

Learning Journeys Forum Report

6th September 2018 at St Pauls African House, Shepparton.







Learning Journeys – Shaping the future of new arrival learning support in our region

Introduction

The Learning Journeys Forum was held in Shepparton on 6th September 2018 at St Pauls African House, 54 Poplar Avenue, Shepparton. The Forum was designed to provide an opportunity to hear from inspiring young people of refugee backgrounds about their learning journey, hear how schools involved in the Refugee Education Support Program are providing learning support for students and families of refugee background and provide professional learning support and networking opportunities.

The forum was attended by 25 people with representatives from:

- La Trobe University – Shepparton campus
- St Mel's Primary School
- Sirius College
- McGuire College
- Save the Children
- Uniting
- The Smith Family
- Department of Education
- Department of Human Services (Centrelink)
- Department of Health and Human Services Victoria
- Shepparton Interfaith Network
- Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network(GMLLEN)
- Primary Care Connect
- Mercy Access
- St Paul's African House
- Foundation House
- Liz Arcus Photography

The forum was organised around three themes; INSPIRING, SHARING, and LEARNING.

Inspiring

During the Inspiring session we heard from four young people from refugee backgrounds and the MC about their education journey. The case studies below have been presented as closely as possible to how they were delivered on the day. Only slight editing has been done where necessary for comprehension.



Speakers

Emcee – Jean-Michel Batakane

Jean-Michel was born in Congo, and lived in Kenya for eight years and is currently living in Shepparton. Jean –Michel studied Graphic Design at Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE in Shepparton and studied Filmmaking in Nairobi, Kenya. He does film and photography, and works as a Theatre Technical Assistant in Shepparton. Jean-Michel’s passion is film, and he feels that the media has a big impact on how we view the world. As a designer he sees the media portraying the colour of his skin as a bad thing and that pushes him to hope that one day he can use his knowledge of film to create works which would balance the truth and help the world be a better place, where everyone feels comfortable in the colour of their skin. Jean-Michel believes that education is the key, and that it can be used to lock one’s mind, or open it.

CMY Shout Out Speaker - Barry Berih

Barry was born in Australia to Eritrean parents, and is a community leader who works with young people in North Melbourne. As a youth worker at North Melbourne Football Club, Barry is passionate about getting to know young people and he hopes to one day own a business that helps young people realise their dreams. Living with mild cerebral palsy, Barry is keen to share his experience of growing up, dealing with adversity and the value in building good relationships with family.



Case Study

My family have been through a lot in migrating and learning a new language, and we share a lot of the challenges of living in different cultures. I went to Essendon Primary School and Ascot Vale Special School (AVSS). At Essendon I had a Teacher Aide who helped me overcome some of the difficulties I had with reading and writing. I was also home schooled by my Dad. My teachers were very supportive and made time to talk with my parents; they were patient and understanding, which made a lot of difference as they paid attention to my special needs, but also provided me with opportunities to be independent. The relationship between my family and my school was very important in helping me to achieve my goals of learning how to use public transport, how to network, how to cook and look after the home and how to job search. I now work at the YMCA at the North Melbourne Community Centre as a Customer Service Officer. I’m also an Eritrean Community Leader and run sport mentoring programs for 12-25 year olds.

Hussain Alamein

Hussain is an Australian-Iraqi, who was born in Iran. At the age of 5 his family left Iran to find refuge in Australia, and decided to settle in Shepparton. Other than the 4 years he spent studying medicine at University in Melbourne, Hussain has lived most of his life in Shepparton. Hussain decided to come back to Shepparton to undertake his second year medical placements at Goulburn Valley Health. After completing his studies he plans to stay and work in the Goulburn Valley region.

Hussain is passionate about education and his community and paying forward all the support that he was given growing up. He feels that education has opened many doors for him and has allowed him to follow his dreams and aspirations. Hussain would like to see a more equitable education system in Australia, as he feels that it is important for everyone to have the tools to achieve their personal goals. With the help of his



colleagues at the University of Melbourne Medical School (Shepparton Rural Clinical School) they have been reaching out to the community and offering free tutoring and hope to play at least a small part in making a positive impact on the world.

Case Study

I am an Iraqi-Australian and spent most of my life growing up in Shepparton. As I try to recall my feelings of my first days of schooling in Shepparton I can say that my experiences were “different”. One thing I had to really reconcile entering the education system was this clash of cultures. Being someone who comes from a different culture to entering an environment with one homogenous culture, it was different and difficult. It was tough to reconcile who I was at home and what my environment was trying to shape me up to be. At primary school I was given special classes and dedicated teachers that focused on my learning needs and even had 1on1 tutoring to focus on my English communication skills. In my final years of high school I began to realise that there existed a clear gap in education between public schools in regional towns and those in metro regions. With this in mind, going through Years 11 and 12 I knew that a lot of my learning had to be self motivated and as such I went through online resource and began to work on my own needs, and choosing goals that would push me to move further and further, as well having a good set of friends to push me to do my best. As such I was able to do well enough to get into the University of Melbourne and get into my dream course, medicine.

Throughout my experiences of education I found it’s important when going through high school to have your own role models, people you aspire to be like. I know that a lot of people will say that education should be about yourself and that everything you do is for yourself, and I agree. But for myself the thing that motivated me to work hard mostly were my brothers Ali and Mohammad who came to Australia with absolutely nothing and were able to go through a few years of high school to come out and graduate and work as an engineer and doctor today.

Fawzia Abkar

Fawzia was born in Darfur, Sudan and since arriving in Australia has lived in Shepparton.

One change that Fawzia would like to see in the world is for people to accept each others difference. Fawzia believes that Earth has only one race and that is ‘humans’ not Africans, Asians or Americans, just humans. Fawzia is concerned about the divisions within the Sudanese community and is currently working on a youth project to help bring all different race of Sudan together.

Currently, Fawzia is studying a Bachelor of Nursing at La Trobe University- Shepparton Campus, and when she is not studying, she works as a skin care consultant and is a youth leader for the Darfur youth in Victoria.

Fawzia is also developing a charity organization called Hope Is Here, which focuses on empowering women, girls and children and through this has started a homework club every Monday for primary and high school students.

Fawzia’s dream is to become a nurse and she is passionate about her studies, as it is something she has always wanted to do. She hopes that it will one day allow her to travel the world and help people who are in need, as she really enjoys helping and being there others.





Case Study

I remember when I first came to Australia at the age of 10 with no English, having no English put me through so much struggle when it came to communication. I was enrolled in Grade 4 and was welcomed with open arms, every student wanted to sit next to the new girl and whenever I needed help, my classmates were there to give a hand. The first English word I learnt was NO and I was so proud to use it. I used to say no to everything, at that time I did not know what “no” meant, so I used it to respond to all the questions that I was asked. I remember one of my classmates asked me to play with them on the computers and me being me, I proudly said ‘No’ and then I saw the classmates face go down in disappointment and walked away. I did not know what I did or said wrong, all I said was ‘No’.

The school had a dance, and the dance was done though boys and girls dancing together and holding hands. Now I was not allowed to dance with boys, and my teachers were encouraging me to dance, but because I didn’t have the language, I didn’t know how to say I can’t dance with boys. The only choice I had was to run away; I made the teacher chase me around the school for a good 30 minutes because I thought I would get into trouble for not listening to the teacher and I ran away and that would make my punishment worse. Back in Africa students used to get hit in school for not listening to the teacher and I thought that would happen to me. After 30 minutes of chasing I finally came to a stop and was ready to accept my punishment, but the teacher just yelled at me for my behaviour, and I did not understand a thing she said.

When I moved to a new school I was given a timetable for extra classes to help with learning English. The timetables were written in English, and at that time I could not read at all, so I ended up showing up 30 minutes or an hour late to the sessions. I remembered that my teacher told me to do something and return it the next day and I didn’t do it because I did not know how to read or write. The next day I so scared to show up for class that day., When I made it to class the teacher said “it’s okay.”, In my head I was like, if he didn’t hit me now or yell at me, then I am in it for it later. For the whole day at school, I could not eat because I was so terrified and scared of what he was going to do to me after school. After school came and nothing was happening, he didn’t yell, he didn’t hit me. What I found different here in Australia was that the teachers just teach the class and didn’t care if the students did their work or not and that surprised me even more. How could students get away without getting their task done? That was something I had to get used to, I had to get used to not having a teacher caring if I did my work or not and not getting punished for my wrongdoings.

When I was little back in Africa, I experience and witness things that kids my age should never suffer and that lead me to have trauma, a trauma that would not let me sleep or focus on my education and my daily living. I found it extremely hard to concentrate in class and get my work done on time and by the time I got to VCE I struggled really hard to keep up with the workload of VCE, which resulted to me not getting the grades I wanted Year 12. I was still happy and proud of myself for coming that far. I didn’t let a single grade stop from pursuing my future aspiration. Currently, I am studying a Bachelor of Nursing, I run weekly homework club for primary and high school students and also I have started an organisation called “Hope Is Here” which focuses on the needs of women, girls and children, not just Africans but everyone.

Education is essential to me; it’s a power that can be used to change the world, achieve your ambitions and goals but it all depends on how an individual uses it.

Muzhgan Qazikhil

Muzhgan was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and came to Australia with her family in 2009. She works four jobs all with a focus on young people and education and dreams of one day becoming a teacher. She is



passionate about teaching women in her community to stand up for their rights; she would like to see people become more understanding and accepting of differences.

Muzhgan believes that education is like power, the more you learn, the more you can understand the world.

Case study

My education started with my mother paying a neighbour to teach me the Koran and Dari, this was when the Taliban were in control of Kabul and because I am a girl I was not allowed to go to school. After the Taliban left, I studied in an old school that had been bombed and was used as a hideout for the Taliban. The walls had huge holes so that we could see the kids in the next classroom and there were bullet shells all over the floors. When my younger brother started school, he was scared and would get very upset, fortunately I was in the next classroom to his so if I sat at the back of the classroom I could sit by one of the holes in the wall and hold his hand while he remained in his classroom and we could both continue in our own classes. Our family then had to move, and I started at a different school with no classrooms at all. We would sit outside in the hot sun on the ground. In 2008 the UN provided some chairs and tables and tents for the school, but the tents were very hot and chairs that were meant for three people would have six people sitting on them. It was very cramped and uncomfortable and not a good environment to learn. Although the conditions were difficult I loved going to school because it was the only time I saw my friends.

In 2009 I arrived in Australia with my family and I was offered a place in the English Language Centre. We were shown by the Settlement Services how to get there once, but it was a long way and we had to take more than one bus, we had to remember the bus number and what stops to change at. We travelled there to be enrolled and, on the way, home we got lost and couldn't find our way back home. We had been told when we arrived that if we were ever in trouble to call 000 so that was what we did. The police came and found us and took us home but after that my father said we were not allowed to go to the English Language Centre because it was too hard for us to get there. Instead we attended a private school, it was not a multicultural school and I had very little English. For 6 months I sat in a small room with my two sisters and a teacher and we learnt the alphabet and some basic words. We did not mix with the other children at all and it was very isolating. After this we moved into the classroom. We were never given the option to choose our subjects. Although I could not speak much English at all my classmates were very friendly. Two years later my family moved to Shepparton and I was enrolled at Shepparton High School from Year 10.

I regret that I was never able to attend an English Language Centre, as I would have liked to have been somewhere that I could've learnt about the structure and culture of schools in Australia and what it feels like to study here. There are so many differences that it would have been nice to start with other students who were in a comparable situation to me.

In Year 11 I went to a Homework Club at the Shepparton English Language Centre (SELC) and this was very helpful as I did not have anyone at home who was able to help me with my homework. I completed VCE and also Certificate 2 in Community Service, Certificate 3 in Business and Certificate 3 in Education Support. I am now working at Save the Children as a Family Support Worker/Bio-Cultural Worker, Victoria School of Languages as Persian Teacher teaching year 9-12 VCE classes, and at Wanganui Park Secondary College and SELC as Multicultural Education Aid. I'm grateful of the support I have received from SELC as they made me from a shy girl to a strong girl. Every time when I was on the ground they reach their hands and made me to stand up on my feet and made me into an even stronger person.



Sharing

The Sharing session was divided into two parts; the first was a World Café to discuss issues and challenges that are common across the OSHLSP sector; this was followed by an opportunity to hear about the work that some of the local schools that are participating in the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) are doing to support the education of students from refugee backgrounds.

World Café

During the World Café session participants were invited to select two themes to have an in depth discussion about for 30 minutes, after which they were asked to move to their second choice theme. The themes were chosen based on CMY's recent research into the impact that the Victorian OSHLSP sector is having on students of refugee and migrant backgrounds and some of the challenges and issues that are emerging. The four themes were:

- Funding
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Supporting student resilience
- Intergenerational issues and supporting families

During the discussion participants were asked to discuss the following questions;

- What do we know so far?
- What challenges might occur and how can we meet them?
- What opportunities can you see?
- What's missing/ what do we need more clarity about?
- What is the next step and how can we support each other in taking that next step on this issue?

The outcome of the discussion is summarised below;

Funding

Lack of funding was recognised as a cross sector issue and included the lack of funding for transport in rural/regional centres, overreliance on volunteers and low wages for staff, which can lead to decreases in staff moral and organisation stability. Funding is often stretched over a number of agencies often offering similar programs and it was felt that networking opportunities where organisations could discuss achievements, service gaps, programs, and opportunities for partnership in program delivery, would lead to an increase in the capacity of the sector. The need to consult with the community on what they wanted was seen as an important next step, along with improving technical knowledge in how to apply for funding.

Volunteer recruitment and retention

This is recognised as an issue across the state with particular difficulties in sourcing specialist volunteers who are culturally appropriate and able to support senior students. It was felt that there were opportunities for partnering with high schools, GOTAFE, La Trobe University education students and the University of Melbourne medical students, to potentially recruit more volunteers. It was acknowledged that by making volunteers feel valued, highlighting positive outcomes of their work and providing training and support, would lead to better retention of volunteers. The next steps included gathering resources together and centralising what is being done to support volunteers and possibly establishing a homework club coordinators network.



Supporting student resilience

The group acknowledged that students from a refugee background are resilient and even though they face many cultural and linguistic barriers, their culture and language can also be a source of strength. Some of the challenges for students were identified as the lack of knowledge about the supports and services that are available and the lack of culturally aware mentors to help build student's self esteem. It was felt that individual student learning plans could be tailored to incorporate cultural knowledge. Challenges also exist for families and parents around their involvement in education. It was felt that better communication with parents by education providers and settlement services about the education system could help to build knowledge and understanding. There was a strong sense of the need to build better relationships with parents and families which in turn would assist parents to know and value their child's strengths and support resilience. A need for increased cross cultural communication skills and knowledge of the education system was identified as one of the next steps.

Intergenerational Issues and Supporting Families

The group felt that cultural norms influence decision making and often brings pressure and expectation from families around career paths for young people. This can include cultural expectations of gender roles and gender identity. Each generation has a set of values and wants better outcomes for future generations. However, there are challenges around perceptions in a new community, and having a rigid set of ideas about the future can put people in "boxes" and lead to perpetuation of gender roles. The challenge is to respectfully question behaviours and myths through better communication with families, communities and individuals. The group felt that the next steps require more awareness and engagement with the parent generation. This could include conversation groups, evening language classes to better cater for new arrivals who are working during the day, and better use of community spaces such as the Library and the new school Community Hubs. It was felt that the Settlement Services programs needed to be holistic and appropriately connect newly arrived families to services that show the different learning and employment pathways for young people.

School sharing

Three of the Shepparton schools that are participating in RESP and two of the project partners, shared some of the activities that they are doing to support the education of refugee background students.

At St Mel's Primary School eight Cultural Liaison Leaders, who are parents within the school, are included within the St Mel's RESP Team. The Cultural Liaison Leaders are from a range of cultural backgrounds including Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, Fijian Indian, Tongan and Congolese. The RESP team has strategically chosen representatives from across the school community who will have a connection to the school for years to come. The Cultural Liaison Leaders are becoming well known within the school community and provide the first point of contact for families, providing information about the school, including school excursions and camps, and how best to support their child's learning. The RESP Project has enabled the school to develop a deeper understanding of the multicultural families and the families are reciprocating through greater engagement with the school. The use of Cultural Liaison Leaders within the school has helped to make the project more sustainable.

Sirius College is working in partnership with Save the Children to run a Reading Club once a week after school to provide intensive support for students with their English and reading. Ten students from Grades 1-3 attend the reading club each week. The school Principal Adem Engin indicated that the students are from Arabic, Afghani and Turkish backgrounds. The reading club focusses on working on letter sounds with the students, and this has led to them being more willing to try to read words that they are unfamiliar with and



they are using a variety of reading strategies to do this. Teachers at the school have indicated that students' reading levels have increased since they started to attend the club. Recently the students were very pleased to have their parents attend the club where they shared afternoon tea, joined in the activities and heard their child read.

Save the Children has also partnered with Wilmot Road Primary School to run a reading club once a week after school. Save the Children shared some of the activities that they run at the club which emphasised the support and encouragement that the Club Coordinator and Volunteers provide for the students.

McGuire College is running a learning support club for refugee background students from Year 10, 11 and 12. The project will support students undertaking VET and VCE, as well as increase student learning engagement and confidence. School staff regularly attend the learning club and assist students with their homework.

Li Arcus Photography has partnered with St Georges Road Primary School and shared the work she is doing with the school to develop family engagement films in Dari and Arabic. The films are designed to assist newly arrived parents become familiar with the school processes and to provide guidance to families who may not be literate in their first language, in how to read with their children at home. Once completed the films will be available on the school's web site and will also be provided to new parents at the school on a memory stick so that they can view them at home.

Learning

The Learning session pulled together the outcome from the World Café segment and presented a summary of the CMY research into the state of the Victorian OSHLSP sector.

Learning from the World café session

The key learnings from the World café session were:

- Lack of funding is a cross sector issue, however it was recognised that communities need to be consulted about what they want rather than relying on the ideas of agencies.
- Centralising volunteer support for refugee background students may lead to better outcomes for students and increased retention of volunteers. A Homework Club Coordinators network was also suggested.
- Refugee background students are resilient; however there is a need for better communication and engagement with parents about the education system and education pathways for young people.
- Increased cross cultural communication skills will help build better relationships with parents and families. The new Community Hubs and other community spaces such as the Library provide opportunities for sharing knowledge, expectations and values.

Learning from CMY research into the state of the OSHLSP sector

CMY shared some of the recent learnings from research into the impact that the Victorian Out of school Hours Learning Support Program (OSHLSP) sector is having on students of refugee and migrant background. OSHLSPs provide high quality learning support to children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. They also assist families to better support their children's learning at home. They provide opportunities for small group or one-to-one support tailored to students' needs. CMY has been working for 10 years with organisations, community groups and schools that run OSHLSP and has compiled a database of



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clubs within Victoria that provides an indication of the size of the sector. Overall CMY has 355 clubs on our database across Victoria.

- Overall number of clubs: 355
 - School based 146 (held in a school and run by school staff)
 - Community based 142 (held in a community centre, community organisation run)
 - Other 67 (held in school, community organisation run)
- Numbers of students reached (approx.) 11,430
- Numbers of volunteers working across clubs (approx.) 3147
- Number of regional clubs 44

CMY's research in the sector has found that clubs are working across four different outcome areas. They can be defined as:

Academic

1. Academic progress

There is an evident improvement in a student's work, aptitude in a subject or skill area or an increase in work completion and attendance.

2. Academic confidence

When a student participates more in classroom or club activities, contributes to class discussions and is able to ask for help, it indicates an increase in academic confidence.

Social

3. Social confidence

When students are better able to interact with their peers and are more confident in group activities.

4. Social connections

When students' interactions with peers, teachers and tutors develop into relationships of greater trust.

The CMY research identified the following emerging issues that are common challenges across the OSHLSP sector:

- Variation in student academic level
- Sustainable funding
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Material support to students
- Racism
- Intergenerational issues
- Mental health and resilience

The State of the Sector Report is due for release in December 2018 and will be available on the CMY web site.



Forum reflection

At the end of the Forum participants were asked to reflect on one thing that they had learnt as a result of attending the Forum and what they would do with this new knowledge. Some of the learnings and next steps that were shared are summarised below.

Learnings	Next steps
I learnt about the experiences people from refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds can be so different to our own and the impact this can have	Develop more/better supports to assist CALD students
That it is important for parents to understand the school education context.	Develop materials to assist parents to understand the school education context
Funding and support for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is slim and there is a motivation to fix it.	Encouraging services to be inclusive and supporting young clients who require help
I learnt about technology support to parents	Organise an information night for the parents about technology
The need for parents involvement in education of their children	Connection of AMES to primary and secondary schools
That it is very important to get the parents in and take them along this journey.	Promoting after school hubs to EAL parents
There are a number of homework clubs running	It would be interesting to see collaboration
Parental support and engagement in education is paramount	Research how to increase parental support for their children

Forum feedback

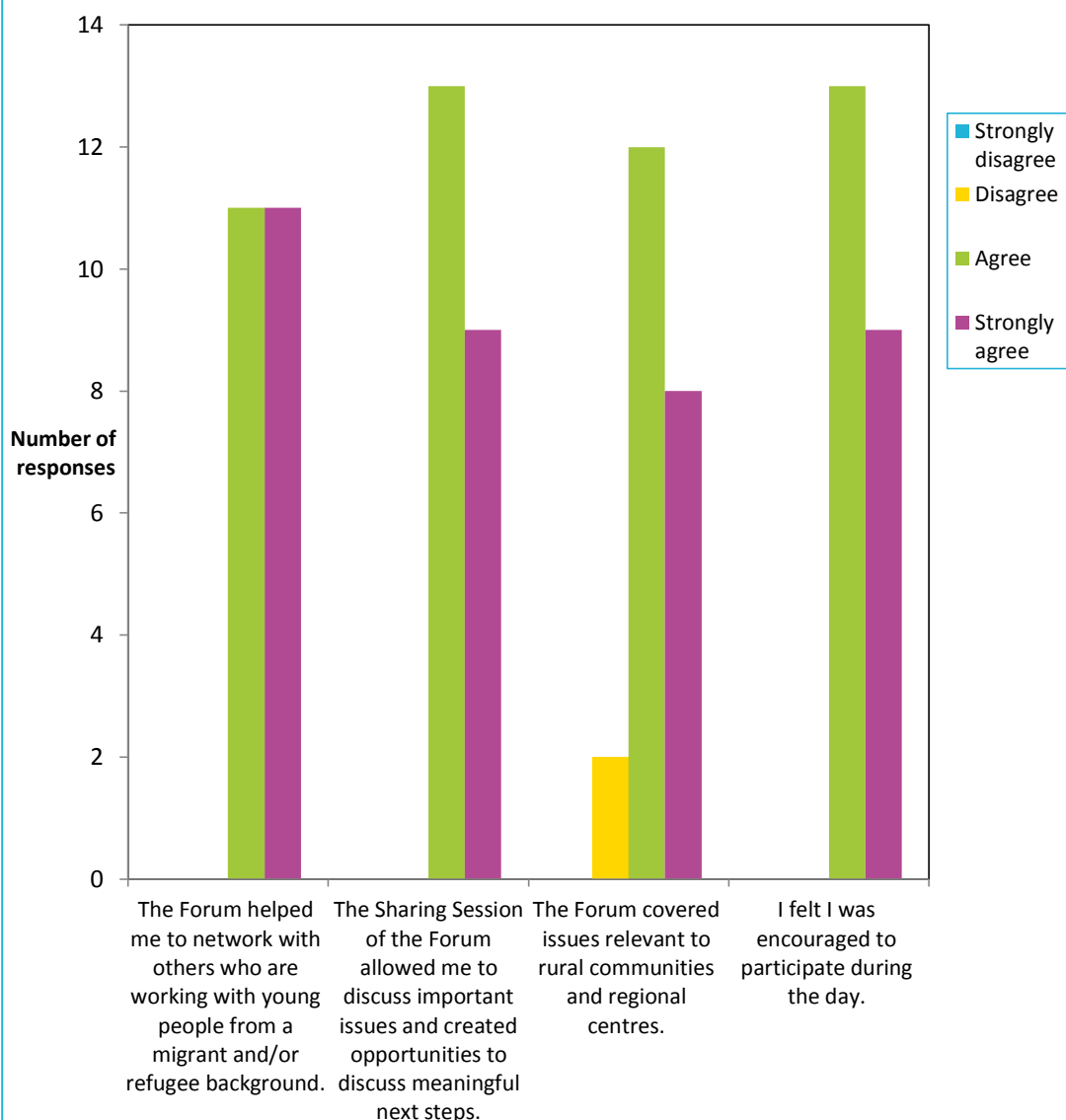
The Forum was attended by 25 people with 22 providing feedback on the Forum.

Participants were asked to rate the overall usefulness of the Forum with 33% rating it excellent, 57% rating it very good and 10% rating it good.

Feedback was sought on whether the Forum assisted participants to network with others who are working with young people from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds, and whether the Sharing session provided an opportunity to discuss important issues and create meaningful next steps. Participants were also asked to provide feedback on whether the Forum covered issues relevant to rural communities and regional centres and to suggest any ways that the Forum could be improved and any topics participants would like to see covered in CMY training or learning resource. The feedback results are summarised in the chart below.



Learning Journeys Forum Feedback



The participants found that the personal stories shared by the young people at the start of the Forum, provided a greater understanding of the issues and challenges they faced in their learning journeys.

Feedback from the Sharing session indicated that it provided an opportunity for networking and sharing of ideas and experiences. Participants also found it useful to hear from the RESP schools about what they were doing and that the sharing and summing up of the World café session was useful.

Overall participants found the following useful aspects of the Forum:

- Learning
- Hearing from the panel of experts
- Hearing about the schools' achievements



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- Personal stories from the speakers about the challenges they face
- Networking and shared stories
- Awareness and sharing ideas
- Discovering other potential partners – networks and places for referral
- Greater understanding of the issues
- Learning about other services and promoting ways “we” can help
- The student learning journeys
- Sharing during the World Café session and the summing up of this session
- Personal stories of people from different refugee backgrounds
- All very useful, the personal accounts were an excellent start
- Guest speakers were good
- Hearing what others are trying
- Networking with other homework clubs and sharing experiences
- Sharing session
- Loved the stories from the young people
- Interaction and sharing session
- Hearing the guest speakers experiences
- All of it
- Sharing – good to hear what’s happening in schools

Suggestions about how the forum could be improved included inviting parents and current students to participate in the forum, having more frequent forums, having a longer Sharing session and showcasing rural OSHLPS so that participants can learn from them.

Participants also suggested the following:

Suggestion	Response	Action
Providing a directory of what services are available and who to contact and where to go for particular issues/needs.	The CALD Reference Group has prepared a directory which has been provided to local schools.	A copy of the directory can be provided to the workshop participants.
Shared slides and workshop notes from the day.	A report of the Forum has been prepared.	The report of the Forum to be sent to workshop participants.
Specific problem solving to support the needs of refugees with no previous education.	This matter could be taken up by the CALD Reference group. CALD Reference Group can be contacted at hensgen.sharon.s@edumail.vic.gov.au	To be suggested to the CALD Reference Group.



Suggestion	Response	Action
Evidenced based research.	The CMY State of the Sector Report provides evidence based report.	Add the Learning Journeys Forum participants to the State of the Sector Report distribution list.
If there is anything new/different happening by some particular group, to bring it to everyone's notice.	The CALD Reference Group provides a forum to do this.	Review the Learning Journeys Forum participants list to see if there are any additional organisations that need to be invited to join the CALD Reference Group.
Success stories/RESP program outcomes.	Case studies are available on the CMY web site at https://www.cmy.net.au/my-education-resp	
Newly arrived issues for new settler groups – inclusive of their families.	The Community Hubs will be addressing this issue for families connected with St Georges Rd PS, Wilmot Rd PS and Gowrie St PS.	Community Hubs Coordinator to be invited to participate in the CALD Reference group to report on this.
What do people/parents from refugee backgrounds think they need for their children to do to succeed in education.	The Community Hubs will be addressing this issue for families connected with St Georges Rd PS, Wilmot Rd PS and Gowrie St PS.	Community Hubs Coordinator to be invited to participate in the CALD Reference group to report on this.