

Case study: Tarneit P-9 College

Learning Support Program

Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) 3: 2016 – 2017



Background and Identified Needs

Tarneit P-9 College is located in the West of Melbourne and currently has 1,604 students enrolled. Of these students, 612 are from an English as an Additional Language (EAL) background and 45 are from refugee backgrounds. The predominant cultural backgrounds are South Sudanese, Pasifika and Indian.

The school RESP team identified that due to existing language barriers, increasing student confidence to engage in learning at school should be a priority. Literacy support was also prioritised, as learning outcomes have not been on par among students from a migrant and/or refugee background compared to the rest of the student cohort.

The RESP Project

As a part of RESP, the school partnered with 100 Story Building to develop a Learning Support Program, known as 'Students League of Early Excited Powerful Yawners' or 'SLEEPY'. This consisted of weekly out-of-school-hours sessions aimed at students from year 1 to 4, with year 8 and 9 students providing support as peer mentors.

The project aimed to increase the capacity of students to engage in learning at school and increase student confidence with literacy tasks.

100 Story Building is a social enterprise for children and young writers from culturally diverse and marginalised backgrounds based in Melbourne's inner west. The organisation worked closely with Tarneit P-9 College to design the project and assist with monitoring and evaluation.

Outcomes for Students

Learning outcomes

Students have shown a high level of engagement in the creative learning approach, and now demonstrate greater confidence to try unfamiliar activities. Agency staff noted that students have become more willing to "take creative risks" and fully engage in a process without knowing the end result. Mentors also noticed a shift throughout the year as students needed less prompting to generate ideas, and became enthusiastic to participate in group discussions and reflections.

Classroom teachers noticed that students who attended SLEEPY were more alert and engaged when starting classes on Monday morning. School staff also reported that students are now

requesting to use the library several times a week to continue working on their tasks from SLEEPY.

"[SLEEPY] helped me to get better at writing, to be more confident." - Student



Social and wellbeing outcomes

As students became more comfortable in the group, peer mentors observed students encouraging each other with their work and becoming more open to sharing ideas. By the end of the year, younger students had developed new friendships across the different year levels, including with the Year 8 and 9 mentors.

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The student mentors themselves quickly thrived in their roles and increasingly took on more ownership of the project. The mentors demonstrated exceptional leadership and team work, as well as a willingness to engage meaningfully with the younger participants. The involvement of older students as mentors has helped to create more connections between the primary and secondary levels at the school.

"Writing has always been a passion of mine and along with the kids I too built on my writing skills...all the recesses we sacrificed were worth it." - Year 9 Peer Mentor

Outcomes for the School

Capacity to meet the needs of refugee students

The RESP project supported the school to explore a different style of literacy teaching. In particular, 100 Story Building encouraged staff to think about the variety of ways that stories can be developed and shared. This professional learning contributed to making SLEEPY a welcoming and inclusive space for students. The teachers and mentors now feel inspired to use these new skills and continue the project into the future. Many teachers are also starting to implement the activities and teaching strategies from SLEEPY in their classes.

"Both mentors and students have developed a different way of thinking when it comes to creative storytelling." - Teacher

Engagement with families

The project was given a stall during the school's 'Spring Showcase'- an event highlighting student programs and achievements. The showcase was an opportunity to display some of the work from SLEEPY and engage with families in the school community. At the end of the year, parents of children participating in SLEEPY were invited to attend one of the final sessions. Parents observed the activities and shared breakfast with the students and school staff. Given the success of these two events, the school would like to explore more opportunities to engage families in the project next year.

Work in partnership

The school highly valued their partnership with 100 Story Building. Regular communication, including the use of a shared google drive, enabled strong teamwork and collaboration. Establishing clear processes and goals early on helped both parties to manage the project within a busy school environment. Throughout the year, 100 Story Building facilitated project design and reflection sessions with staff and student mentors. The

school intends to continue working with 100 Story Building for professional development and consultation on future projects.

"Everyone involved, from school leadership to teachers and mentors, has been fearless and enthusiastic, and there is a clear culture within the school of continual learning and having fun while doing it." - 100 Story Building Project Coordinator

Lessons Learned

School staff were pleasantly surprised by the development of the peer mentor role throughout the project's implementation. All staff agreed that having peer mentors involved was a resounding success and strongly contributed to the engagement of younger students. Going forward, the school would like to further develop and support the role of peer mentors, recognising the positive impact their involvement has for younger students and the mentors themselves.

This resource was produced as part of the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP). RESP assists selected schools to identify and implement strategies to support the achievement outcomes, wellbeing and engagement in learning of students from refugee backgrounds. To learn more visit: www.cmy.net.au

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