



**“My Homework Club  
is a cool place to go  
to now.”**



## **Best Practice Case Studies of Homework Clubs**

**Part of the Evaluation of Learning Beyond  
the Bell Program**

**July 2011**

***Thank you*** to those who have contributed their support, ideas and opinions to these case studies including homework club students, coordinators, teachers, volunteer tutors, school Principals and organisational CEO's.

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## Introduction

These five case studies have been undertaken as part of the activities forming the Evaluation of the Learning Beyond the Bell (LBB) program managed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) during 2011. The evaluation is being undertaken for CMY by *John Mc.Consulting*.

In the 2008 State Budget funding was allocated to CMY to establish and implement LBB over a 4 year period.

The Aim of LBB is: ***to improve newly arrived migrant and refugee students' school connectedness and engagement by strengthening the capacity of out of school hours learning support programs.***

This Aim is activated through the following six activity areas:

- Developing a coordination framework for Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs (OSHLSP's), or Homework Programs/Clubs, across the State.
- Professional development for volunteers and tutors
- Grants to 26 Homework Programs (Best Practice Grants) to target recent migrant and refugee students
- Identifying service delivery gaps in consultation with DEECD
- Designing, developing and delivering Homework Program information sessions for parents and school council members.
- Liaising with mainstream classroom teachers/schools on learning needs and progress of ESL students attending the 26 Homework Programs.

Funded through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the LBB program is mid way through its agreed period of operation.

There are a number of activities being undertaken as part of the Evaluation of LBB and documented in the ***First Six Monthly Report***, available from CMY. These case studies complement the findings in this report. The final evaluation report will be completed in 2012.

### Purpose

The purpose of these case studies is to bring personal perspectives into the Evaluation of LBB and make results, opinions and views more accessible; and to help build the capacity of homework programs through showcasing and examining good practices.

### Selection

The five homework clubs included in this study were selected from the ten clubs comprising the main study group for the Evaluation of the LBB program. They were selected to demonstrate elements of good practice and themes that have been successfully pursued by these clubs that may be of interest to others. These themes involve:

- Attracting a **broad range of students** including those that are "difficult to engage."
- **Specialising** in literacy and numeracy for students that have severely interrupted schooling.

- **Maximising student involvement** in a school based homework club.
- **The benefits, and risks,** of a community services organisation as the location and operator of a homework club.
- The benefits of homework club/school **partnerships.**

### **Methodology**

These case studies have been undertaken at the organisational level complemented by the views of significant individuals attending and/or assisting with the operations of their homework club. Over March and April 2011 detailed discussions and interviews were held with homework club coordinators, selected students, selected former students, tutors, teachers, organisation managers and others. Their quotes are used throughout these case studies. They participated with the agreement that this report would not identify themselves or the homework club they are associated with and although no contentious statements are made in this report, this agreement is honoured.

## Case Study 1

### *Attracting a Broad Range of Students*



This homework club is run by a community centre in Melbourne's North. Most homework clubs attract students who are connected and engaged in local schools; this homework club and the community centre that operates it, is notable for attracting students to its activities who are connected and engaged in local schools as well as those students who are not well engaged and are at risk of disconnecting prematurely from a learning environment. Many homework club students are recently arrived migrants and refugees with Middle Eastern backgrounds.

Students that are not regularly attending local schools are attracted to activities happening at the community centre and then introduced to the homework club. Three after school homework club sessions per week operate from the community centre, with an average attendance of 15-20 students at each.

In this respect these young people are being reintroduced to a learning environment. All students attending the homework club at this community centre are participating in programs designed to improve newly arrived migrant and refugee students' school connectedness and engagement.

In line with aim of LBB, the capacity of the homework clubs at the community centre has been enhanced through receipt of a Best Practice Grant as part of the LBB program and through participation in other LBB sponsored training, development opportunities and targeted assistance.

There are a number of positive features associated with the operation of this homework club that have emerged through discussion with the coordinator, students, former students and others.

### **The Benefits of Location**

During the course of the evaluation of the LBB program we have tied results and features of programs to both their auspicing and operating arrangements and their location. Clubs are either auspiced or operated by community services organisations (CSO's), schools or through a partnership of both and they mostly operate from CSO premises, schools or other community facilities such as public libraries. We have found benefits can accrue from each location, and that partnering arrangements produce more benefits for students than lone auspicing and operating arrangements.

The benefits of this homework club operating from an active community centre are apparent. Students are attracted to a number of events and activities as well as the homework club.



***“I started attending the girls’ fitness club and got the confidence to attend the homework club. That’s important for us Muslim girls”.*** Aasha. 14 years.

## Two Streams

The homework club has two streams, those students that are well connected to a learning environment and aspiring to complete secondary schooling or to go on to other employment and training, and those that are being attracted back to a learning environment and are not well connected or regularly attending local schools. Last year, all but one senior homework club student completed VCE. The homework club encourages senior students to gain ENTER scores that match their occupational aspirations and is planning and seeking funding for a third stream that would encourage high performance outcomes and the encouragement of leaders. Students attracted to learning through other activities at the community centre tend to “stick around” and attend homework club.

## Paid and Unpaid Tutors

Homework clubs across the state rely on volunteer tutors to provide personal tutoring. Our research over the last year (documented in the first Six Monthly Report for CMY) indicates that students value personal tutoring most highly, ascribing their success in learning and understanding to the degree of personal tutoring that has been available and the approach, skills and knowledge of the tutors. Tutors come from a number of backgrounds with a majority being tertiary students. The advantages and some disadvantages in relying heavily on voluntary tutors are detailed in the **First Six Monthly Report** to CMY. Some advantages identified include the ability to provide personalised tuition and a strong connection between students and community members and opportunities, while some disadvantages relate to the less reliable nature of voluntary commitments and attendance over paid arrangements and the relatively high turnover of volunteers reported by a number of homework clubs.

Two paid tutors assist at homework club sessions at this community centre. The community centre believes that due to the broad range of learning-motivated and not so motivated young people attending homework club sessions, paid arrangements with tutors better meet the demands of this workplace and attract staff that can meet the responsibilities expected of those working there. They believe that a formal employment contract and paid arrangements encourages ongoing commitment and attendance by tutors and enables them to attract tutors with relevant experience. The idea of encouraging the use of a formal agreement with all tutors, voluntary and paid, is recommended in the **First Six Monthly Report** available from CMY. The employment of appropriate former homework club students has also provided an employment path and

assisted in carrying a positive learning culture forward. One person in this situation is Ali, mentioned later.

Volunteer tutors also assist at the homework club to achieve the goal of a 1: 4 student/tutor ratio. Volunteer tutors are also likely to have attended the homework club in the past, though Raphael, the Community Development Coordinator at the centre works hard to attract tertiary students and others to assist. Difficulties attracting appropriate and qualified tutors to assist over the longer term at homework clubs across Victoria are also documented in the first Six Monthly Report to CMY.

## Leadership

Funding of \$15,000 pa to the community centre through a Best Practice Grant as part of the LBB program has enabled the centre to strengthen management and leadership of the homework club. While this funding is seen as inadequate recompense to cover the full cost of operations of the homework club, it has enabled an already existing club to consolidate important leadership, planning and management functions. The Community Development Coordinator, Raphael, manages the homework club as part of his duties. The community centre has made a commitment to position homework club activities at the core of the centre's programming. The Coordinator, Raphael and others at the centre and at the homework club actively promote a learning environment.



***"I want an environment where it is OK to enquire, where there is no fear of failing or asking too many questions. A culture that everyone understands is important and that culture has to be aspirational because these kids are like raw diamonds.***

Raphael. Coordinator.

## Parental Involvement

Our research documented in the ***First Six Monthly Report*** for CMY indicates that parents from the 10 clubs selected for detailed analysis are less likely to attend their child's homework club than they are their child's school and that parents very rarely, or never, attend the homework club. This is not so much the case at this homework club.

A number of activities run at the community centre attract the parents of students attending the homework club, and strategically timetabled activities such as community cooking sessions and the like, overlap with homework club sessions. This overlap has resulted in a much higher level of parental/guardian attendance and knowledge of the homework club than is the reported norm. It is thought that with this level of parental involvement, this homework club is assisting families to come to grips with and understand better the complex education system in their new land.

## A Learning Culture and Environment.

**The experience of Ali highlights the degree to which the culture of this homework club contributes to individual success.**

*Ali arrived in Australia after 3 years in a Kenyan refugee camp at the age of 9 years with his mother and two sisters. His father died in the Somali conflicts. Three older brothers have been able to later join the family in Australia. All family members have benefitted from attendance at this community centre and/or its homework club.*

*Ali was attracted to the community centre by indoor soccer. He says soccer did literally “kick off” his attendance at the homework club and led him in to valuing learning.*

*“A lot of us were isolated through language barriers and other things we didn’t want to talk about, but sport is a common language and that got me involved. From then, especially when Raphael arrived, I got attracted to the homework club.” He was attracted by the fact that “teachers (tutors) were available for me” and feels he benefitted enormously from their personal assistance. He puts his successful completion of secondary education down to the support he received from the homework club and the confidence it gave him at school.*

*Ali is now studying and working part time and could not believe he has been asked to work as a tutor at his old homework club.*

*“I could not believe I was asked to work here. I love this place; it has been like a home to me.”*

## **Overall Benefits of Homework Clubs and LBB**

The benefits of homework club attendance in relation to the aim of LBB are being looked at in a number of ways during the course of this evaluation. One hundred students are being tracked in relation to a number of indicators of school engagement and connectedness over a period of 30 months. The views of students, teachers, tutors and others are being periodically captured. Changes in indicators and opinions are being noted and reasons for change gathered and implied separately from these case studies. The positive outcomes and benefits of homework club participation and areas that may be improved are documented in the **First Six Monthly Report** of the LBB Evaluation provided to CMY.

## **Particular Benefits of Engagement at this Homework Club**

There may be other considerations regarding the benefits to young people from attendance at this particular club due to the broad nature of those attending; particularly those that are risk of disconnecting prematurely from a school or other learning environment and are being reintroduced to a learning environment through attendance at this homework club.

A number of Victorian studies highlight the importance of school connectedness in avoiding future youth homelessness, child protection and juvenile justice involvement. This community centre and its homework club are clearly connecting with a proportion of young people who are at risk of disconnecting prematurely from school. It may be that this homework club is assisting and has assisted in diverting some vulnerable young people away from personally damaging and costly involvement in the youth homelessness, child protection and juvenile justice areas. These possible outcomes of homework club involvement have been raised by a few participants in discussions associated with these case studies and will be further explored throughout the remainder of the Evaluation of LBB.

## Case Study 2

### *Specialising in Literacy and Numeracy*



This homework club, more appropriately referred to as an after school hours learning program or “program”, is operated on Saturdays by an English Language School in Melbourne’s west. The program was initiated in 2004 by the local Horn of Africa Community Network (HACN) for the use of facilities for language tuition and assistance for YOUNG African students. After operating from a largely volunteer base, HACN, the school and a local university developed a partnership arrangement 3 years ago that led to a more structured approach while still relying on volunteer tutors.

The receipt of a LBB Best Practice Grant to support the Saturday program has now enabled the program to expand and strengthen its operations. Pre service teachers now run the sessions under supervision and support arrangements with the school and Helen, a leading teacher and student wellbeing coordinator at the school coordinates the Saturday program.

Three classrooms operate on a Saturday with up to 50 primary age students in attendance. All students at this program are recently arrived refugee and migrant children. Some attend the English Language School throughout the week, others attend mainstream schools. Many students are picked up by bus and all enjoy a substantial lunch. The contribution of food to the success and enjoyment of this homework club cannot be underestimated: the **First Six Monthly Report** to CMY highlights the benefit of food and snacks to the students in the ten homework clubs studied.



***“As well as assisting with general operating expenses the LBB Best Practice grant enables us to operate on a Saturday.”*** Helen. Leading teacher/ SWC

### **The Transition from Untrained Volunteers to Volunteers in Training**

Two to three volunteer pre service teachers run each class of around 15 students supervised and supported by Helen. Helen participates in classes, assists the pre service teachers with lesson planning and classroom teaching techniques and strategies and provides individual and group fieldwork supervision as required by their university. Pre service teachers are given responsibility, under supervision for planning and undertaking the lessons and clearly appreciate the opportunity to learn and practice within this

environment. All have committed to working at the program throughout 2011, well beyond the fieldwork requirements of their university course.



***“It is an opportunity and privilege to learn in this environment and I would now not miss a Saturday.”*** Suheyla. Pre service teacher.

Prior to the systematic involvement of pre service teachers, this program used volunteers with little or no teaching or ESL experience. Helen has two main recollections from this period; volunteer tutors were unreliable in their attendance but also struggled to give students the learning experiences and adopt the teaching methods required of this student group. There is now an emphasis on formal lessons planned specifically for the literacy and numeracy levels of these students. There is no focus on homework assistance. Helen’s experience leads to the view that the literacy and numeracy needs of these particular students with severely interrupted schooling cannot be met by volunteer tutors with no understanding of teaching or ESL experience. She is of the view that schools should be considered as partners in the operation of all homework clubs.



***“In terms of the future development of homework clubs for refugee and migrant young people; partnerships involving schools are the only way to go.”*** Helen. Leading teacher/ SWC

There is some evidence in the *First Six Monthly Report of the LBB Program* for CMY that supports this view.

### **Meeting the Needs of this Specific Target Group**

Helen is also clear that there are few after school programs available to these students that expertly address their most basic literacy and numeracy needs.



***“There are good recreational and social programs around that include these kids in activities including sport, cooking and the like, but what they really need is expert literacy and numeracy tuition. It’s much easier to find community run social and recreational programs for these kids than educational programs”.*** Helen. Leading teacher/ SWC

Helen points out that secondary age students are particularly vulnerable to falling behind or never catching up with a workable level of literacy and numeracy in this critical period immediately and shortly after arrival in Australia. There is an opportunity with primary age students, who may have missed less schooling than their secondary counterparts, to intervene earlier through programs such as this one. If students are able to be expertly assisted and their literacy and numeracy strengthened, their chances of a productive settlement within their new country are enhanced enormously. More resources in this area, for children after school hours are required.

## Some Student Outcomes

Late in 2010 some students attending this program were engaged in an exercise to determine, amongst other things, outcomes related to the main Aim of LBB; whether participation at this program was adding to their feelings of connectedness and engagement at school. Age appropriate indicators of school engagement and connectedness were identified and students engaged in discussion around their feelings associated with these indicators. Students attending this program felt very well connected to both this program and their main weekday school. They were adamant that how they felt at this program and the concrete outcomes they had experienced had assisted them in feeling more connected and engaged at their main week day school. A number of other positive student outcomes are described in the First Six Monthly Report of the Evaluation of the LBB Program for CMY.

This program is clearly making a big difference for those students attending.

## Does LBB Make a Difference?

The benefit derived from the LBB Best Practice grant is clear. But for a program like this, what other benefits are derived from LBB?

In 2009 CMY organised training to support the work of the (volunteer) pre service teachers working with this program. The training was run on site. This training was considered most valuable and relevant at the time, leading to plans to have it recur in 2011.

Helen, leading teacher has participated in other training and networking opportunities organised by CMY for best practice grantees.



***“CMY run very relevant training for our situation.... I will use it again.”*** Helen.  
Leading teacher/ SWC

## Case Study 3

### *Maximising Involvement*



This after school hours homework club is run in the library, VCE study centre and two specialist classrooms of a secondary school in Melbourne's outer east and regularly has well over 130 students attending. Space is at a premium. It is one of the highest attended homework clubs in Victoria!

This homework club has come about from a partnership between the regional Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) and a secondary school and the involvement and commitment of other key players including the local municipality and, more recently, a community services organisation (CSO). The history of this homework club indicates that there are many advantages to be gained through partnering arrangements between schools and other organisations such as those that support the operations of this homework club.

The capacity of the homework club at this school has been enhanced through a Best Practice Grant as part of the LBB program administered by the regional Migrant Resource Centre.

There are a number of positive features and issues surrounding the operation of the homework club at this secondary school that have emerged through discussion with the Student Wellbeing Coordinator, teachers, students and others.

### **A Model of Partnership**

A truly **collaborative** model of partnership has developed between the MRC, the school, the local municipality and now a key CSO. This model has been replicated in three other arrangements with secondary schools and two with other community services organisations.

Clear responsibilities have been developed between organisations and individuals. The Student Wellbeing Coordinator (SWC) at this secondary school, Mandy, leads and manages the operation of the homework club with the responsibility being a legitimate and important part of her workload. The Migrant Resource Centre administers the LBB Best Practice Grant and has allocated time to a coordinator, Vitalia, to support the development of homework clubs in their region. Bill, the local Council's Multicultural Youth Development Officer plays a key role.



***“I have a clear role and an approach that can be developed in other settings and with other organisations”.*** Vitalia. MRC.

Successful partnerships need to be actively supported and maintained and recently the need was identified by the school, MRC and local municipality to review the contribution of each player and develop a Statement of Responsibilities or MOU.

The leadership style of the Student Wellbeing Coordinator, Mandy, has contributed to its success.

## **Participatory Leadership**

At any session there is likely to be over 100 students along with:

- Mandy and Vitalia
- Library staff.
- 10-12 teachers from the school acting as tutors.
- Other school staff “popping in” including regular visits by the school Principal.
- The Multicultural Youth Development Officer from the local Council.
- 3-4 volunteer tutors composed of parents and former students.

The involvement of the local Council Multicultural Youth Development Officer, Bill, led to 30 homework club students attending an outdoor youth development and adventure camp in 2010 and involvement by two senior students in other youth leadership and ambassadorship training. Involvement of these two students in a multicultural multi faith youth network and a participatory arts initiative also arose from Bill’s involvement at the homework club. Bill.....“*The Apple Man*” brings fresh fruit to each session to complement the afternoon tea provided by the homework club; and there are lots of questions by students as to his whereabouts if he doesn’t arrive on time!

### **Why This Success?**

Participatory leadership is clearly present. After each homework club session all members of the school staff are emailed by Mandy in the form of a mini update as to how many students attended that afternoon and any outstanding successes. The names of all teachers and volunteers are listed and thanked for their involvement. The aim of this update is to provide feedback and to spread and encourage ownership for the success of the homework club to all those that participate. It also acts as PR that may influence others to attend in future. The successes that occur at the homework club are also celebrated and promoted in the school newsletter. It is made clear in a number of ways that the homework club is supported across the whole school and community. Attendance by the principal and other members of the principal class further embed the value of this program into the life of the school.

Most importantly, the culture of the homework club including the emphasis on personal tuition is attracting students. The relaxed atmosphere in the homework club assists socialisation and a chance to relate to teachers and tutors in a more informal environment.



***“Wonderful and nurturing relationships have developed before our eyes. It does not go unnoticed by the students that so many staff members are volunteering their after school time to help them.”*** Mandy. SWC



***“It’s calm here. I feel refreshed when I get home. They come up and ask if I want assistance and because they are not getting paid to be here.....they are doing it for us.....it makes me feel valuable”.*** Aamon. Year 8



***“Of all the things we do at this school I am the most proud of this. I can relate to kids in a different way here”.*** Greg. Maths teacher.

### **“Catching” the LBB Target Group.**

The Aim of LBB is to: ***improve newly arrived migrant and refugee students’ school connectedness and engagement by strengthening the capacity of out of school hours learning support programs.*** For the purposes of this evaluation recently arrived includes those refugee and migrant students that have arrived in Australia over the last seven years. This homework club adopts a strategy to attract refugee and migrant students that is used by a number of others; they make the homework club accessible and open for all students and encourage in particular, attendance by refugee and migrant students.

This approach works, in fact our research over the last year (documented in the ***First Six Monthly Report*** for CMY) details examples where the adoption of this approach at the expense of a more targeted approach aimed only at refugee and migrant students has led to increased attendance by refugee and migrant students.

While this homework club is clearly promoted to all students as voluntary, the club was initially promoted to selected parents and teachers. General word of mouth across the school is now the most potent and successful form of advertising complemented by ESL and other teachers. Approximately 45% of students attending sessions have a migrant or refugee background.



***“Our refugee and recently arrived students learn much by working side by side with their peers of all academic abilities and cultural backgrounds”.*** Mandy SWC

and importantly:



***“If this club was just for refugees, I would not feel good. I don’t want to stick out like a sore thumb. I would not come if this club pointed me out as being different”.***

Rashid. Year 12

The degree of reach by the homework club into the main student body and engagement of informal student leaders has reached the stage where it is considered “pretty cool” to attend.



***“My homework club is a cool place to go to now”.*** Brian. Year 10

## **Homework and Beyond.**

This club also reflects the broad range of learning activities occurring at homework clubs that are documented in the first Six Monthly Report for CMY. While there is an emphasis on homework, other activities such as preparation of resumes, assistance in understanding learning driving and licensing requirements and assistance with career and learning pathways decisions also occur regularly at the club. There is an emphasis on relevant learning.

**The experiences and viewpoints of Rashid and Aaron highlight the degree to which the particular features of this homework club have contributed to individual success.**

**Rashid is a regular Year 12 attendee at the homework club. He arrived in Australia four years ago after fleeing Afghanistan with family members and finding temporary refuge in Pakistan. He appreciates the inclusive nature of the homework club and states that if it were promoted as being for refugee students he would not attend. Interestingly, Australian born Aamon, Year 8, has a similar perspective, saying that if the homework club was promoted as being for kids that need help; he would not attend either. Both Rashid and Aamon privately acknowledge their need of assistance. Such views may have implications for the way in which homework programs are promoted to potential students.-**

**Both Rashid and Aaron comment that they *“always leave the homework club with something they have achieved”*. Both have benefitted from the personal approach to learning, the availability and consistency of teachers/tutors, the leadership of Mandy, contact with other students and opportunities presented during the course of the homework club. In 2010 Rashid attended an outdoor youth development and adventure camp organised by Bill. His leadership potential became apparent and he is now involved in leadership and multi faith multicultural youth development activities supported by the local Council and others.**



***“You always come out with something new. You get help and keep your respect; in fact you feel more respected”.*** Rashid. Year 12

## Case Study 4

### *Community Participation and Sustainability*



This organisation operates two homework clubs; the primary age club (Year 4-6) is the subject of this case study. The program is auspiced by a community centre working in Melbourne's west in partnership with the local library. The community centre is entrepreneurial in attracting funding from a number of sources for a number of different community activities and services including a community wide volunteer coordination program. A large number of volunteer tutors support the club. The community centre is the recipient of a Best Practice Grant as part of the LBB program and staff and volunteers at the community centre have participated in other LBB sponsored training, development and assistance. Approximately 60% of students attending the primary age club have parents born overseas or were themselves born overseas.

At these homework clubs the benefits of location of the homework club amongst a range of other community based services is apparent, as is the vulnerability and episodic nature of the financial support that most homework clubs experience.

### **Personalised tutoring**

The aim is to have a student: tutor ratio of 1:1. This ambitious aim has resulted in as many as 15 tutors being available at some primary age sessions attended by around 25 students. Tutors are mostly tertiary students with a smaller proportion of local community members including retired teachers. The low student: tutor ratio is valued by students at this club, in fact the personalised tuition and learning opportunities available through homework clubs generally was regarded as the most valuable or "best" feature of their club by students sampled in 2010. Getting assistance with homework was the next most valuable feature. Getting opportunities to socialise and mix with friends did not rate highly unless it was combined with learning activities.



***"The best thing about this club is my tutor and doing my homework. I get it out of the way and it is more fun having friends here as well".*** Mustafa. Year 5.

Students commented on just how much their homework club session was disrupted and how disappointed they were if "their tutor" did not show up at a session.

## The Use of Volunteers

This community centre operates a well-established volunteer coordination program across the municipality and this has been of great benefit to the homework club. Reductions in the patterns of volunteering across Victoria are well documented. Victoria's Volunteer Strategy 2009 and research by the Australian Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2006, and many others indicates that while overall volunteer levels may still be high, a significant change in the profile of volunteers and their capacity to volunteer has reduced the degree to which community services organisations can rely on voluntary efforts to assist with operations. There is also the realisation, promoted by organisations such as Volunteering Australia that volunteers need to be appropriately checked, recruited, inducted, encouraged, supported and recognised. Best practice in volunteer recruitment and retention is well documented: <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/files/7GHOWN9C10/VA%20Model%20Code%20June%202005.pdf>

The volunteer coordination program at the community centre is well regarded in this area and volunteer homework club tutors, when questioned during both discussion and formal survey, reported almost unanimously that they generally felt well supported and positive in relation to their own achievements and those of students.

Many homework clubs are largely dependent on volunteer tutors, particularly those operated solely by community services organisations. The location of this homework club within an organisation that has a well developed volunteer coordination program adds a lot of value to homework club outcomes.

A number of volunteer tutors at this homework club had also participated in training provided by CMY as part of LBB. A survey of volunteer tutors late in 2010 found a high level of satisfaction with this training.



***“My work at this club has fitted well with what I am learning in my (tertiary) course. I was lucky to find out about this when they visited Uni. Yes, I have been well supported here”.*** Peta. Volunteer tutor/student.

### Volunteer Turnover

Students at homework clubs generally have reported on the value of having consistent relationships with particular tutors. There are indications from the 2010 survey of homework club tutors from the ten homework clubs in the initial evaluation period of LBB, reported in the ***First Six Monthly Report*** to CMY, that turnover of tutor's makes consistency throughout the year difficult to sustain. In general, 20% of volunteer tutors had been with their club less than 3 months and 70% had been with their club less than 6 months. While this perhaps reflects the nature and degree of volunteer commitment that can be expected in these times, it is of concern to this and other clubs.

## Other Shared Resources.

There are a number of other resources at the community centre and library that are shared across the homework club sessions. Some have been developed for the sole

benefit of homework club students; others are shared across the community centre. These include:

- Volunteer coordination and support
- Volunteer tutors
- Management and coordination of the community centre
- Coordination of library activities
- Coordination of the homework clubs
- Purpose designed library premises
- IT equipment, laptops, notebooks. Purchased by the community centre from a grant
- Translators/interpreters engaged by the community centre from a grant

The LBB Best Practice grant covers the coordination costs of the homework club/s; other costs, including the non salary costs of operating the homework clubs are born by the community centre, highlighting a situation common across Victoria: homework clubs have no ongoing programmatic funding and have to search for various time-limited funding sources to sustain the costs of operations. The LBB Best Practice grant is the most welcome sole source of specific funding aimed at strengthening the homework club/s operated by this community centre.

## **The Difficulty in Achieving Sustainability**

The experience of this community centre highlights the vulnerability of funding that supports most homework clubs. The local municipal Council has announced that base funding for operations and activities at the community centre will be reduced by 70%. This resourcing supports the homework club's operations, including volunteer tutor recruitment, support and coordination. The lack of ongoing funding for the general operations of this community centre will impact upon the homework club.

The Best Practice Grant, provided through LBB, assists recipient organisations to develop strategies and skills that encourage operational and financial sustainability for their homework programs. This grant, however, is time limited. As described here, many organisations invest considerable time and energy into competing for sustainable funding in an environment that is seeing a decrease in core funding available for community programs.



***“The community centre has built a reputation on being able to provide an answer, but is now in a position where it must manage a reduction in services to match its new level of base funding. Where it will end up and what it will look like is very much an open question at present”.*** Chairperson. Committee of Management.



***“Our homework program is the jewel in the crown of our services and must be preserved, however it will not benefit from the same level of support and resourcing from our community centre that it has had in the past”.*** Community centre Director.

## Case Study 5

### *Homework Club/School Partnerships*



This homework program is operated by a community centre in Melbourne's north east. It is coordinated by the New Arrivals Youth Worker, Bernard, at the community centre as part of his duties.

There are 5 clubs in the program: 3 are held at secondary schools, 1 at a primary school and 1 in a local library. The school based clubs are all held at lunchtime or after school, the library club runs on Saturday mornings. Average attendance at each club is 7- 10 students. All clubs focus on newly arrived students, the Saturday club focuses on VCE. Most sessions run for an hour. The students' main language groups are Arabic, Mandarin, Dinka and Dari.

There were more than 20 tutors involved in 2010, of whom a small number were paid. The club aims at a one to one student/ tutor ratio though this is not always possible. The club is able to draw on volunteers from a local community managed volunteer program, and some are supplied through CMY, with most tutors being university students. Many of these are drawn to the program through contacts with the community centre and the coordinator's approaches to the nearby university. In the past many of these have been pre- service teachers, however this year there has been a problem attracting secondary teaching students due to increased competition from other organisations for their voluntary services. This has caused some difficulty in finding tutors for specific VCE subjects such as physics and chemistry.

This community centre has focused on running homework clubs in schools through strong partnering agreements with schools and the local library.

### **Building a relationship between schools and the homework club**

There are many observable benefits from holding this homework club in a school.

The difficulties in effectively liaising with schools about student progress and homework club operations experienced by clubs operating from non school settings has been documented in the *First Six Monthly Report* to CMY. Some of these difficulties are overcome by way of the location of this club within a school setting.

The coordinator of this club has established close working relationships with the ESL and Student Wellbeing Coordinators in the schools which host the homework clubs. There is usually a teacher present at the club, this helps cover discipline and Occupational Health and Safety issues and the tutors feel supported.

It has the added benefit of providing the opportunity for liaison between tutors, the coordinators and the teacher, and provides a conduit for information about the club to be fed back to other teaching staff. However there is not always a high level of knowledge of the clubs and what their contribution can be at principal level. This is one area identified by Bernard where there could be more promotion.

In an attempt to improve communication between the club and the school regarding student progress, this club introduced a new agreement in 2011 which includes more contact between the club and the student's teachers.

Holding the club in a school does raise awareness amongst the teachers of what the club can offer.

#### **An observation made during a visit to this homework club:**

***The teacher whose class was in the room where the club is held stayed behind at the start of lunchtime to talk to some students about an assignment she had just distributed. When she noticed the homework club staff start to arrive, she said to the girls:***



***"It would be a really good idea to go through this now with your tutor so you understand it when you go home."*** Teacher.

It was observed that having the homework club located in this school makes these connections much easier and creates a more seamless path for the student between their class work and the club. The comparative benefits of both location and auspicing arrangements for homework clubs is discussed in some detail in the ***First Six Monthly Report*** to CMY.

## **Homework and More**

This homework club has homework assistance as its main focus, followed by other school related issues.

The location of the club enables it to link in more closely with the rhythm of the school year. Bernard states that, many of the students need assistance when they have to make subject choices in their senior years, and their family does not have the background knowledge to be able to help. These choices often have to be made in a short time frame. Tutors are able to discuss with students what their ambitions for the future are and assist with teachers and the coordinator in planning a pathway of subject choices appropriate to their aspirations and abilities.

## **Attendance, Time, Parents and Location**

Students report that it is easier to attend the club when it is held at their school, either at lunchtime or after school, as there is no separate transport required. They feel comfortable with the location, and their parents are not worried about them going somewhere unfamiliar. Some students said that they did not have much time outside of school because of family responsibilities and other commitments.

However, it is difficult for parents to be involved in the club when it is held at school and some students said they didn't really know if their parents were aware that they attend. By contrast, it was observed that while students were attending the club held on Saturday mornings in the library, some of their parents and younger siblings were using computers in the library and borrowing books. In this way the club is obviously having a wider benefit for the whole family by increasing their use of community facilities and appealing to those students who, for whatever reason, prefer to get assistance away from their school setting.

One size does not fit all students and their circumstances; different types of clubs are needed to cater for different types of students.

## **Linking School and Homework Club**

**The experience of one student, Ayen, highlights the benefits of strong links between school and homework club.**

Ayen is 17 years old and is in Year 11. Her family came to Australia as refugees from the Sudan in 2004. She is the eldest of 7 children and has a newborn baby brother. When she came her family shared a house with relatives, and 14 people now share her home. Her mother is not well and Ayen has family responsibilities which take up much of her time, she would like to participate in sport outside of school and learn music, but cannot fit this in.

Ayen said she doesn't always get the help she needs in class and gets stressed if she can't do her homework, having the tutors to assist makes her feel more confident about her schoolwork and less worried. What homework she cannot complete at the homework club she does at night when the younger children are in bed. She does have computer access at home and can also work at her female cousin's house; this cousin goes to university and can drive Ayen home. She uses no public transport except for the school bus and does not use community facilities such as the local library.

Ayen's secondary school progress has been closely linked with her attendance at the club, which has built on the assistance she received in Literacy and ESL classes from Years 7 to 9. Her English teacher knows she goes to the club and suggests she seek help there with particular assignments.

For Ayen, having the homework club at school in school hours is working really well. She is not sure, given her circumstances that she would be able to attend if the club was anywhere else and stated *"If the club was held somewhere else I would try to go but I don't know if I could make it"*

Ayen has been attending the club for 4 years and she enjoys it stating *"I know I am going to walk out knowing that I have learned something."* She also likes the social contact and has friends she met at the club.

Ayen found the advice she got at homework club in choosing the subjects to help her achieve her goal extremely helpful. She intends to keep going to the club in Year 12, but says there is often no-one to help with her with specialised science and maths subjects. She would like to be *"a doctor or a nurse so I can help children in developing countries"*.

Her parents have no involvement with the club and only come to the school for parent – teacher interviews. Her siblings go to different schools.

## Summary/Conclusion.

These case studies aim to bring the personal perspective into the Evaluation of LBB and make results, opinions and views more accessible; and to add to the understanding of the operations of homework clubs by examining the context within which they operate. These five case studies highlight, showcase and examine good practices by identifying themes that each club has found successful.

They raise a number of factors and practices for consideration by all involved in this vibrant sector:

- **The degree to which location of the club contributes to successful outcomes for students in relation to the Aim of LBB.**
- **The benefits that can come from partnering arrangements between auspice and operating organisations.**
- **The importance in involving schools in partnering arrangements if they are not the auspice organisation.**
- **Factors associated with the recruitment, retention, recognition and support of volunteers.**
- **Consideration of situations where volunteer tutors may not have the skills required to assist students and ways this can be overcome.**
- **Targeting strategies including encouraging recently arrived refugee and migrant students into homework clubs via general promotional strategies.**
- **The degree to which homework clubs do, and should, attract students that are disengaging from school. Do we attract students that are already well connected and engaged with school and learning environments?**
- **How location of the club can encourage parental involvement.**
- **The degree to which tutors/teachers with specialised training are required for particular students e.g. those with few literacy and numeracy skills and severely interrupted schooling; and the availability of these skilled tutors/teachers.**
- **The relationship between good participatory leadership and a successful homework club.**
- **The very positive experiences and outcomes reported by homework club participants.**
- **The broad range of activities undertaken at homework clubs; much more than homework.**
- **The vulnerability of ongoing programmatic funding for core operations of some organisations operating homework clubs.**
- **The difficulty in developing sustainable financial and supportive frameworks for homework programs in general.**

These and other considerations are being identified, raised and discussed through the Evaluation of the Learning Beyond the Bell Program managed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

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