the destination school and the family.

Recommendation 5: Longitudinal Research on Youth Pathways

Further longitudinal research should be undertaken to track the pathways of young refugees and young migrants from refugee backgrounds in the City of Greater Dandenong

Although this research captured a large amount of anecdotal evidence regarding the pathways being taken by young refugees who are going through the ESL New Arrivals Program in CGD, its short timeframe did not allow the possibility of tracking young people to assess the different outcomes of the ESL New Arrivals Program.

A further research project – building on the best practice tracking and longitudinal study of some ELC/ S’s – undertaken in partnership with local ELC/S’s and community agencies - should track young people over a 6-month, 12-month and 18-month period after they have exited the ESL New Arrivals Program. This research would seek to – in the first instance – map, analyse and describe the data already held and enhance it with dedicated data collection on, and tracking of, the current cohort, including agreed milestones to measure language proficiency levels, post exit history, VCE enter scores and destinations over this period.

This research would confirm which pathways newly arrived young people are currently taking. It would also gather further data regarding their experiences of transition and English language attainment and better describe the gaps and barriers they face in entering, and maintaining a pathway through, mainstream education. This, in turn, would support the development of better focused and more effective interventions.
Recommendation 6:
Transition Program for those exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program

Develop a comprehensive transition program for young people exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program and moving into mainstream schools

Resources should be allocated as a matter of priority to develop an appropriate transition program that adequately equips young people and their families with the information they need to make decisions about mainstream schooling and to assist them in coping with the transition once they have exited the ELS/C’s. Transition coordinators that have recently been put in place are a step in this direction, and we welcome this. Organisations and groups working in the sector should work closely with these coordinators to ensure appropriate transition support programs are put in place.

Where transition coordinators are supporting large numbers of students exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program at the same time, the recruitment and training of volunteers, or partnering with relevant community groups, should be investigated as an option to ensure comprehensive transition support is provided.

Recommendation 7:
Engage and Inform Parents

Need for a targeted approach to engage and inform parents about the education system and culture in Australia

Where appropriate, existing models for engaging and informing parents about education pathways and the education system in Australia should be utilised and promoted further within the ESL New Arrivals Program. Resources and programs that have already been produced or piloted should be collated centrally, distributed widely, and made available to all English Language Schools/Centres, organisations working with newly arrived young people, and mainstream schools.
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### Appendix 1

**PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues – Job Placement Employment and Training Program</td>
<td>CMYI</td>
<td>Anna Hutchens</td>
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<td>CMYI</td>
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<td>Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues – Reconnect project</td>
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<td>Youth Links</td>
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<td>Christie Pascoe</td>
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Appendix 2

OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT

1. Undertake a snapshot analysis of the current New Arrival Programs focusing on: (a) promising practices that address the needs of young refugees and newly-arrived young people who have refugee-like experiences; and (b) program gaps and barriers experienced by young refugees and newly-arrived young people who have refugee-like experiences.

2. Identify promising practices between New Arrival Programs and mainstream secondary schools.

3. Identify national and international good practice models of English Language School/Centre programs.

4. Collect destination data on a small sample of young refugees who have attended a New Arrivals Program in the Southern Region 18 months ago. Trace their educational, training, employment, current status or other movements (where possible) over the last 18 months.

5. Communicate project intention and aim to establish a positive relationship with Southern Region Educational Director, Manager of ESL Strategy Team, schools and centres who provide New Arrivals Program for young refugee people.

6. Discuss issues raised throughout the project with peak advocacy bodies that could assist the project reference group in responding to DE&T policy.

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – Service provider

Preamble

Hello, my name is Louise Olliff and I am a researcher working with the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network. The project I am working on is an analysis of the ESL New Arrivals Program in the City of Greater Dandenong. I am basically trying to identify what is working well within the ESL New Arrivals Program (positive practices), and also what is not working so well (gaps and barriers). This information will then be used as an advocacy tool by the CMYI-SELLen-City of Greater Dandenong reference group to ensure that the language support needs of young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences are being met.

I am very interested in your experiences, opinion or understanding of the ESL New Arrivals Program as someone who is working directly with young people from refugee backgrounds. I would like to record what you say and transcribe it for reference. I would also like to let you know that what you say will remain confidential and I will not include your name or any details that will be able to identify you within the report.

Is this okay? Do you have any questions?

Position of contact with young people

- What does your organisation do?
- What is your position within this organisation?
- What point of contact do you personally have with young refugees and migrants with refugee-like experiences?
- Any other background information about specific work (prompt…)

Young people’s attitudes to the ESL New Arrivals Program

- What kind of feedback, if any, do you hear from the young people you work with about the ESL NAP?
- Do you have any anecdotal evidence of what young people are experiencing during the NAP and after they leave this program?
- In your opinion, what are the biggest difficulties facing young refugees during the NAP and once they have left the ESL NAP?

Young people’s attitudes to education and employment in Australia

- How important do you think language skills are in determining the successful transition of young refugees into mainstream education/employment?
- What are other factors that determine their success?
Does English Language School have any other purpose besides teaching English? What purposes? 
If yes, how important is this in determining the successful transition of young refugees into mainstream education/employment? 
What is your understanding of young people’s attitudes to secondary school? 
How well do young people know the education system prior to exiting English Language School? What is your understanding of young people’s attitudes and hopes with regards to employment? 
What anecdotal evidence do you have of the difficulties/opportunities young people face in finding employment after finishing the ESL NAP?

**Own attitude towards ESL New Arrivals Program**

- What do you think the ESL New Arrivals Programs are currently doing well?
- Can you think of an example of a specific program/centre that is working well?
- Why do you think it is so successful?
- Do you think that the 6-month ESL New Arrivals Program is enough for young people to be able to make the transition (to school/ work)?
- If not, why not?
- What do you think the funding body of the program expects the program to achieve?
- If you could suggest one thing to improve the ESL New Arrivals Program for young people in the future, what would it be?

**Data points**

- Do you know of, or can you provide, a copy (or reference) of any studies/reports on good practice or issues in NAP/ESL?
- Does your organisation collect any information on young refugees who have been through NAP?
- What kind of information/access does your organisation offer?

**Evaluation**

- Is there anything you would like to say about your experience of participating in this interview?

**Concluding comments**

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Your comments have been very useful. Your ideas will be used to contribute to a report about the current ESL New Arrivals Program, and will hopefully make sure that the language needs of young people with refugee backgrounds are being met. Thanks again.

**Appendix 4**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – Young person**

**Preamble**

Hello, my name is Louise Olliff and I am a researcher working with the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network. The project I am working on is an evaluation of the ESL New Arrivals Program (language school) in the City of Greater Dandenong. I am basically trying to find out what is working well with the language schools, and also what is not working so well. This information will be used to advocate on behalf of young people who are coming to Australia as refugees or with refugee-like experiences and are going through this program. We want to make sure that the language services being offered to young people like yourself are the best that they can be.

I am very interested in your experiences of the ESL New Arrivals Program and I would like to ask you a few questions about what you think of the program. I would also like to record what you say so that I can remember it for later on. Although the interview will be taped, no one else will know what you have said because when I type up your words I will not include your name or any details that will be able to identify you as an individual.

Is this okay? Do you have any questions?

**Demographics**

- Gender – M/F
- How old are you?
- What is your country of birth? What is your parents country of birth?
- Have you lived in any other countries? List.
- What is your cultural/ethnic background?
- What year did you arrive in Australia?
- What language(s) do you speak other than English? How well do you know them (writing, reading, speaking?)

**About the refugee experience**

- How long was it after you left your country of birth before you arrived in Australia?
- Before you came to Australia, what kind of schooling had you had?
- Since the age of five, have you missed any schooling?
- If you know, what type of visa category did you on? (Humanitarian/ Family Migration/ Skilled/ Temporary Protection Visa) ...(if appropriate, ask service provider for this info)
About accessing ESL NAP services

- How long after you arrived in Australia did you start at a language school?
- Which language school(s)/centre did you go to?
- How long did you spend there?

Self-evaluation of language skills

- How would you describe your English language skills before you started at the ESL program at the language school?
- How would you describe your English language skills after you left the ESL program (after 6 months/12 months/ x months)?
- How would you describe your English language skills now?
- How well do your family (or the people you live with) speak English?
- Do you speak English when you are at home?
- Where else did you learn English? (prompt: workplace, school, television)
- Are you happy with your level of English right now?
- If not, are you participating in any ESL programs? What?
- How does this program/these programs compare with the ESL NAP that you went through at the English Language school/centre?
- Is it easy to learn English?
- If not, what do you find most difficult about learning English?

Attitude towards ESL New Arrivals Program

- What was the most helpful/useful thing or things you learned while at the ESL school? (prompt: how to read, met new friends, socialised)
- Do you think that doing the ESL New Arrivals Program was enough for you to be able to make the transition (to school/work)? If not, why not?
- If you didn’t go to school after NAP, why not?
- If you could suggest one thing to improve the ESL New Arrivals Program for young people in the future, what would it be?
- What other services assisted you during your time at NAP that you found useful? (prompt: youth workers, JPET worker, information session for parents, school orientation, excursion around local community, etc.)

Future plans

- What are you currently doing? (school, work, etc.)
- What do you hope to do in the future? (further education, training, work)

Concluding comments

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Your comments have been very useful. Your ideas will be used to contribute to a report about the current ESL New Arrivals Program, and will hopefully make sure that the language needs of young people such as yourself are met in the future. Thanks again.

Appendix 5

Broadmeadows ELC Transitional Support Program Summary

The Transition Program has been a proactive way of supporting refugee and newly arrived students exiting the Broadmeadows ELC into Broadmeadows Secondary School. It has allowed workers to identify structural or systemic issues that may contribute to difficulties in transition from the ELC to the secondary school system and therefore impact on the ability of the client group to remain in the education system. As a result, the support needs of refugee and newly arrived young people have been more effectively accommodated as the workers have been able to facilitate changes within the secondary school system. Further, this has resulted in a shift in culture and process that increases the early identification of young people at risk resulting in more appropriate referral.

Program history:
Marcela Nunez, CSS Youth Worker from Dianella Community Health, Mike Bromhead, Counsellor Advocate, VFSTT, and Kate O’ Sullivan from Reconnect Young Refugees, CMYI met on about 5 occasions to discuss our roles and work on collaboration between our programs. We discussed referrals, and went through some case examples to clarify our approaches. We were interested in focusing on the needs of newly arrived and refugee young people.

Marcela and Kate, along with Michael Mawal a youth worker from Australian Lebanese Welfare, organised a small recreation program for young people at the ELC in the February 2000 School holidays, and from there became interested in the difficulties faced by young people in the transition from the small, supportive environment of the ELC where they had made friends with people in very similar circumstances, to mainstream high schools, where they were more marginalised, and had less language support. We also began talking with the School Nurse at Broadmeadows who shared this concern. She was interested in supporting young people through this transition.

Mike, Marcela and Kate set up a meeting with the school nurse to discuss these issues further, and meanwhile Marcela and I had decided to approach Broadmeadows Secondary College re spending regular time in outreach at the school. The school was open to this. We later found that Michael Mawal had already negotiated with the school to do the same, and had started spending time in the school.
We decided to meet with him to discuss cross referral, co-ordination at school etc.

At the first meeting at the school re transition issues, a number of options were put to the school re professional development, running a program for kids etc. The school later said they would like some P.D. and were open to other options. We considered applying for a School Focussed Youth Service grant to run a transitional support program, but the timelines were too short. We were exploring Vichealth Mental Health funds and other options.

We initially ran a short training session for school staff about our organisations, the issues faced by refugee young people and some of the educational effects of trauma at a staff meeting- but time was very limited. Ongoing secondary consultation and group work with students over the following year or so made a greater impact in improving staff awareness of the issues perhaps than the one off training, but it was a start.

We then spoke to the language centre and school about setting up a transitional support program for students (6 weeks in the new term they started at the school). We received a list of the students entering the school from the language centre and arranged a meeting with students in the first week of term. We then met during class time for the following 5 weeks. At first we asked all new students to attend, but later decided to make the group voluntary after some of the young people were finding the sessions too difficult (we felt they didn’t want to talk about the issues- too painful, and we needed to respect that, so we followed up with individuals afterwards on a one to one/casual basis, and they were OK). Others didn’t want to miss out on sport (and this was really important for a couple of boys who had few other rec. opportunities). The voluntary nature worked better.

Sessions addressed practical issues re feeling comfortable in the new school, access to Youth Allowance payments etc., and looked at some of the emotional impacts of the transition for those who had exited from the Broadmeadows English Language Centre. We found that transition from one school to the next was also bringing up old grief issues- as young people were remembering the last time/s they had to leave school overseas, and establish new friendships, adjust to language, culture, teachers etc. We also encouraged students to figure out how they could seek help if they were struggling, and introduced them to a number of members of support staff in the school.

The language centre also at this time was re-thinking their orientation program and support for exited students and the staff member in charge of this consulted with students and youth workers in the group for feedback about the process which changed as a result. We were finding, for example, that students that had been identified as at risk by the language centre (as evident in school reports for example) were not being picked up for extra support in the high school, and quickly facing discipline issues etc.

After running the course a number of times, we sought funding from Hume City Council Community Support fund. We applied for a combined model, which incorporated the transition program and the holiday recreation program we were also running for these students and others currently enrolled at the language centre. We planned to provide an excursion at the end of the transition program with some of the funds we received.