School’s In for Refugees

A whole-school approach to supporting students and families of refugee background

2nd Edition
(Updated 2016)

How to use this resource

Foundation House
The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.
How to use this digital edition of School’s In for Refugees

Navigating the document

- The Table of Contents listings/entries are linked so the reader can navigate directly to specific chapters and chapter sections.
- The Table of Figures listings/entries are linked so the reader can navigate directly to specific Figures.
- On any given page, clicking on the top-of-page running headline “School’s In for Refugees” will take the reader back to the document/complete Table of Contents.
- On any given page, clicking on the top-of-page running headline “Part 1 (or 2)” will take the reader back to the Table of Contents for that Part.
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Using the Resources, Tools, Professional learning activities and Case studies

- Each Resource, Tool, Professional learning activity and Case study in Part 2 is available as an individual file and can be accessed for easy use in professional learning and performance development activities from the Foundation House website: www.foundationhouse.org.au.
- Each individual Tool file in Part 2 is interactive; users can open the tool they wish to use, enter relevant information and “save as” to keep as a working document.

Printing this document

- It may be best to print this document as needed, in chapter sections, as it is approximately 120 pages (240 leaves) long. Please print as a double sided document.
SCHOOL’S IN FOR REFUGEES

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# Contents

Foreword viii  
Preface ix  
Introduction x  
About Foundation House xi  
Foundation House and schools xii  
The Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) xiii

## PART 1
UNDERSTANDING THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

1 Overview 3  
1.1 Purpose of this resource 5  
1.2 Parts of this resource 6  
1.3 Using this resource 7  
1.4 The whole-school approach and supporting refugee-background students 7  
1.5 Using a whole-school approach 8

2 Refugee-background students: a series of transitions 11  
2.1 A framework to explore the refugee experience 13  
2.2 Transitions 15  
2.3 Resettlement 17  
2.3.1 The long-term nature of resettlement and transitions 17  
2.3.2 Factors that promote successful refugee resettlement 17  
2.3.3 The role of schools in successful resettlement 19  
2.4 Educational challenges 19  
2.4.1 Learning English as an additional language 20  
2.4.2 Managing new learning environments 20  
2.5 Possible pathways for refugee-background students: older students 22  
2.6 Refugee student stories 23  
Story 1: Moses, arrived in Australia aged 16, born in Sudan 23  
Story 2: Rhadia, arrived in Australia aged 11, born in Iraq 25

3 Refugees in Australia 29  
3.1 Definitions 31  
3.2 Students from refugee backgrounds 32  
3.2.1 Countries of origin 32  
3.2.2 Establishing background 32  
3.2.3 Special needs of asylum seekers 33  
3.2.4 Special needs of unaccompanied minors 33

4 The impact of trauma on wellbeing and learning 37  
4.1 Understanding the context of trauma 40  
4.1.1 Conflict and persecution 40  
4.1.2 New challenges upon arrival 40  
4.1.3 Gauging the impact of refugee experiences on students 40
4.2 Specific effects of the refugee experience on children and young people 41
4.3 The impact of trauma on learning 44
4.4 Recovery from trauma and the role of schools 45
4.4.1 The goals to support recovery from trauma 45
4.4.2 Framework for recovery 45

5 The role of schools in supporting recovery from trauma 47
5.1 Applying the recovery goals to school practice 50
5.2 Supporting the individual student 52
5.2.1 Early-intervention strategies 53
5.2.2 Individual learning and behaviour plans 53
5.3 The role of the individual teacher 53
5.4 Supporting school staff 54
5.4.1 Possible feelings and reactions 54
5.4.2 Implications for practice 55
5.4.3 Burnout 56
5.4.4 Dealing with emotional reactions to traumatic events 56
5.4.5 Coping with stress 56
5.4.6 Debriefing 56

6 Implementing and planning for change 59
6.1 Why conduct an audit? 61
6.2 Steps to implementing School’s In for Refugees 62
6.3 School’s In for Refugees and its place in a whole-school review process 63
6.4 The SIFR Audit 63
6.5 The planning framework 64

AREAS OF ACTION

7 School policies and practices 65
7.1 Supporting students in school transition 68
7.1.1 Preparation and transfer of students between education settings 70
7.1.2 The enrolment process: induction phase 70
7.1.3 Consolidation phase: settling in to school 74
7.2 DET support for refugee-background students 75
7.3 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) support for refugee-background students 78
7.4 Interpreters and translations 78
7.4.1 Working with interpreters 78
7.4.2 Translating and interpreting support for schools 79
7.4.3 Telephone interpreters 80
7.4.4 Translated information 80
7.4.5 Translating school notices 80
7.5 Multicultural education aides (MEAs) 81
7.6 EAL policies and the whole-school approach 81
7.7 Flexible learning options, pathways and transitions for older students 82
7.8 Professional learning for staff 83
7.9 Policy, practice and advocacy 85
7.9.1 Reporting 85
7.9.2 School compliance that supports refugee-background students 85
7.9.3 Documents that support policy and practice 86
10 Partnerships with parents and carers

10.1 The importance of partnerships: communication and support
10.2 Welcoming and informing parents and carers
10.3 Involving, engaging and collaborating with parents and carers
10.4 Resources that facilitate partnerships with parents and carers
10.5 School's In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1):
Partnerships with parents and carers

11 Partnerships with agencies

11.1 Knowledge of agencies and services
11.2 Referral protocols
   11.2.1 Ensuring a staged response to supporting students
   11.2.2 Referral policies
11.2.3 Indicators for a referral to counselling
11.2.4 Discussing referral with the student
11.2.5 Approaching an older student about referral for counselling
11.2.6 Facilitating referral for counselling for a younger student
11.3 Understanding the range of partnerships between schools and agencies
   11.3.1 Outside agencies’ presence in school
   11.3.2 Types of partnerships
   11.3.3 Partnerships with agencies to support refugee-background students
   11.3.4 Financial support: community grants
11.4 School's In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1):
Partnerships with agencies

PART 2

Resources

Resource 1 Beaut Buddies: a school-based peer-support transition program
Resource 2 Understanding and addressing racism in schools
Resource 3 Strategies to help students with a refugee background who are experiencing behavioural issues
Resource 4 Enrolment steps to meet the needs of refugee-background students
Resource 5 Strategies that meet the recovery goals
Resource 6 Whole-school approach to strategies
Resource 7 Refugee resettlement experiences that impact on learning and wellbeing
Resource 8 Framework for recovery
Resource 9 Calmer Classrooms: a snapshot
Tools

Overview to tools 1, 2, 3 The planning framework: the three stages of the whole-school approach to improving support for refugee-background students

Tool 1 School's In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit

Tool 2 Review of current school practice to support refugee-background students

Tool 3 Action plan for a whole-school approach

Tool 4 Transition and enrolment checklist: new arrivals with a refugee background

Tool 5 Classroom strategies to overcome blocks to learning

Tool 6 Managing challenges in the classroom

Tool 7 Supporting individual students: review and plan

Tool 8 Framework to explore the refugee experience

Tool 9 Five areas of action for the whole-school approach to support refugee-background students

Tool 10 Whole-school strategies to address resettlement challenges

Professional learning activities

PLA 1 Understanding the refugee experience

PLA 2 Transitions and challenges of the refugee experience

PLA 3 Post-compulsory pathways

PLA 4 Supporting the individual student: review and plan

PLA 5 Supporting the individual: applying strategies to the whole-school approach

PLA 6 Reflecting on teaching and learning practice and classroom strategies

PLA 7 Applying strategies to support an individual student

PLA 8 Supporting parents and carers

PLA 9 The whole-school approach: mapping current strategies and planned changes

PLA 10 Using the Audit

Case studies

Case study 1 Steven the Donkey, by Ayen, aged 6

Case study 2 Rhadia, aged 11

Case study 3 Nan, aged 4

Case study 4 Aadem, aged 12

Case study 5 Abdullah, aged 15

Case study 6 Paw, aged 17

Case study 7 Michael, aged 18

Case study 8 Layla, aged 17

Case study 9 Mary, aged 33

Case study 10 Shirin, aged 16

Acknowledgements

Bibliography
## List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1</td>
<td>Five areas of action for the whole-school approach to support refugee-background students (Tool 9 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Framework to explore the refugee experience (Tool 8 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>A series of transitions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3</td>
<td>Resettlement factors that influence integration and marginalisation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4</td>
<td>Education pathways for refugee-background students</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Visa categories, numbers and entitlements</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Framework for recovery (Resource 8 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Refugee resettlement experiences that impact on learning and wellbeing (Resource 7, in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Supportive school environments: applying the Foundation House recovery goals and the VicHealth social and economic determinants of mental health</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>Strategies that meet the recovery goals (Resource 5, in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>Whole-school approach to strategies (Resource 6, in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1</td>
<td>The planning framework: the three stages of the whole-school approach to improving support for refugee-background students</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.1</td>
<td>SIFR Audit: School policies and practices</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.1</td>
<td>Linking the recovery goals to the principles of learning and teaching</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.2</td>
<td>Sample timetable of an integrated bridging program</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.3</td>
<td>Sample timetable for Ucan2 day</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.4</td>
<td>SIFR Audit: Curriculum, teaching and learning</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9.1</td>
<td>Guide for discussing sensitive issues with refugee-background students</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9.2</td>
<td>SIFR Audit: School organisation, ethos and environment</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10.1</td>
<td>Strategies for involving parents and carers</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10.2</td>
<td>SIFR Audit: Partnerships with parents and carers</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11.1</td>
<td>Approaching an older student about referral for counselling</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11.2</td>
<td>Facilitating referral for counselling for a younger student</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11.3</td>
<td>School partnerships analysis</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11.4</td>
<td>SIFR Audit: Partnerships with agencies</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
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<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Multicultural Education Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>BELS</td>
<td>Blackburn English Language School</td>
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<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and linguistically diverse</td>
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<td>CELS</td>
<td>Collingwood English Language School</td>
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<td>CEM</td>
<td>Catholic Education Melbourne (formerly CEO)</td>
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<td>CEO</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office (now CEM)</td>
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<td>CECV</td>
<td>Catholic Education Commission of Victoria</td>
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<td>CMY</td>
<td>Centre for Multicultural Youth</td>
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<td>DEECD</td>
<td>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (now DET)</td>
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<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education and Employee Workplace Relations</td>
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<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training (formerly DEECD)</td>
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<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection</td>
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<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an additional language</td>
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<td>ELC</td>
<td>English language centre</td>
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<td>ELS</td>
<td>English Language School</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
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<tr>
<td>FASSTT</td>
<td>Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma</td>
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<td>HPE</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBB</td>
<td>Learning Beyond the Bell</td>
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<td>LBOTE</td>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
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<td>LLEN</td>
<td>Local Learning and Employment Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMERCl</td>
<td>Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Language other than English</td>
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<td>MEA</td>
<td>Multicultural education aide</td>
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<td>MIC</td>
<td>Migrant Information Centre</td>
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<td>MIPs</td>
<td>Managed individual pathways</td>
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<td>MRC</td>
<td>Migrant Resource Centre</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>NSSF</td>
<td>National Safe Schools Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSHLSP</td>
<td>Out-of-school-hours learning support program</td>
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<td>PLA</td>
<td>Professional learning activity</td>
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<td>PoLT</td>
<td>Principles of learning and teaching</td>
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<td>RAT</td>
<td>Refugee Action Team</td>
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<td>RESP</td>
<td>Refugee Education Support Program</td>
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<td>RMP</td>
<td>Refugee Minor Program</td>
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<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social and emotional learning</td>
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<td>SFYS</td>
<td>School-focused youth service</td>
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<td>SIFR</td>
<td>Schools In for Refugees: A whole-school approach to supporting students and families of refugee background</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWC</td>
<td>Student wellbeing coordinator</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<td>Unaccompanied humanitarian minor</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>YAMEC</td>
<td>Young Adult Migrant Education Course</td>
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<td>VCAL</td>
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<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
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<td>VHRREC</td>
<td>Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
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<td>VicHealth</td>
<td>Victorian Health Promotion Foundation</td>
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<td>YLC</td>
<td>Year-level coordinator</td>
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<td>VTAC</td>
<td>Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre</td>
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<td>WELS</td>
<td>Western English Language School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

School’s In for Refugees: A Whole-School Approach to Supporting Students of Refugee Backgrounds (SIFR) is a great resource for school communities. The resource aims to assist all school staff, including the administrators, teachers, non-teaching professional staff and other professionals who work with schools. It provides access to practical strategies that help refugee students meet the challenges of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment and work their way through learning difficulties.

As the Child Safety Commissioner for Victoria, I know from our work with children who have suffered abuse and neglect that these experiences can have a long and lasting impact upon their development, including a reduction in their capacity to concentrate and to learn. The way to address these challenges lies in understanding and building relationships with traumatised children, with teachers playing a major role in promoting resilience through development of an attachment to school and a love of learning. To support teachers and other school staff to do this work effectively with such traumatised children, my office developed the resource booklet Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatised Children. In recognition of the similarities of refugee-background children whose lives have also been affected by the trauma of war and dislocation, material from this resource has been incorporated into the School’s In for Refugees resource.

I would like to commend the implementation of a whole-school approach to supporting students from a refugee background, because we know schools provide an important context for traumatised children to be supported in the company of their peers. When student wellbeing and engagement are a whole-school priority, this ensures learning by students is a responsibility shared by all staff, all school community members and all areas of the school. A whole-school approach also ensures that there is a shared vision which members are encouraged to comply with. This approach is an internationally recognised health promotion framework adopted by the World Health Organization.

Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner
When author John Marsden – who is also a school principal – was recently asked what was most important to him in life, he replied, ‘Emotional wellbeing.’ As a writer, teacher, mentor of students, and former student who had a nervous breakdown near the end of my schooling, I can only wholeheartedly agree. Without emotional health, a child cannot exercise the full spectrum of their intellectual curiosity, or participate fully in school life.

School is a place where refugee children, and children of refugees, get their first taste of a life wider than the parameters of their family unit, their local ethnic community, and the gravity of their pasts. It is a place for them to experience being a child, and to grow into a young adult.

Yet refugee children come to school often with experiences that most of their classmates could only ever imagine. Without a deeper understanding of these students’ experiences, their fear of outsiders might be mistaken as shyness, their anxiety as timidity and their reluctance to participate a sign of insolence.

Refugee parents might show a tendency to be overprotective. This is because their children exist to replace what was so traumatically lost. They might expect their children to fulfil certain roles and to be high achievers. The child of refugees, or refugee children will often also be translators and cross-cultural mediators for their parents, fulfilling very adult responsibilities at home. Sometimes they might also be responsible for taking care of small children.

That’s why social and spiritual development of children at school is just as, if not more, important than academic development. School is the place where many refugee children find a place of security and anchor, a sense of continuity in their lives. To my parents, an education was a way out of hard manual labour and poverty. They were amazed that schools here in Australia were not places where 60 students sat in cramped desks in one classroom, but that they were places where children could even play. In my final year of high school, caught up with the stresses of our family life and trying not to fail, I had completely neglected my emotional health. Always having been seen by teachers as ‘the quiet achiever’, it was easy for me to equate failure with a complete rupture of all that was stable in my life.

This is why having perspective is so important, and why this book is so crucial. It helps educators understand such students, and ensures that they are not defined by their refugee statuses or past traumas, but allows them to develop fully as children and human beings first. I am grateful that organisations like Foundation House (FH) exist, and I feel very honoured to be part of School’s In for Refugees. I hope that it will be used as an invaluable resource for years to come.

Alice Pung

Author: Laurinda, Her Father’s Daughter, Unpolished Gem
Editor: Growing up Asian in Australia
Introduction

In 2004 The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (VFST, also known as Foundation House (FH)) published the first edition of School’s In for Refugees, a resource designed to support schools and school-based professionals in their efforts to provide a high-quality education for young people from refugee backgrounds. This second edition has been produced and updated* to document some of the important changes that have occurred in the refugee resettlement program since the first edition and to capture a variety of new resources, strategies and initiatives developed in this time.

The development of this edition has been informed by comprehensive consultation with teachers and others in the education and community services sectors. Consequently, this second edition incorporates significant changes. These include summary sections at the beginning of each chapter, tools and examples of good-practice, professional learning activities and templates for teachers to use with other staff members to support their own learning and development about the needs of refugee-background students in their own context.

The underlying rationale for this second edition acknowledges the unique position that school communities occupy in the recovery and resettlement process for people whose lives have been fundamentally disrupted by conflict, persecution and long-term displacement. A school that provides a safe and inclusive environment for young people from refugee backgrounds and their families provides opportunity for participation in a community and the education process supporting the reformation of friendships and connections integral to our understanding of a socially inclusive society.

This resource recognises that the pre-arrival experiences of many young people from refugee backgrounds includes disruptions to education and experiences of violence and other traumatic events, and that this adds considerable complexity to mainstream education settings and teaching practice.

Given this context, Foundation House has continued to develop this resource for school-based professionals. The resource provides a range of tools and strategies for working with refugee students that complement the best-practice standards and procedures currently used by teachers for all students in Victorian schools. The resource will be most relevant to schools in Victoria but can be applied to other state, territory and overseas education systems. This is not a stand-alone resource, but should be used alongside other resources and strategies that guide schools in supporting the education and wellbeing needs of refugee-background students and their families.

* This edition was updated in May 2016.
About Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (VFST, also known as Foundation House) was established in 1987 to meet the needs of people living in Victoria who had been subjected to torture, or experienced war-related trauma prior to their arrival in Australia.

From offices in Brunswick, Dandenong Sunshine and Ringwood, and outreach in regional and rural areas of Victoria, Foundation House provides direct care to survivors of torture and war-related trauma in the form of health assessments, referrals to health services, health education, counselling, psychotherapy, advocacy, family support, group work, natural therapies and community development. These services are provided to individuals, families, groups and communities.

As well as providing direct care to survivors, Foundation House plays an important developmental role with service providers, government and refugee communities. This role is grounded in the experience gained through direct contact with survivors. Foundation House has a reputation for delivering high-quality developmental work, with a number of its programs receiving health sector awards.

Foundation House is funded through a combination of state and Commonwealth governments, philanthropic trusts and non-government sources. Foundation House is a not-for-profit, non-denominational, politically neutral and non-aligned organisation. For more information about Foundation House, go to www.foundationhouse.org.au.

Foundation House is a member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), a coalition of eight agencies that are based in each state and territory. For more information about FASSTT, go to www.fasstt.org.au.
Foundation House and schools

Foundation House provides direct services and developmental activities in schools. It aims to promote:

• the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people who arrive in Victoria as refugees
• successful resettlement in Victoria following the refugee experience
• systemic change to improve the responses of educational settings for refugee-background children and young people
• enhanced educational outcomes for students of refugee-background.

Foundation House works with schools at a systemic, local and individual level through:

• counselling and case work with individual refugee students and their families
• group work with refugee-background students
• group work with parents and carers
• classroom group work and activities
• resource development
• professional development for school personnel
• secondary consultation for schools
• support for whole-school change through the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP)
• partnerships with the Department of Education and Training (DET) and Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM)
• providing resources for teachers of refugee-background students learning English and settling into school
• providing teaching resources for use in the classroom that build connections, celebrate diversity and explore human rights teaching.
The Refugee Education Support Program (RESP)

Foundation House works in partnership with school communities to create the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP). RESP is a partnership between the Department of Education and Training (DET), the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and Foundation House (FH), who work in collaboration with the Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV) and Independent Schools Victoria (ISV). Each RESP is facilitated by a school support worker from Foundation House and a MY education project officer from the Centre for Multicultural Youth with support from the DET regional program officer, the CEM learning consultant and the ISV senior adviser. Each RESP is further supported by a regional operations group comprising the above personnel and other agency representatives as appropriate.

RESP aims to improve the educational outcomes of refugee and migrant young people through assisting schools and community organisations to better meet their needs. RESP provides holistic, whole-school and community support to strengthen the connections between student achievement (including home learning), school engagement and wellbeing, to assist schools to identify and develop strategies to support refugee students and their families or carers. RESP supports DET, CEM and ISV schools and wider community partners to increase their capacity in planning for and meeting the needs of refugee students.

Schools participating in the RESP will be set up as a cluster. There are RESP clusters in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Each RESP cluster will operate for a period of two years and will consist of a mix of between 6 and 8 primary and secondary schools. Schools participating in the RESP appoint a refugee action team (RAT) of between 4–7 staff members to work within the cluster. Participating schools and local community agencies work together based on geographic proximity and/or the services having a meaningful relationship to students with a refugee-background from the schools.

Team members from participating schools:

- Attend a whole-day SIFR workshop and a whole-day OSHLSP Consultation including an introduction to the refugee experience and consultation and partnership building to identify and respond to out-of-school-hours learning support needs for students from refugee backgrounds.

- Undertake a whole-school audit and review of current practices and policies to develop an action plan outlining specific strategies to provide increased support for students and families from refugee backgrounds. See Part 2, Tools 1, 2 and 3

- Attend a half day workshop each term

- Revise the action plan throughout the two-year process to ascertain future directions for the school in relation to supporting students and families from refugee backgrounds.

- Schedule a whole-staff professional learning workshop at their school: Introduction to the refugee experience.
PART 1
UNDERSTANDING THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

1 Overview 3

2 Refugee-background students: a series of transitions 11

3 Refugees in Australia 29

4 The impact of trauma on wellbeing and learning 37

5 The role of schools in supporting recovery from trauma 47

6 Implementing and planning for change 59

AREAS OF ACTION

7 School policies and practices 65

8 Curriculum, teaching and learning 91

9 School organisation, ethos and environment 109

10 Partnerships with parents and carers 129

11 Partnerships with agencies 139
1 Overview
Summary

This resource aims to strengthen the capacity of school communities to support refugee-background students. The resource will assist teachers and schools to:

- understand the refugee experience for young people, including their prior educational experiences, transitions and resettlement experiences
- understand the impact of trauma on young people’s learning, wellbeing and development and the implication for school practice
- introduce the implementation of a whole-school approach (involving review, action and change process) to supporting students with refugee backgrounds.

It is recommended that readers become familiar with the reference material (Part 1) before using the resources and tools (Part 2).

The whole-school approach to supporting refugee-background students is adopted because:

- schools, and their inherent context of bringing children and young people together, play a vital role in supporting the recovery and aspirations of refugee-background students
- student learning is best supported when student wellbeing and engagement are a whole-school priority, and responsibility is shared by all staff
- it involves all members of the school community and all areas of the school’s organisation
- it incorporates a shared vision, and encourages people to operate in a way that is congruent with that shared vision
- it is an internationally recognised health promotion framework adopted by the World Health Organization.

1.1 Purpose of this resource

‘Without particular interventions at a system and a local school level, many students from refugee backgrounds are likely to experience considerable disadvantage, and may fail to achieve their educational and social potential.’

DEECD, 2008a

The resource aims to strengthen the capacity of school communities, at both primary and secondary levels, to provide a safe and supportive school environment for refugee-background students and their families. A supportive school culture will nurture the positive mental health and wellbeing of refugee students, enhance their educational outcomes, and promote social connectedness between refugee families and the school community.

The purpose of the resource is to provide all school staff (administrators, teachers and non-teaching personnel) and other professionals working with schools, with strategies to help refugee students overcome learning difficulties, adjust to a new environment, and negotiate ongoing challenges as they engage in the schooling system. Intended for use at both primary and secondary levels, the resource outlines strategies for all areas of the school, from broad school-wide processes, structures and partnerships, to classroom curriculum, teaching and learning, and support and advocacy for the individual student. It has been designed as an easy-to-use reference tool, specifically tailored to enable schools to improve the educational outcomes for refugee-background students.
Because there is a variety of school settings available to refugee students, and a range of experience among schools and staff in teaching refugee students, the resource allows schools to identify and implement the most appropriate policies, programs and structures for their particular school environment.

The resource begins with a reference section that includes:

- a description of the refugee experience for young people
- an understanding of the impact of trauma on young people’s learning, wellbeing and development, and the implication for school practice
- the introduction of a whole-school approach to supporting students with refugee backgrounds
- an outline of the five areas of the whole-school approach and recommended strategies for implementation.

SIFR provides information on understanding the refugee experience as well as resources, tools, professional learning activities (PLAs) and case studies to assist a school in exploring and addressing the issues involved in implementing a whole-school approach to supporting refugee-background students. The resource is best used when complemented by the School’s In for Refugees professional development workshops delivered by Foundation House.

The strategies contained in this resource reflect current policies and practices as demonstrated in a range of English language centres (ELC), English language schools (ELS), primary schools and secondary colleges across Victoria. A comprehensive review of the first edition of School’s In for Refugees was conducted in 2009 with schools, allied professionals and Foundation House school support workers. Recommendations from this review are incorporated in this second edition.

### 1.2 Parts of this resource

#### PART 1

**Understanding the refugee experience (Chapters 1–6)**

**Chapter 1**
This overview provides background information on Foundation House, the purpose of the resource, details of the content, and an outline of the whole-school approach.

**Chapters 2–6**
Chapters 2, 3 and 4 describe the complex transitions for a refugee-background young person. It outlines the experiences of trauma and violence, educational challenges, short and long-term challenges of resettlement in Australia, the effect these experiences may have on learning and wellbeing, and the implications for school practice.

**Chapter 5** outlines the role of schools in supporting recovery from trauma.

**Chapter 6** gives instructions on how to use the resource to create whole-school change.

#### Areas of action (Chapters 7–11)

Chapters 7–11 outline the five areas of a school where strategies can be implemented to support refugee-background students. These five areas represent a school framework similar to that applied in the MindMatters resource, which is the national mental health promotion initiative to introduce a whole-school approach to mental health promotion in secondary schools.

There is an audit at the end of each chapter, and a full audit in Part 2: resources, tools, PLAs and case studies.

Advice and good-practice examples are featured throughout to support the content of each of the five areas of action.
PART 2

Resources, tools, professional learning activities and case studies

Part 2 includes resources, tools, professional learning activities and case studies that support key concepts, processes or initiatives. They may be used in a professional learning context or simply as a resource to be referred to by teachers and others working with refugee-background students.

The professional learning activities (PLAs) are outlined in simple lesson plans and are designed for schools to support teachers and other school staff to engage with the material in the resource. They allow users of the resource to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and provide opportunities to apply concepts and strategies. Materials to support PLAs are found in Part 2: resources, tools, PLAs and case studies.

The tools include worksheets and pro formas that can be completed as part of professional learning activities. These tools facilitate the process of identifying strategies that reflect the recovery goals across the whole school, including the classroom and targeted individual support. The tools also include the materials to be used in the process of implementing a whole-school approach: the audit, review and action plan.

1.3 Using this resource

It is important to read Part 1, as it provides the background information, rationale and considerations for use of the resources that support whole-school review and change.

It is vital that users of the resource read Chapter 2: Refugee-background students: a series of transitions, Chapter 3: Refugees in Australia and Chapter 4: The impact of trauma on wellbeing and learning. These chapters provide an insight into the traumatic experiences that many refugee students have undergone prior to their arrival in the classroom, as well as the ongoing challenges of resettlement. These chapters also explain the effect of torture and trauma on students, the likely behaviours that may result, and approaches to support recovery.

Finally, although this resource is intended as a comprehensive guide, you may wish to seek further information or resources, or may require additional support in implementing some of the policy or practice changes you have identified through completing the audit.

1.4 The whole-school approach and supporting refugee-background students

Schools play a vital role in supporting refugee-background children and young people to resettle in a new country. They can promote recovery from trauma through building connections and meaning, developing skills and knowledge and working towards aspirations. Many young people, dislocated from community, arrive into a society demanding new skills in negotiating systems and relationships. School is the pivotal context that brings all young people together. Schools, beyond their role in providing education, are naturally placed to provide opportunities to increase social inclusion, support freedom from discrimination and provide important life and work skills. These factors create better mental health outcomes, contribute to more successful resettlement, and ultimately offer the best chance for successful participation in Australian society.
A whole-school approach involves all members of the school community – school staff, students, parents and carers, agencies that engage with the school, and other community members. A whole-school approach addresses all five areas of action – policies and practices/school organisation, ethos and environment/curriculum, teaching and learning/partnerships with parents, and carers/partnerships with agencies.

The National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) suggests the whole-school approach ‘works across all the areas of school life. It implicitly acknowledges that learning occurs not only through the formal curriculum, but also through students’ daily experience of life in the school – and beyond’ (DEEWR, 2003). The value of a whole-school approach is applied or inherent in many recent school review and change processes developed in Australia and on an international level (National Safe Schools Framework, Health Promoting Schools, MindMatters, School Wide Positive Behaviour Support).

The whole-school approach is either inherent or explicitly promoted in many government policy and program initiatives. These include responses to supporting refugee-background and EAL students (Strengthening Outcomes, EAL Handbook, Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) Handbook). Other program areas such as student engagement, global and multicultural education, School Accountability and Improvement Framework, Effective Schools Model, and principles of learning and teaching also support the whole-school approach.

DET Student Engagement Policy Guidelines recognise that student learning is linked to engagement and that wellbeing is a whole-school issue which is the responsibility of all school staff. ‘Schools provide a strong foundation for student learning when student engagement and wellbeing are a whole-school priority’. School philosophy and practice should reflect ‘that student wellbeing is everyone’s responsibility, is a high priority and that social and emotional wellbeing underpin effective student learning and positive behaviour’.

DET suggests that engaging students will be most effective when schools focus on:
- creating a positive school culture that is fair and respectful
- building a safe and supportive school environment
- encouraging positive, supportive and respectful relationships that value diversity
- promoting pro-social values and behaviours encouraging student participation and student voice
- proactively engaging with parents and carers
- implementing preventative and early-intervention approaches
- responding to individual students
- linking to the local community.

DEECD, 2009b

1.5 Using a whole-school approach

Foundation House has adapted the Health Promoting Schools framework to identify five areas of action (see Figure 1.1). This resource is based on the application of this framework to develop sound, meaningful and enduring responses to supporting refugee-background students. Areas of the framework overlap and interrelate. A particular strategy (for example, a teacher using buddy reading in their class) could be plotted in curriculum, teaching and learning, but also in school policies and procedures, as there could be a school policy that buddy reading is conducted in all classes once a week.

A whole-school approach can be used to identify a theme, e.g. transition, and then plot the range of strategies across the five areas of the school that enable a meaningful transition process for recently enrolled students, and those preparing for new pathways. The SIFR Audit identifies strategies across each of the five areas to enable schools to reflect on what is currently in place, and what could be implemented to better support refugee-background students.
Figure 1.1
Five areas of action for the whole-school approach to support refugee-background students
(Tool 9 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)
2 Refugee-background students: a series of transitions
Summary

- When understanding the transitions of the refugee journey it is useful to use a framework that considers the experiences in three broad contexts that overlap – the experiences of trauma, personal and cultural history, and resettlement.

- The first and most dangerous and traumatic of the transitions usually occurs before arrival in Australia. For some, it is the transition from a regular home life to the horror of the events that led to refugee flight and the dangers of the journey towards a refugee camp. Many refugee children and young people may have been born in a refugee camp, where there is often poor hygiene, meagre food supplies, little social or recreational outlets and inadequate education. There are also many refugees who have not lived in refugee camps, or have spent a much greater amount of time living as a displaced person, either in their own country or another country.

- Children and young people from a refugee background will all have experienced some degree of dislocation, deprivation, disruption and loss.

- Living in a new country, refugee-background young people and their families face challenging transitions during resettlement. These include learning a new language, living in a new dominant culture, managing housing and financial demands and negotiating a new education system, while continuing to manage the effects of trauma, separation and disrupted schooling.

- Transitions are ongoing in a new country. Changes in family configuration, relationships and roles are likely as part of resettlement in a new country. Further challenges arise as many young people are negotiating the identity and developmental challenges of childhood and adolescence in a new country, while attempting to engage in the regular transitions of schooling that are inherent in the Australian education system.

- Education challenges are broad and include the implications of education experiences before arriving in Australia, transitions through different education settings in Australia, managing new learning environments, learning English as an additional language, and the impact of ongoing resettlement demands on learning.

- Implications of the refugee-background experience in the classroom can be broad and multi-layered.

- Some young people aged 16 years and over (considered the post-compulsory years of education) face challenges of being independent, yet insufficiently qualified, or not meeting requirements for specific levels of English and education pathways in Australia.

2.1 A framework to explore the refugee experience

Figure 2.1 illustrates the three broad components of the refugee experience. These include experience of trauma, personal and cultural history, and resettlement. The overlapping nature of the circles reflects the interrelated nature of components of the refugee experience. For example, the ongoing impact of trauma may influence a young person’s attempts to feel safe or concentrate in a classroom in Australia. A family’s cultural experience and values, and expectations of family roles, may be in contrast to those of the dominant culture in Australia, and negotiating this issue is a challenge for resettlement.
It is important to keep in mind the strengths that refugee-background young people and their families carry with them to Australia. Recognising skills and strengths is fundamental to providing an environment of dignity and respect. This is particularly important in schools, where there is an expectation that teachers are required to use strategies that reflect student needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests (as outlined in the principles of learning and teaching in Chapter 8).

Many rights have been violated for families and young people of refugee background. In Australia, the importance of rights continues, and entitlements to some rights are in jeopardy for some individuals and families during resettlement. Examples include the right to be free from discrimination, to practice cultural and religious freedoms, or even, in some cases, for those young people who are disengaged with schooling, the right to a basic education.

**Professional learning activities**

The professional learning activities (PLAs) are outlined in simple lesson plans and are designed for schools to support teachers and other staff to engage with the material in the resource. They allow users to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and provide opportunities to apply concepts and strategies. Materials to support PLAs are found in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies.

> PLA 1

**Understanding the refugee experience**

Apply a refugee case study to the Framework to Explore the Refugee Experience to reflect on trauma, personal and cultural history, and resettlement, and how they are interrelated.

See Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies.

**Figure 2.1**

Framework to explore the refugee experience (Tool 8 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)
2.2 Transitions

As shown in Figure 2.2 the journey for refugee children and young people, from their places of birth through the education settings with which they engage, represents a series of transitions.

The first transition usually occurs before arrival in Australia, and is often the most traumatic and dangerous for all the family. For some it begins in the transition from a regular home life to the horror of the events that lead to refugee flight, and the dangers of the journey towards the refugee camp. Refugee children will ‘all have experienced some degree of dislocation, deprivation, disruption and loss’ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). This will include the loss of home and friendships, as well as the loss of, or separation from, family.

Many refugee children and young people will also have experienced years of living in camps. Some may have been born in the camp, where there is often poor hygiene, meagre food supplies, little social or recreational outlets and inadequate education. As noted in the UNHCR’s Refugee Resettlement Handbook, ‘Refugee children and young people are likely to have endured changes unheard of in the lives of children in resettlement countries’ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). There are also many refugees who have spent time living as a displaced person in their own country of birth, or as refugees in other countries, with poor access to primary health care and education and exposure to danger or persecution.

A second series of challenging transitions begins for refugee students when they arrive in Australia and start the process of resettlement. For new arrivals, Australia represents a very different cultural environment, with unfamiliar customs, language, expectations and ways of doing things, as well as complex health, legal and service systems. Resettlement is a difficult process for children and young people, given the effects of malnutrition, neglect of medical problems, loss of family and social support networks, hostility and discrimination, and possible renewed conflict in their country of origin. Refugee families may also face practical difficulties in accessing housing, employment and income support that impact directly on children and young people.

Finally, refugee-background children and young people must make a series of transitions through the education system. This is a challenge on a number of levels. To begin with, it is likely that all refugee-background children and young people have had either disrupted educational experiences or, in some cases, no education at all. The Refugee Resettlement Handbook states that ‘Schools are one of the first casualties of war’ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002, p. 23). Teachers and the education system itself may have been specifically targeted for elimination in the conflicts that lead to refugee flight. For children in refugee camps, usually only basic education is available, and then only for a lucky few. Additionally, refugees may have limited entitlement to education in their countries of asylum.
Figure 2.2

A series of transitions

Pre Arrival

**Education**
No education or interruptions to education (in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd language)

**Trauma and violence**
Experience of trauma and violence
Managing effects of trauma and violence

**Place**
Home ➔ Displacement ➔ Refugee Camp ➔ Transit country
Refugee Camp ➔ Transit country

**Culture**
Values, norms, connection to culture, disruption to or loss of culture

**Family**
Separation, loss, possible changing roles, changing configuration

**Individual**
Developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence

**Systems and Environment**
In transit countries / refugee camps

Post Arrival

**Movement between language centres, mainstream schools & year levels.**
Changing schools, post compulsory pathways

**Possible experiences of trauma during resettlement**
Ongoing management of effects of trauma and violence

**Housing security**
Short term housing
Secondary / tertiary settlement

**Negotiating Cultures**
Integrating, disconnecting and the experience of negotiating within new cultural environments

**Possible changing configuration and responsibilities, progress in negotiating new cultural norms**

**Psychosocial wellbeing, personal skills, connections to others progress in negotiating new cultural norms**

**Resettlement systems and environment**
New language, health, transport, education
Wider community attitudes, structures and initiatives to support / build skills and connections with new cultural groups
2.3 Resettlement

2.3.1 The long-term nature of resettlement and transitions

The resettlement process is complex and ongoing (see Figure 2.2). Immediate arrival needs may be met quickly for some (e.g. food, shelter, safety, financial support, education and placement). Achieving the more long-term and sustainable resettlement goals is far more complex. The challenge of gaining employment for adults in the family is often delayed by the long process of learning an additional language as an adult, gaining appropriate work skills and competing in the employment market. Securing affordable housing and achieving financial security is a major and continuing challenge. Stable housing is difficult to find for many families, and some are forced to move in with relatives, or live in outer suburbs with little infrastructure or community support. Moving homes and changing schools is not uncommon for families of refugee background.

While children may be quickly entered into the education system, further challenges can surface over the years. This is particularly relevant to young people aged 16 years and older, as they are required to choose from pathways that rarely accommodate the implications of disrupted schooling. Families are required to manage all these challenges in an environment where they continually negotiate new cultural norms, often with a background of traumatic experiences. Young people themselves are in constant transition, as they engage in a new education system, build new social connections and move through the developmental challenges of childhood and adolescence in a new culture. The manner in which young people respond in this context can challenge family expectations, and this may lead to conflict between generations. Difficult resettlement experiences can exacerbate the trauma reaction for families, which is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.3.2 Factors that promote successful refugee resettlement

Most refugees ultimately settle successfully in Australia. However, the experiences of forced displacement and settling in a new country are associated with high levels of exposure to social and economic conditions known to increase the risk of poor mental health. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation framework for promoting mental health identifies three overarching social and economic determinants of mental health that include factors promoting successful resettlement:

1. Social inclusion
   • social and community connections
   • stable and supportive environments
   • a variety of social and physical activities
   • access to networks and supportive relationships
   • a valued social position

2. Freedom from violence and discrimination
   • the valuing of diversity
   • physical security
   • opportunity for self-determination and control of one’s life

3. Access to economic resources and participation
   • access to work and meaningful engagement
   • access to education
   • access to adequate housing
   • access to money.

VicHealth, 2008

Figure 2.3 demonstrates that people of refugee background may become alienated and marginalised if important factors that promote successful resettlement are not present, in particular being unable to engage in work or education, and having few opportunities to participate and be included in mainstream contexts. The graph indicates that if individuals and families can be supported in negotiating these challenges with opportunities to overcome these risk factors, they have a better chance of successful integration.
Figure 2.3
Resettlement factors that influence integration and marginalisation

- Integration
- Post Arrival
- Employment
- Participation
- Increased Language Competence
- Limited Interaction/Participation in Mainstream Contexts
- Lack of Employment Opportunities
- Ongoing Welfare Dependency
- Difficulties Learning the Language
- Food/Shelter
- Income Support
- Education
- Safety

Arrival
2.3.3 The role of schools in successful resettlement

The VicHealth determinants of mental health can be applied to educational environments as follows:

Social inclusion: provision of supportive learning environments, appropriate learning contexts, and opportunities for positive connections and relationships

Freedom from violence and discrimination: a school that is safe, values diversity, and promotes opportunities to develop skills for self-determination and control of one’s life

Access to economic resources: engagement in appropriate and meaningful education to develop skills and experiences to successfully participate in the workforce.

Chapter 3 discusses the impact of trauma on learning and wellbeing, and the importance of schools addressing recovery goals to support recovery and resettlement.

2.4 Educational challenges

Refugee children and young people who enter Australia usually:
- have had no formal schooling, are not literate in their first language and have limited numeracy skills
- have had a disrupted education and limited literacy and numeracy skills in their first language.
- have had schooling only in languages other than their first language.

Refugee-background students in your school may have:
- little or no formal schooling experience prior to arrival in Australia
- disrupted and/or unpredictable learning opportunities
- little or no literacy and numeracy skills in their first language
- greater proficiency in oral language than written language
- received schooling in a language other than their first language
- been exposed to very different learning environments and styles from those in Australia
- had limited access to basic school resources such as books, pens and desks
- moved regularly between schools in Australia
- past trauma or health issues that may be impacting on learning
- no parent or family support to assist with challenges.

Implications for the classroom may include:
- misunderstandings about appropriate behaviour
- unfamiliarity with skills, environment and expectations
- anxiety about the classroom environment
- concern over trying to catch up, as peers are also progressing
- needing time to learn English and subject-specific concept development
- different understandings of time
- difficulty completing tasks due to lack of literacy and numeracy skills
- development of gross motor skills ahead of fine motor skills
- being unwilling to take risks
- having limited strategies for learning
- needing time to tune out and rest
- having difficulty concentrating
- shutting down
- hypervigilance
- difficulty working with others
- poor impulse control
- difficulty forming relationships.
Education transitions that may be challenging include:
- entrance directly into a mainstream school soon after arrival
- moving from an English language centre/school to mainstream school
- moving from primary to secondary school
- moving between schools due to families moving or changing circumstances
- moving between schools and other educational settings at 16+

2.4.1 Learning English as an additional language

The rate of English as an additional language (EAL) learning is influenced by a range of factors, including:
- age
- prior education and literacy experiences
- level of motivation
- the EAL programs and mainstream classroom programs available and the impact of trauma on learning and development.

It is generally accepted that it takes 5–7 years to learn EAL for academic purposes, yet up to 10 years or more for those with disrupted schooling (Miller, Mitchell and Brown 2009).

2.4.2 Managing new learning environments

In Australia, refugee-background children and young people must attempt to adjust to a new and challenging environment when entering the school system, and moving between settings in the school system. The culture and structure of Australian schools is very different from their previous formal educational experiences. Many refugees describe the teaching style in Australia as less formal, with an emphasis on experiential, self-motivated learning. In the classroom, refugee students may be very reserved because they may not be used to providing their own opinions or making judgements and may consider it inappropriate to ask questions.

For those who have not experienced any formal education, the structured learning environment of school can be quite alienating. These young people are likely to have very high anxiety levels. The progress of some students may be further slowed by other impediments resulting from the refugee experience such as hearing impairment, poor vision, emotional trauma, malnutrition and poor short-term memory.

After arriving in Australia, refugee children and young people will begin schooling in one of the following: English language schools/centres (ELS/Cs), mainstream primary and secondary government schools, mainstream primary and secondary private schools, Catholic and independent schools.

Most newly arrived refugees will initially attend an English language school or centre for two to four terms, where they receive intensive English language tuition. DET provides support for newly arrived students enrolling directly into mainstream schools through EAL outposts, isolated student support and in-school support. These programs are explained in more detail in Chapter 7.

Although learning English in a language school or centre is challenging, and the experience of schooling itself is very new, the transition from this environment into a mainstream school is a particularly difficult and distressing event for young refugees.

Students are leaving a more nurturing environment where they have developed trust and a feeling of safety and comfort. There are often smaller staff/student ratios and the curriculum is specifically targeted to the needs of EAL learners. The move to a mainstream school creates uncertainty for refugee-background students. Refugee students moving between primary and secondary school systems also experience this form of dislocation. The transition is even more challenging when a young person enrolls directly into a mainstream school.
Figure 2.4: Education pathways for refugee-background students

Adapted from Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and Refugee Young People and Training Working Group, 2003
2.5 Possible pathways for refugee-background students: older students

A further transition stage for refugee-background young people takes place during the later years of secondary schooling or after secondary education – to further education, vocational education and training, employment or other activities (family responsibilities, parenting, looking for work or looking for further training). It is important to recognise that this stage is ongoing and will often involve many separate transitions as it is common for older young people to move between and in and out of these different institutions and environments.

Refugee-background students who arrive as teenagers have less time to develop literacy, numeracy and social skills in Australia before needing to make career pathway choices. Particular issues for 16+ refugee-background students include:

- uncertainty about the future and how best to achieve their goals in their new circumstances
- intense, but often unexpressed, feelings of anxiety associated with previous life experiences (such as fear for those family and friends who remain in the difficult circumstances from which the young people have fled, for example, refugee camps, unknown locations or conflict situations)
- uncertainty about how to perceive Australian society, based on mixed experiences of very high levels of support, and perceptions and experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination
- mismatches between their perceptions of themselves as ‘old enough to make independent decisions’ and experiences of Australian institutions that in many different ways define them as ‘too young’, ‘insufficiently qualified’ or ‘incompetent’
- conflicts between their perceptions of what they ‘need’ to do and Australian requirements for specific levels of English and education.

Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2008

Often these older students may have high career aspirations, adult responsibilities, a parent/carer role with siblings, or are married with children.

Refugee-background students who are not recently arrived

Some refugee-background students who have been attending schools in Australia for several years may still face challenges in schooling. As previously mentioned, learning English to a level proficient for academic purposes can take 5–10 years. The implications of disrupted schooling can endure for years, and each student’s progress in a new country is individual and based on many factors. Some families move suburbs and schools, even states, and learning issues may arise that have not been understood earlier. Sometimes family and living circumstances change after initial resettlement. This can impact on a young person’s emotional wellbeing, and be further exacerbated by the possible long-term effects of trauma.
2.6 Refugee student stories

Below are two stories that illustrate the refugee experience. Case studies are found in Part 2.

Story 1: Moses, arrived in Australia aged 16, born in Sudan

Journey to Australia

Moses was born in a village in southern Sudan. There are many tribes in southern Sudan, and Moses’ tribe was Dinka. In southern Sudan, a civil war between the government troops of northern Sudan and the liberation armies caused the death and wounding of many people, and young boys were often taken away from their families and forced to fight. Moses’ older brother was taken by the army, and the family never heard from him again. Life was very hard in the rural area where Moses lived, and there was not much food. Moses’ father had two wives, which was a tradition in Sudan. His father lived with his first wife and her two sons and three daughters. He visited Moses’ mother, his second wife, every other week, and Moses looked forward to his visits.

Dinka people value their cows, and when Moses was quite small, his father bought him and his mother a cow, which Moses looked after and loved. Moses’ mother had lost her leg to a landmine, so from a young age Moses had to work hard to ensure that the two of them had sufficient food and wood for cooking. Even so, Moses loved his life in Sudan. Each day he roamed around the village, chatting with his many uncles, helping aunts to carry their heavy loads of wood, herding cows, fishing in the river, climbing trees and hunting with friends.

When Moses’ father visited, he would talk with other men in the village of his opposition to the northern government of Sudan, and Moses loved to sit behind him and listen to his elders’ conversations. Moses’ father had twice been imprisoned and tortured for speaking out against the government, and Moses knew to hide in the forest when soldiers came to their village to look for his father. One time, a young soldier had caught Moses and badly beaten him. He was lucky to survive, because on the same occasion his close friend was killed in front of him for resisting the soldier. Moses escaped when the soldier was called away, but Moses has never forgotten the image of the soldier shooting his friend.

When Moses was 10 years old, his father talked about his decision to leave Sudan for Kenya, as he feared being arrested a third time. Moses’ father and mother talked through the night about whether she could manage the journey to Kenya, which would entail much walking and hardship. By morning, they told Moses that they had reached the decision that Moses should go with his father, but that his mother would remain in the village with her sister. Moses was devastated at the thought of leaving her, his uncles and aunts, his cow and the life he loved. Moses’ mother promised that she would somehow see him again in the future, and gave Moses one of her bracelets to remind him of her. When night came, Moses and his father collected the first wife, whom Moses called his stepmother, and the family set off on the journey to Kenya.

The journey was long and difficult. Moses now had two half-brothers and three half-sisters, and had to get used to being in his new family. His stepmother was very kind to him, but he cried each night, thinking of his mother. As they journeyed, they slept in the forest during the day, and travelled at night, walking long distances. Once they were attacked and beaten by local villagers, and their saucepans were stolen. When they arrived in Kenya they had few belongings left, and they were exhausted and malnourished. One of the things that made Moses happy in these difficult times was that he had managed to hold onto his mother’s bracelet to remind him of her.
For the next five years, Moses lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. The camp itself was dangerous, with thousands of people living closely together. There was fighting between the many factions in the camp, there was only a little schooling, and Moses felt that he never had enough to eat because his food allowance was small, and the food was not always fresh. He and other boys spent their days getting up to mischief. After five years in the refugee camp, the family were interviewed by Australian Government officials, and accepted for resettlement in Australia. Moses and his family arrived in Melbourne when he was 16 years old. After his village life in Sudan and the refugee camp in Kenya, Melbourne was very strange, with high buildings and many fast cars travelling down broad, sealed roads. After life in the refugee camp, Moses had grown used to the separation from his mother, but he still missed her, and wore her bracelet as a reminder of happier days in Sudan. He soon realised that the health services in Australia were better than those in Sudan and that his mother could see doctors who would give her an artificial limb and help her to walk. He felt angry that his mother had not been able to accompany him, and hoped that she could join him when he was older.

Moses: At school in Australia

On arrival in Australia, Moses and his family found a house that they could afford to rent, though it was too small for eight people – Moses and his two half-brothers had to sleep on the lounge floor. Many things in the house surprised Moses – the fact that clean water came by turning a tap, and that food was cooked on an electric stove. Moses often went out and walked around the streets, but was sad that he knew no-one and that he could not wander in and out of houses as he used to do in his village. He felt very isolated and alone, and was confused about who he was in this strange culture.

With his half-brothers and sisters, Moses attended the local English language centre. He found it difficult to learn English. After a while, he moved to a mainstream school where he entered Year 9.

He found the classroom very restrictive. He couldn’t understand the teacher. He hated the school. There were both boys and girls in the school, and they were treated as equals, whereas in Sudan boys were regarded as more important. Studying was also difficult for Moses. He had experienced very little schooling in his life so far, and was not interested in reading and writing. He would much rather work on cars, because he was good at it. Teachers assumed that a student in secondary school had learnt reading and writing skills in primary school, and Moses was often in trouble for not concentrating and not doing his homework. Homework was difficult for Moses. There was little space at home for him to study, and the television was always on in the lounge room where he slept. His father spoke little English and his stepmother had never been to school to learn reading and writing. They did not understand the school system to discuss his problems with a teacher, nor could they help him with homework.

There were other problems at home too. Moses was having difficulty sleeping, partly because of the cramped and noisy conditions, but also because he had nightmares in which he saw his friend being shot by the soldier. This reminded him of how bad the war was at home, and the ongoing danger for his mother. His father had also become very angry, beating the children when they annoyed him. His father often remembered the torture he had experienced in prison, and he was depressed because he had to leave Sudan. He also felt guilty because he had left Moses’ mother in dangerous conditions. All these problems made him feel angry and frustrated about his ability to change this situation.
As a result of his difficulties at home and school, Moses' moods oscillated between anger and sadness, and he was unable to control his behaviour in the classroom, even though each day he resolved to concentrate hard. In Sudan, Dinka people were regarded as strong and proud, but in Australia Moses felt looked down on by other children, who teased him because he was so different from them. He was in trouble for fighting back when he was teased, and was occasionally suspended from school. Moses began to stay away from school because it made him so angry, and he started to hang around the shopping centre, making friends with some boys there. They admired him for his strength and daredevil attitude, which encouraged Moses to miss more school.

One of the teachers at school noticed Moses' difficulties, and he invited Moses to join the mechanics workshop he was running after school. From the first time he attended, Moses loved it. At the end of Year 10, Moses was told he had failed. He did not want to go on with school any more. A community worker at the school told him about a mechanics course being run at the local TAFE, and Moses jumped at the idea. His father didn't agree at first, but once the school careers officer explained that it could lead to an apprenticeship and potentially a job, he agreed to let Moses try it.

The worker also linked Moses into an after-school support program (an English language course) to help improve his English and suggested that he talk with a counsellor to deal with the nightmares he was having. From that moment, Moses began to enjoy his life in Australia. He liked the way Australians took such delight in cars, and felt proud that he could fix them. He began to make friends with others who admired his skills, and for the first time since he left the village he felt as though he belonged.

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**Story 2: Rhadia, arrived in Australia aged 11, born in Iraq**

**Journey to Australia**

Rhadia is 11 years old and is in her final year of primary school in the western suburbs of Melbourne. She was born in Iraq, of a Shiite Muslim family. When she was growing up, Iraq was ruled by the Ba'athist Socialist party, which would not entertain any political opposition. Because of this, the human rights of Shiite Muslims were abused, and political activists were particularly at risk of detention, torture and even execution.

Until she was seven years old, Rhadia lived in Baghdad with her mother, father and younger brother. She had a large extended family, and her grandmother and two uncles shared her house. Rhadia's father was a journalist, and her mother had trained as a science teacher, but stayed at home after she was married to look after the household. Rhadia worked hard at school and had many friends.

When Rhadia was seven years old, her father left for work one morning, and did not return. The family never heard from him again, and although work colleagues, family and friends searched, there was no trace of him. Talking about her father became taboo in Rhadia's household, as everyone was so upset by his absence. Rhadia felt the family were trying to hide information about her father from her, and she heard her cousin whispering that he had been imprisoned, tortured and murdered, which made Rhadia very unhappy. She found it difficult to smile any more. Rhadia missed her father's laughter, his affectionate nature and the stories he told her as they sat together in the courtyard of their large family home. He had passed his love of writing to Rhadia, and the two of them had planned that Rhadia would go to university when she was old enough, and learn to be a journalist like him. Rhadia had written simple stories to share with her father and her teacher, and she received high marks for her work at school.
After Rhadia’s father disappeared, life changed for the worse. The police often came to their house to interrogate Rhadia’s uncles about her father’s absence, and Rhadia witnessed them beating her favourite uncle. Rhadia hated the feeling of fear in the family whenever the police visited. Now that her father was no longer the family’s breadwinner, Rhadia’s mother had returned to teaching, and her grandmother looked after the household. Rhadia loved her grandmother, who talked about her village life as a little girl. One evening, the police visited the house and arrested Rhadia’s two uncles. During the night, Rhadia’s mother packed her and her brother into a truck that was going to Iran. Rhadia had no time to say goodbye to her beloved grandmother and friends, and cried as they drove, wanting to go home. Her mother tried to comfort her, explaining that it was unsafe to stay in their home, and that she had been able to organise transport to Iraq by gradually selling her gold jewellery during the last year and paying bribes to Iranian officials.

Over the next year, Rhadia, her brother and her mother lived in a refugee centre in Iran, where 5,000 people lived in crowded conditions. Her mother struggled to provide food and safety for the family, often relying on the generosity of others to survive. There was limited schooling for Rhadia and her brother in the refugee centre, though their mother was able to tutor them. In desperation, her mother wrote to an old colleague of her husband who had fled to Australia a few years before, and he agreed to sponsor them to come to Australia. Gaining a visa to come to Australia was a difficult and complicated process for the family, but at last they arrived to find their friend waiting at Melbourne airport. On the bus from the airport, Rhadia thought the country very odd. Colours and smells were different; traffic was fast and regulated. People were dressed differently from those in Iraq and Iran, and she saw women and girls of her age with bare legs, arms and heads.

The family moved into their friend’s small flat, but after three days they all realised that there was not enough space and Rhadia’s mother was uncomfortable in a flat with a single man. He asked the Department of Immigration to house them in accommodation that the government made available for refugees on arrival in Australia, and Rhadia, her brother and mother moved to a flat where they could stay for four weeks. There, Rhadia’s mother was told that her children must attend the local primary school, which had a language centre for students to learn English. Within a week of arriving in Australia, Rhadia and her brother had started school.

Rhadia: At school in Australia

Rhadia was bewildered by school in Australia. In Iraq, the children sat in rows and were quiet and obedient to the teacher, who was respected as the source of knowledge for the students. In Australia, the classroom seemed noisy and chaotic, and there was a different style of teaching and learning. The students were encouraged to ask questions and challenge the teacher’s words. Rhadia could not speak or write in English, and could not pursue her old enjoyment of writing stories to share with her teacher. At home, Rhadia wrote stories in Arabic about her life in Iraq, remembering her father, her grandmother, her friends and her uncles, all of whom she missed terribly. Her mother wanted to help Rhadia and her brother with their homework, but she was prevented by her own lack of English skills. Rhadia often had stomach pains and had to miss school and stay home with her mother, but the doctor could not find anything wrong with her. Rhadia despaired of learning English, making Australian friends, and of ever achieving her father’s dreams of university and a career. Her teacher noticed that Rhadia often looked sad, that she never smiled, and that she was shy in the classroom.
Rhadia also had problems socially. The Australian lifestyle was very different from that in Iraq, and she felt that she would never find Australian friends and fit in with their way of life. At home in Iraq, her family had a large house, a car, good clothes, books and a comfortable lifestyle. In Australia, the family had second-hand furniture, clothes and books. They received money from Centrelink, but never had any to spare for the new clothes that Rhadia longed for. For the three terms she spent at the English language centre, some other students in her class also wore a headscarf, but when she moved into the mainstream school, there were fewer girls who dressed like her. She felt different from other girls her age, and this made her feel lonely and isolated. She did not have a sense of belonging in Australia, and she felt it was not her place.

Rhadia's mother was also saddened by her life in Australia. She herself was having to learn English, and could not pursue her teaching career. She had some casual work in a factory where her husband's colleague worked, but she had few friends and felt very isolated. With sole responsibility for her children, she became overprotective, and tried to keep them indoors at all times. Rhadia's mother had never lost her fear of the police knocking on the door, and the family often stayed at home because she was fearful of walking in the streets where she may see a policeman. Because her mother often lay on her bed and cried with loneliness, Rhadia increasingly took on the responsibility of housework and care for her younger brother. Rhadia became very withdrawn, and her teachers worried about her ability to study. Rhadia's family could only stay in their Department of Immigration flat for four weeks before they needed to find another house. Luckily, a social worker helped them find a flat on the tenth floor of a housing estate that was not too far from school. The family was pleased to find that there were other Iraqi families in the flats, and Rhadia's mother slowly made some friends among the women, who introduced her to the local mosque.

There had been so many changes in Rhadia's life, and she often sat and dreamed of all the things that had seemed so stable at home in Iraq. She thought of the many cultural and family celebrations, when she had danced and sung with friends and relatives. She missed the sense of belonging that these celebrations had brought. In thinking of her friends in Iraq, she wanted to write to them, but feared that receiving a letter from Australia would place them in danger. She felt guilty that they were still living with the fear of persecution, and that they could not enjoy the peace that Australia offered.

At Rhadia's new school, there was a homework program run by a woman from a local service to help students like herself. There, the woman who helped with her English recognised Rhadia's interest in maths. She encouraged her to make use of the computers at the homework program and the maths tutor who attended every second week. After a year, the women encouraged her to enter a maths competition within the school. To Rhadia's pleasure, she won a prize, and her confidence in her own abilities began to increase. Her English was improving, and she began to see that she might still be able to fulfil her father's dream of going to university. She began to make friends who had similar interests to her, and was thrilled to be invited to a birthday celebration of an Australian friend. Rhadia's successes encouraged her mother to relax in her new country, and she was pleased to think that she and her children could live in safety, and hope for a stable and secure future in Australia.
3 Refugees in Australia
Summary

• ‘The 1951 Refugee Convention spells out that a refugee is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”’

UNHCR, 2016

• There is a range of visa classes that people with refugee experiences may hold.
• Some people may be seeking asylum in Australia and be holding a bridging visa that allows them to remain in Australia while they apply for a permanent protection visa. These people will be under enormous stress as their future is uncertain and they may have only limited work, health, and education entitlements in Australia.
• There are other visa categories in the migration program where members have arrived through family reunion. Some of these visa holders may have refugee-like experiences. These visa holders are ineligible for social security payments for two years from the date of arrival.
• In any given year, there are approximately 300 unaccompanied humanitarian minors (UHM) in Victoria. These are children or young people who arrive in Australia without parents to care for them. Some arrive with or have a relative over the age of 21 years to care for them.
• Visa categories and entitlements are subject to regular change.

3.1 Definitions

Each year the Commonwealth Government accepts 13,750 people from refugee backgrounds through the Special Humanitarian Program, which includes people:
• living in other countries who have been referred to Australia for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (i.e. granted refugee visas)
• living outside their home country who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights in that country, and are proposed by someone in Australia, such as a family member (granted Special Humanitarian Program visas)
• who are already in Australia when they make a claim for protection and are found to be refugees. Some arrive and reside here on a valid visa (e.g. as a visitor) before claiming protection. Others arrive without a visa. People who do not have a valid visa are detained until they are granted a bridging visa pending the resolution of their status, a permanent visa, or are removed from Australia.
If a person enters Australia with documents (e.g. student or visitor visa) and then applies for asylum, they are given a bridging visa; this allows them to remain legally in the community while their application for refugee status is being considered. If a person enters without a valid visa or passport, he/she is detained while their status is determined.

It is government policy that children will not be held in immigration detention centres. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) Detention factsheet 82 states:

‘Families with children

It is government policy that children will not be held in immigration detention centres. Children might be accommodated in low security facilities within the immigration detention network to manage health, security and identity risks to themselves or their guardians. Facilities include immigration residential housing, immigration transit accommodation and alternative places of detention.’


There are students in Victorian schools who have spent time in detention or community detention. Government responses regarding asylum seekers and detention were in flux at the time of writing this resource. It is advised that schools contact DIBP or DET for the latest information and policy.

It is important for schools to recognise that other people with ‘refugee-like’ experiences are often sponsored to come to Australia by their relatives through the Family Migration Program. Their visa category will not indicate possible refugee experiences.

Many new arrivals to Australia will have experienced years of conflict and persecution prior to leaving their homelands. Their departure will usually have been unplanned and their escape perilous. Many refugee families will have spent years in a first country of asylum, either in a refugee camp or in the general community, before being offered permanent settlement in Australia. In these countries, their status will have been uncertain and they will have had only limited access to basic resources such as food and water, shelter, personal safety, health care and education.

3.2 Students from refugee backgrounds

3.2.1 Countries of origin

In Victoria, students from refugee backgrounds come from a range of countries. The top 10 countries of birth for humanitarian arrivals from 2010 to 2015 were, in order, Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Iran, Thailand, Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan (Department of Social Services, 24 December 2015).

This diversity is also illustrated in the following list of countries of origin of refugee clients using the services of Foundation House in 2013–2014: Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Bhutan. (VFST, 2014).

3.2.2 Establishing background

Student learning can be affected by experiences before coming to Australia. These include disruptions to education due to conflict, lack of formal schooling, and a range of traumatic events.
To identify a student with a refugee background, exit reports and communication with the previous school or language centre should assist. The visa code (required for enrolment) can also indicate basic information about the family without asking unnecessary questions. People will have arrived either under the humanitarian program, or the migration program. Common visa codes in the humanitarian program include 200, 201, 202, 203, and 204 (see Figure 3.1). Many more people arrive in Australia in the migration program, although some of these may have a refugee-like background. It is important to be aware that visa codes can change as immigration issues evolve and new government policies are adopted. A number of unobtrusive questions can then be asked of families and carers at enrolment or another appropriate time about history and nature of past schooling (see Chapter 7 for details).

3.2.3 Special needs of asylum seekers

Schools should be aware that the home environment of students whose families are applying for protection visas may be very stressful. The family will be extremely anxious about the outcome of their claims, and unable to plan for the future. The adults may not be entitled to work; even if they have work rights, they may be unemployed and without access to welfare benefits. The family may be destitute and reliant on acquaintances or charitable sources for their shelter, food and medical care. Some families live in detention centres and some are housed in community detention.

3.2.4 Special needs of unaccompanied minors

Unaccompanied humanitarian minors are children who arrive in Australia without parents to care for them. They may arrive with, or have relatives, over the age of 21 years such as elder siblings, aunts, uncles or grandparents to provide for their care. In any given year, there are approximately 300 unaccompanied humanitarian minors in Victoria (DEECD, 2011). These children and young people are entitled to support from the Refugee Minors Program (RMP) and are automatically allocated a Department of Human Services worker.

If schools become aware of minors who don’t have a worker for some reason (they may have moved interstate) they can refer to the RMP with the consent of the family. Because the sibling/carers might also be quite young and/or struggling themselves with settlement issues (housing, Centrelink, learning English, caring for younger siblings), the family is likely to need extra support with school life and may be struggling financially.

Unaccompanied humanitarian minors without a suitable relative become wards of the minister under the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946. The minister’s responsibilities as guardian under the Act are delegated to officers in state and territory child welfare agencies. The children will receive a high level of support from the RMP and will stay in a mixture of accommodation facilities, including foster homes and share houses.

Most unaccompanied minors, and many other young people of refugee background, struggle with the separation from their parents and/or siblings. If they are not in touch with family overseas, finding their family, helping to support them financially, and sponsoring them to come to Australia are most important. Many will feel responsible for their family, and be preoccupied with their family’s safety overseas, and the level of hardship being experienced by the family.

The two components of Australia’s immigration program are the:
• humanitarian program – for refugees and others in refugee-like situations
• migration program – for skilled and family migrants.
The expected number of people arriving annually through the migration program is 190,000.

On 9 September 2015, the Australian Government announced that it will make an extra 12,000 Humanitarian Programme places available in response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. These places are in addition to the existing refugee and humanitarian programme intake of 13,750.

Schools are required to record the visa numbers of their students. Most refugee-background students will come to Australia through the humanitarian program. All those granted a humanitarian visa will be permanent residents and entitled to all rights afforded to permanent residents (work, study rights, access to social security payments, Medicare, pharmaceutical benefits scheme) and access to 510 hours English (adults) and EAL new arrivals funding. Those holding bridging visas will have limited entitlements. Schools should contact DIBP and DET for the latest information in this regard.

Families who are sponsored under the family reunion stream of the migration program become permanent residents and are eligible to work, study and access Medicare. These visa holders are ineligible for social security payments for two years from the date of arrival (as part of the assurance of support conditions), as the sponsor must continue to help the applicant (and their family) settle in Australia by providing support, accommodation and financial assistance. Some of these families, young people and children may have refugee background experiences.

**Figure 3.1**

**Visa categories, numbers and entitlements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanitarian program visas</th>
<th>Visa sub-class</th>
<th>Visa number and name</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>200 – Refugee</td>
<td>Holders of these visas applied for and were granted their Humanitarian Entry visas offshore. They are permanent residents upon arrival. People within this visa category may have lived in a war zone, experienced political persecution, torture or trauma and have probably been living in a refugee camp. The 204 Woman at Risk visa is issued to single women only. Women in this category who have children will have arrived as single parents (but may have reunited with their partner onshore).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>201 – Refugee (In-Country Special Humanitarian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>203 – Refugee (Emergency Rescue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>204 – Refugee (Woman at Risk)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Humanitarian Programme</td>
<td>202 – Special Humanitarian Programme</td>
<td>Holders of these visas applied for and were granted their visas offshore. They are permanent residents upon arrival. People within this visa category may have lived in a war zone, experienced political persecution, torture or trauma, and have probably been living in a refugee camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Protection</td>
<td>866 – Permanent Protection</td>
<td>People who hold an 866 visa were identified as refugees, were issued a permanent protection visa (PPV) and are permanent residents. They arrived in Australia and applied for a PPV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resolution of Status</td>
<td>851 – Resolution of Status</td>
<td>These people have been granted permanent protection and were former temporary visa holders or a member of a family of a temporary visa holder who arrived in Australia prior to 9 August 2008.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary (Humanitarian Concern)</td>
<td>786 – Temporary (Humanitarian Concern)</td>
<td>The 786 visa category (temporary safe haven) provides temporary protection only for people who have been displaced by upheaval in their country. People with this visa have not been detained and live in the general community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Visa categories, numbers and entitlements (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa sub-class</th>
<th>Visa number and name</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridging visa (temporary resident) or protection visa applicants</td>
<td>010, 020, 030, 040, 041, 050, 051 Bridging visa A–E</td>
<td>Bridging visas are temporary visas that allow people to remain in Australia in the community while their status is being processed. Some visa holders may be entitled to access financial and medical assistance through the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) programme. People receive services under one of six SRSS bands, depending on their personal circumstances, level of need, and stage in the immigration process. Further information is available here: <a href="https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Refu/Illegal-maritime-arrivals/status-resolution-support-services-programme-srss">https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Refu/Illegal-maritime-arrivals/status-resolution-support-services-programme-srss</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reunion migrants (permanent resident)</td>
<td>Offshore 100 – Spouse 101 – Child 102 – Adopted Child 103 – Parent 114 – Aged Dependent Relative 115 – Remaining Relative 116 – Carer 117 – Orphan Relative 138/139 – Skilled</td>
<td>People who hold a visa from the family reunion category applied for and were granted their visas offshore. This category may include people who have had a ‘refugee-like’ experience, which may be identified by asking the country of origin and stages of their journey to Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reunion onshore applicants (permanent resident)</td>
<td>801 – Spouse 802 – Child 804 – Aged Parent 835 – Remaining Relative 836 – Carer 837 – Orphan Relative 838 – Aged Dependent Relative 862, 863, 881, 882 – Skilled (various)</td>
<td>Holders of these visas applied and were granted their family reunion visas inside Australia. This category may include people who have had a ‘refugee-like’ experience, which may be identified by asking the country of origin and stages of their journey to Australia. Similar entitlements and obligations apply to sponsors as above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This information was sourced and adapted from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection website: [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)
4 The impact of trauma on wellbeing and learning
Summary

- Most refugee-background children and young people will have been subjected to, or have witnessed, horrifying and traumatic events. All will have experienced some degree of loss of home, place and culture, as well as the profound losses of parents, siblings, friends and significant others through death or separation.
- Refugee-background children and young people will also have endured a level of change unprecedented in the lives of most of their Australian-born counterparts.
- Adaptations to school must be taken into account when considering the impact of trauma, as these effects also contribute to the overall development and wellbeing of the individual.
- The developmental impact of pre-arrival and settlement experiences will depend on the nature and extent of exposure to traumatic events; the age of the child at the time of maximum disruption to life; the degree to which the family has remained intact; the quality of the post-trauma environment; and the opportunities for recovery.
- Specific effects of the refugee experience on children and young people can include anxiety and fear, re-experiencing traumatic events, fluctuations of emotions and behaviours, disruption to connections with people, impact of isolation and separation, impacts on self-concept and perceptions of the world, shame and guilt.
- The refugee experience can have specific effects on the family. Traumatised parents often have a reduced capacity for emotionally supporting and protecting their children.
- Guilt associated with leaving family behind may disrupt emotional recovery for all family members.
- Roles within the family as well as responsibilities are often dramatically altered.
- Families may be isolated from their own and wider community support.
- Children are often taught not to trust anyone from the new culture.
- There may be intergenerational conflict as children build connections in the new culture and challenge traditional values of their family.
- Families may lack the confidence to support their children at school due to limited language skills.
- Many families may be facing the ongoing stress of low economic status with poor financial, employment and housing security.
- Resettlement challenges can exacerbate the effects of trauma.
- Trauma can interfere with many of the complex cognitive functions required for learning.
- There are many ways that traumatic experiences can affect the capacity for learning.
- Foundation House has identified four recovery goals that address the core effects of traumatic experiences. These are:
  - to restore a sense of safety and control
  - to restore attachment and connections to others
  - to restore meaning, purpose and a sense of future
  - to restore dignity and value.
4.1 Understanding the context of trauma

4.1.1 Conflict and persecution

People who arrive in Australia as refugees or from refugee-like situations have had little or no choice about leaving their homelands. Rather, their migration will have been forced as a result of war between or within countries, or their persecution as members of an ethnic, religious or social group. Most refugee children and young people will have been subjected to or have witnessed horrifying and traumatic events. These include:

- war, bombing or shelling
- destruction of homes and schools
- violent death or injury of family or friends
- separation from family members
- sudden disappearances of family members or friends
- physical injury and limited medical attention
- deprivation of food, safe water and other resources essential for survival
- fear of discovery or arrest, arrest and detention or torture
- forced conscription into armies or militias
- rape or sexual assault
- lack of opportunities for play.

All will have experienced some degree of loss of home, place and culture, as well as the profound losses of parents, siblings, friends and significant others through death or separation.

4.1.2 New challenges upon arrival

As outlined in Chapter 2, refugee children and young people will also have endured a level of change unprecedented in the lives of most of their Australian-born counterparts. As well as changes in their families and family relationships, on arrival in a new country they are required to learn a new language, adapt to a new set of cultural norms, and orient themselves to a new and unfamiliar school system (Rutter, 1994). The culture and structure of the education system in Australia is likely to be very different from that in their country of origin. In particular, teaching styles are likely to be less formal and classroom work is likely to involve more group work and talking. Both the classroom and playground environment may appear quite unstructured and chaotic for children and young people of refugee background and their parents.

Adaptation to school may be particularly difficult for those students who have had limited or no school experience. These students may be facing the intellectual and behavioural requirements of a structured learning environment for the first time. These new challenges must be taken into account when considering the impact of trauma, as their effects also contribute to the overall development and wellbeing of the individual.

4.1.3 Gauging the impact of refugee experiences on students

The developmental impact of pre-arrival and settlement experiences will depend on the:

- nature and extent of exposure to traumatic events
- age of the child at the time of maximum disruption to life
- degree to which the family has remained intact
- quality of the post-trauma environment and opportunities for recovery.

For some newly arrived refugee-background children and their families, the need for ‘one-to-one’ professional intervention may emerge.
4.2 Specific effects of the refugee experience on children and young people

Anxiety and fear

Feelings of anxiety and fear typically persist in a new country well after actual or threatened violence has ended. Difficulties with concentration and memory, and disturbed sleep patterns, can impair the ability to learn and acquire new skills. Exploration through play, mastering new situations, and the taking in of new information can also be inhibited. This is particularly problematic when adjusting to an unfamiliar and new environment such as a school.

Re-experiencing traumatic events

Re-experiencing trauma is a common reaction to traumatic events. This often occurs at night in the form of nightmares, or during the day in the form of flashbacks and memories. Everyday stimuli can also trigger reminders of traumatic events. Common triggers are people in uniform, sirens, fireworks, sudden loud noises, and authoritarian and threatening behaviour.

All these experiences can cause overwhelming anxiety and the student may cope by shutting down through numbing of feelings, restricting the amount of information from the outside world, and detachment from people and things. Shutting down can also manifest as social withdrawal, avoiding stimulation, looking blank or displaying limited imaginative activity. These mechanisms are a way for the mind to cope with fear, but are not activated all the time. There may be fluctuations in emotions and behaviours, reflecting periods of intense anxiety alternating with periods of withdrawal and emotional numbing. With the pressure of anxiety and tension (which cannot be controlled) the student may become highly irritable and unable to tolerate frustration, resulting in reduced control over impulsive and aggressive behaviour.

Connections with people

The connection with others is usually dramatically altered as a result of trauma and dislocation. A fundamental cause of this disconnection is the loss of others and prolonged isolation and separation from important figures such as parents or other significant caregivers. This may be compounded or mitigated by the receptivity of the new environment, and the quality of nurturing and emotional support available. The age of a child or young person at the time of loss greatly influences the effects of that loss. As Rutter notes, ‘In general, younger children seem to suffer the most adverse effects, while older children (especially those who had a previous history of family warmth and affection) often possess internal resources which help them better cope with the stress of family separation’ (Rutter, 1994).

Prolonged separation from parents at a young age interferes with the future development of relationships. A fundamental internal sense of security is destroyed, unless a new permanent and nurturing relationship is fostered with a protective adult. Without such a new relationship, the child is at high risk of difficulties throughout life, and the capacity to form close, trusting relationships and peer relationships can be affected.

Impact of isolation and separation

Some children develop a pattern of anxious attachment in which they remain fearful of losing people who are important to them. This can manifest as clinging behaviour and jealousy. Anger is harboured when the attachment figure is unavailable, but may not be expressed for fear of rejection.

Other children develop an overly self-sufficient style of relating and avoid close relationships. When developed early in life, such independence can interfere with the capacity to form mature relationships later. It can easily be misunderstood as a healthy reaction because the child is self-reliant. Another pattern that can develop is that of compulsive care-giving, where personal
needs are denied in order to look after others. Again, this can appear as a healthy reaction because the child is helpful and accommodating, but this may be at the expense of his or her own needs. It is also a form of relating that can easily make the child vulnerable to being taken advantage of by others.

Self-concept

Throughout childhood, one’s sense of self and self-concept evolve, with identity formation being one of the central developmental tasks of adolescence. There are many different theoretical understandings of the self, but most share the view that the self functions as an inner map of the person, and their relationship to others and the world. This inner map can be of varying complexity, and consists of attributes and expectations, which can be predominantly negative or positive in value.

Sensitivity to failure is common among all children, but refugee children are especially sensitive because of the importance attached to success by the children and their families. The cumulative effect is that the acquisition of new competencies can be diminished, which ultimately influences the student’s feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth.

The role of teachers and other authority figures (the role of approval or disapproval by others)

All experiences in life, and the view taken of them, shape one’s self-concept. The degree of approval or disapproval by figures in authority, namely parental figures, teachers and community leaders, is particularly critical in determining whether the self-concept is positive or negative. In a simple or undifferentiated view of self, the child may only value a limited set of attributes, making them vulnerable to failure and self-degradation should a particular attribute be judged negatively.

Discrimination and racism are damaging to the development of self. In contrast, when there is a comprehensive understanding of the background experiences of refugee children in the school and in the wider community, insensitive or racist treatment is diminished and the likelihood of children internalising simple and negative stereotypes is reduced. Chapter 9 outlines a range of strategies to support schools in understanding and addressing racism.

Perceptions of the world

Refugee and settlement experiences can also profoundly affect children’s perceptions of a safe and secure world, notions of good and bad, and their sense of future. The belief that home or community is a safe place can be destroyed. As Van der Kolk states, ‘The essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life. Trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside of oneself to deal with frightening emotions or experiences’ (Van der Kolk 1987). Loss of safety also means a loss of trust in others to provide protection (Raundalen 1997). Raundalen has emphasised that should parents fail to protect their children from danger, the children will feel betrayed.

Refugee children have left behind a sense of place and belonging to a culture that provided them with a frame of reference through which to view the world and their future. Children whose recent life experience has been dominated by overwhelming violence and destruction, and who may have witnessed the very darkest side of human existence, may struggle to conceive of a future that holds anything meaningful or positive for them.

Garbarino and Kostelny, who are recognised leaders in the field of the effects of violence on children, capture well the impact of violence, and lack of support, on children.

‘In the developmental process, the child forms a picture or draws a map of the world and his or her place in it. As children draw these maps, they move forward on the paths they believe exist. If a child’s map of the world depicts people and places as hostile, and the child as an insignificant speck relegated to one small corner, we must expect troubled
The professional learning activities (PLAs) are designed for schools to support teachers and other school staff to engage with the material in the resource.

Supporting parents and carers
Refer to Case Study 9 (‘Mary’, a refugee-background parent/carer) to consider the challenges for some refugee-background families and how the school can respond. It is recommended users read Chapter 10 before completing this PLA.

See Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies.

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**development of one sort or another: a life of suspicion, low self-esteem, self-denigration, and perhaps violence and rage. We can also expect a diminution of cognitive development and impediments to academic achievement and in-school behavior.’**

Garbarino and Kostelny, 1993

**Shame and guilt**

The most invisible legacies of exposure to violence are shame and guilt. School-age children have reported ‘feeling bad’ for a number of reasons, including being unable to provide help to others, being safe when others are harmed, and for believing that their activities endangered others (Pynoos and Eth, 1993). Even when nothing could have been done to change what happened, children imagine that they should have been able to do something; to the child, this is preferable to facing sheer helplessness. Manifestations of guilt and shame include fantasies of revenge to repair damage done, self-destructive behaviour to expiate guilt, avoidance of others due to shame, an inability to participate in pleasurable activities, and aggressive feelings towards oneself.

Children can also feel considerable guilt for having left family members and friends behind. They may also have feelings of guilt and shame in not fulfilling the expectations of succeeding at school in Australia.

**Resettlement challenges exacerbating the trauma reaction**

Some of the difficult challenges of resettlement were highlighted in Chapter 2. Resettlement experiences that may exacerbate the trauma experience can include:

- ongoing danger in country of origin
- new unfamiliar environment
- fear about the future
- discriminatory social policies
- continuing separation from family members
- lack of nurturing relationships
- lack of belonging in new dominant culture
- devaluing of person in a new culture
- injustices
- exposure to ignorance and lack of understanding
- racial prejudice
- new humiliations.

These experiences can further generate feelings of anxiety and fear, impact on connections with others and interfere with a young person’s perception of themselves and their future. In supporting young people, it is important to gain an understanding of their experiences in Australia and the possible adverse impact on their wellbeing of these resettlement experiences (see Figure 4.2).

**Specific effects of the refugee experience on families**

Families play an important role in helping their children meet the developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence and in protecting them from the effects of adverse life events. However, the refugee experience can affect the capacity of families to carry out this role, particularly when parents or caregivers have been exposed to torture and other traumatic events, and be experiencing associated mental health difficulties. The feeling of guilt of being unable to protect their children from terrible events may serve as a barrier to acknowledging any adverse effects.

Family relationships and roles are often drastically altered by the refugee experience. In many families, children will have lost a parent through death or separation. Others may be re-joining family members after long separations. In some cases, young people may be living as household heads, as members of their extended family or friends, or as unaccompanied minors. Children and young people often act as interpreters and negotiate with agencies such as Centrelink or the doctor on behalf of their parents.
Studies show that families who are well connected with the community are better able to meet their children’s needs (Watson 1988). However, having recently arrived, refugee families often have limited access to the protective effects of social support in either the newly arrived or wider communities. Further, as a result of persecution in their countries of origin, parents may be fearful of people outside the family and hence may resist forming supportive social relationships or discourage their children from doing so. Some parents may also fear the consequences of their children’s contact with a new culture, particularly if there is a divergence of values between it and their own. This may not only affect children’s abilities to make connections with their new culture, but may also lead to intergenerational conflict and an overly harsh or overprotective approach to parenting.

While many refugee families place a high value on education, they often lack the language skills, knowledge and, in many cases, confidence to support their children to understand and settle into a new school system and culture. Significantly, most refugee families who have recently arrived in Australia are of low socioeconomic status and consequently encounter the stresses and difficulties associated with this situation. Refugee families experience high levels of unemployment, often reside in insecure and substandard housing and are over-represented among those on low and fixed incomes (Watson, 1988; Francis and Price, 1996; Collins, 1998).

### 4.3 The impact of trauma on learning

Learning requires a series of complex cognitive functions. These include:
- attention and concentration
- comprehension
- understanding instructions and input
- following instructions
- working memory (including the holding of information and instructions in the process of problem-solving)
- committing knowledge to long-term memory
- organisation of information and category formation
- shifting from abstract to concrete and from concrete to abstract
- generating a range of strategies to solve a problem
- flexibility and demonstrating a solution to a problem.

Trauma can detrimentally affect most of the above functions. (Kaplan, 2009)

Traumatic experiences can affect the capacity for learning in a number of ways. Some common learning issues for refugee students include:
- difficulty understanding appropriate behaviour
- displaying inappropriate behaviour
- oral language skills stronger than written
- different understandings of time
- lack of literacy and numeracy skills
- gross motor skills more developed than fine motor skills
- unwillingness to take risks
- not having strategies to learn
- needing to turn off and rest from the heavy demands of learning and being at school
- difficulty concentrating
- shutting down
- hypervigilance
- difficulty working with others
- poor impulse control
- difficulty forming relationships
- learning difficulties caused by factors such as malnutrition and deprivation
- sight and hearing problems.

Trauma can create blocks to learning associated with the following components of the trauma reaction: anxiety, withdrawal, grief and depressed mood, anger, guilt and shame.
4.4 Recovery from trauma and the role of schools

4.4.1 The goals to support recovery from trauma

Foundation House identifies four recovery goals that address the core effects of traumatic experiences. These are to restore:

- **a sense of safety and control** that has been undermined by effects of anxiety and fear
- **attachment and connections to others**, which have been lost as a result of prolonged isolation and separation from loved ones
- **meaning and purpose and a sense of future** after these concepts have been undermined by a loss of faith of a safe and secure world
- **dignity and value** to address a sense of guilt and shame over making impossible choices or being unable to act.

4.4.2 Framework for recovery

The framework for recovery looks at the impact and meaning of violent and traumatic experiences on individuals, families and communities. Trauma reaction depends on the meaning given to certain events, which is influenced by personality as well as the social, cultural and political context.

The four components are interrelated. For example, disrupted attachment to family members through separation increases the individual's susceptibility to feelings of betrayal and guilt. Shame intensifies feelings of helplessness and loss of connection to community.

For each of the core components of the trauma reaction there is an extensive range of how the effects are manifested. This is outlined in the framework for recovery, as shown in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1**

Framework for recovery *(Resource 8 in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence and persecution</th>
<th>Social and psychological effects</th>
<th>Core components of the trauma reaction</th>
<th>Recovery goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killings, assaults</td>
<td>Chronic fear and alarm</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Restore safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life threats, threats of harm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of helplessness</td>
<td>Enhance control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Disappearances’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of control</td>
<td>Reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of shelter, food, health care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Disruption of connections to family, friends, community and cultural beliefs</td>
<td>Relationships changed</td>
<td>Restore attachment and connections to others who can offer emotional support and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation, dislocation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibition of traditional practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation of rights</td>
<td>Destruction of central values of human existence</td>
<td>Shattering of previously held assumptions</td>
<td>Restore meaning and purpose to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing on mass scale</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of trust, meaning, identity and future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to boundless brutality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion of personal boundaries</td>
<td>Humiliation and degradation</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Restore dignity and value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No right to privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Reduce excessive shame and guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible choices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.2

Refugee resettlement experiences that impact on learning and wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee experiences of trauma</th>
<th>Possible components of the trauma reaction that can impact on learning and wellbeing</th>
<th>Resettlement experiences that can exacerbate the trauma reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Ongoing danger in country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killings</td>
<td>Poor concentration</td>
<td>New unfamiliar environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assaults</td>
<td>Feelings of helplessness</td>
<td>Fear about the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappearances</td>
<td>Loss of control</td>
<td>Discriminatory social policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shutting down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor sleep patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Loss of relationships</td>
<td>Continuing separation from family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation from family,</td>
<td>Changed relationships</td>
<td>Lack of belonging in new dominant culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers, peers and the</td>
<td>Increased dependency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>broader community</td>
<td>Guardedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Grief or depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibition of traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation of human</td>
<td>Shattering of previously held</td>
<td>Devaluing of person in a new culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rights; living in unsanitary</td>
<td>assumptions about human existence</td>
<td>Injustices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditions; lack of access</td>
<td>Loss of meaning and purpose</td>
<td>Exposure to ignorance and lack of understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to health care, education</td>
<td>Loss of faith in adult ability to protect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic essentials, opportunities to play</td>
<td>Very sensitive to injustice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion of personal</td>
<td>Guilt and shame</td>
<td>Racial prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boundaries</td>
<td>Preoccupation with feelings of having failed to act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible choices</td>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>New humiliations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-destructive behaviour</td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 The role of schools in supporting recovery from trauma
PART 1
5: THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN SUPPORTING RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA

Summary

- Attachment to school, confidence in social and emotional skills, and satisfaction with the learning experience enhances resilience, safety and wellbeing for students.
- Schools that foster a sense of belonging, inclusion, safety and respect enable acquisition of skills for the present and future through appropriate and relevant education; these schools are providing a framework for recovery from trauma in a natural and meaningful context.
- Strategies that meet the recovery goals are present and necessary across all areas of the schools (curriculum, teaching and learning, policies and procedures, school ethos and environment and partnerships with parents and carers and community agencies).
- Individual teachers can support students experiencing blocks to learning, disclosing traumatic information, or displaying behaviours of concern with a range of individual and classroom strategies.
- Early intervention processes should be followed to provide appropriate classroom and individual support to an individual student if necessary. This may include support team meetings, personalised learning plans, referral if necessary, and ongoing support.
- Common reactions among those working with refugees include helplessness, guilt, anger, fear, avoidance reactions and fulfilment. It is important for school staff to recognise their emotional reactions to stress and seek support when necessary.
- Debriefing is important because professionals can be personally adversely affected by exposure to demanding, stressful work, such as working with people who have been severely traumatised.

‘Children who develop an attachment to their school and a love of learning will have greater resilience in the face of adversity than those who do not.’
Child Safety Commissioner, 2007

‘Student safety and wellbeing are enhanced when students feel connected to their school, have positive and respectful relationships with their peers and teachers, feel confident about their social and emotional skills, and satisfied with their learning experiences at school.’
DEEWR, 2010

Schools are the only compulsory setting in which all young people engage. Schools are a natural context for recovery, and have a unique role in providing an environment that nurtures resilience and reduces vulnerability of students who have experienced trauma. Providing a safe, inclusive environment that builds connections and skills and contributes to dignity, meaning, and a sense of future, is fundamental for recovery and is inherent in the purpose and practice of effective supportive schools.
5.1 Applying the recovery goals to school practice

The recovery goals are inherent in supportive school environments and their practice. Three significant aspects of a supportive school environment are student learning, student wellbeing, and transitions and pathways.

Figure 5.1 identifies the links between the recovery goals, supportive school practice and the VicHealth social and economic determinants of mental health.

**Figure 5.1**
Supportive school environments: applying the Foundation House recovery goals and the VicHealth social and economic determinants of mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and economic determinants of mental health (VicHealth)</th>
<th>Supportive school environments and practice</th>
<th>Recovery goals (Foundation House)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Social inclusion                                            | Promotes opportunities to belong, contribute, be valued and build positive relationships with others (this relates to student wellbeing) | • To restore attachment and connections to others  
• To restore dignity and value |
| • Freedom from discrimination                                 | Enables one to feel safe, respected and free from discrimination and racism (and the attitudes and structures that lead to racist behaviour) (this relates to student wellbeing) | • To restore a sense of safety and control  
• To restore dignity and value |
| • Access to economic resources (for children and young people – engagement in education) | Provides for support, engagement, acquisition of skills and success in appropriate, relevant and meaningful education (this relates to student learning and student pathways) | • To restore meaning, purpose and a sense of future (learning skills)  
• To restore dignity and value |

It is recommended that the recovery goals are used to guide all strategies to support refugee-background children and their families. Figure 5.2 provides examples of school strategies that meet recovery goals.
### Strategies that meet the recovery goals

**Figure 5.2** Strategies that meet the recovery goals *(Resource 5, in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of refugee experience</th>
<th>Goals to support recovery from trauma</th>
<th>Strategies to meet recovery goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Restore safety</td>
<td>Structured, predictable environments where changes are explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of helplessness</td>
<td>Enhance control</td>
<td>Teaching classroom and school routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of control</td>
<td>Reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety</td>
<td>Scaffolded teaching of topics and concepts in all subject areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships changed</td>
<td>Restore attachment and connections to others who can offer emotional support and care</td>
<td>Quiet spaces and opportunities to relax and play quiet games, prayer rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Restore meaning and purpose to life</td>
<td>Opportunities for play, art and expression of feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Restore dignity and value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shattering of previously held assumptions</td>
<td>Reduce excessive shame and guilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of trust, meaning, identity and future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effects of refugee experience**

- Anxiety
  - Feelings of helplessness
  - Loss of control
- Relationships changed
  - Grief
  - Depression
- Shattering of previously held assumptions
  - Loss of trust, meaning, identity and future
- Guilt
- Shame

**Goals to support recovery from trauma**

- Restore safety
- Enhance control
- Reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety
- Restore attachment and connections to others who can offer emotional support and care
- Restore meaning and purpose to life
- Restore dignity and value
- Reduce excessive shame and guilt

**Strategies to meet recovery goals**

- Structured, predictable environments where changes are explained
- Teaching classroom and school routines
- Scaffolded teaching of topics and concepts in all subject areas
- Quiet spaces and opportunities to relax and play quiet games, prayer rooms
- Opportunities for play, art and expression of feelings
- Teaching how to seek assistance
- Structured pair and group activities to share experiences and build connections
- Transition programs for a range of transitions experiences
- Using buddy systems
- Teaching social skills
- Teaching emotional literacy
- Welcoming and engaging families and community
- Recognition of prior learning and learning needs
- Programs to meet student needs and address gaps
- Opportunities to experience success with recognition of learning and successes
- Appropriate and individually managed pathway support, including links to other services
- Learning to take risks and build trust
- Celebration of diversity
  - Professional development for staff to promote an understanding of refugee experiences and understanding how to use EAL strategies
  - Modelling respect with correct pronunciation of names
  - Use of interpreters and translations
  - Dealing with discipline one-on-one and with an advocate
  - Consistency between teachers
These strategies can be placed in the five areas of action for the whole-school approach framework (Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3**
Whole-school approach to strategies
(Resource 6, in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies)

5.2 **Supporting the individual student**

In supporting the individual student, teachers should be aware of the common learning issues for refugee students with disrupted education. For comprehensive information regarding the educational challenges for refugee-background students, refer to Section 2.4.

Teachers should also understand refugee experiences that lead to trauma reactions, and that resettlement experiences can exacerbate these reactions. It is also important for teachers to understand individual cognitive functions that underpin learning, how this impacts on learning in the classroom, and the blocks to learning that may result from the effects of trauma (as outlined in Chapter 4).

There are many strategies that reflect the recovery goals that can be used in schools and the classroom to support the individual. These strategies are contained in Part 2: Resources/tools/PLAs/case studies.
5.2.1 Early-intervention strategies

Schools are expected to have processes in place to respond to individual students who require additional assistance and support. This may be the case for some refugee-background students. They may require closer support and monitoring of progress, involving feedback and input from teachers, the student, the parents and carers, and possibly other services that may be involved with the family. Early-intervention strategies may include revised classroom approaches and pedagogy, individual learning and behaviour plans, and other additional support. It is important that these students have a consistent advocate at school to oversee their progress, particularly as effective support will take time.

A targeted response for individual students should include:

- an understanding of the life circumstances of the student and how they feel
- data collection strategies (formal classroom and broader assessment data such as appropriate observation notes from teachers)
- feedback from the student
- feedback from parents and carers
- planning for improvement based on data that is reviewed regularly
- explicit teaching of appropriate behaviour that builds positive learning and social skills
- strategies for the monitoring and measurement of student progress
- inclusive and consistent classroom strategies
- out-of-class support strategies (such as homework support and targeted group work)
- a student support group that meets regularly to review and discuss progress (e.g. classroom teacher, SWC, school support worker).

DET has partnered with Headspace, the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, to develop SAFEMinds: Schools and Families Enhancing Minds. This learning and resource package aims to enhance a school’s capacity to enact an early-intervention approach to identifying, supporting and referring children and young people in need of additional support.

5.2.2 Individual learning and behaviour plans

Many schools use personalised learning approaches, differentiated instruction and individual learning plans. These encourage student backgrounds, perspectives and interests to be reflected in the learning program and the learning environment (see Chapter 8). Some refugee-background students will benefit from the targeted nature of an individual learning plan.

5.3 The role of the individual teacher

‘By understanding and building relationships with traumatised children, teachers can make an enormous contribution to their lives.’

Child Safety Commissioner, 2007

Many schools believe that every student is the responsibility of every teacher. Those who do not directly teach the student still have interactions with students outside the classroom (e.g. during transition times of the day, on yard duty, in the corridors, during cross-curricular activities, on school camps and excursions, through school sporting activities, and during special events such as the school fete). The individual classroom teacher has great opportunities and responsibilities when working with all students. All classroom teachers can provide strategies to support recovery for refugee-background students and many do, sometimes without realising their important role in supporting recovery from trauma. These strategies reflect good-practice for all teachers of all students. The recovery goals can be supported in an engaging, supportive and responsive learning environment as follows:

To restore a sense of safety and control: A safe, predictable learning environment with clear routines, where needs are understood, acknowledged and met
To restore attachment and connections to others: Teaching styles and curriculum content that helps to build connections and develop social and emotional skills (structured pair work, circle time, peer activities and mentoring).

To restore meaning, purpose and a sense of future: Recognition of prior learning and learning needs, differentiated curriculum, scaffolding, recognition of learned skills, engaging activities.

To restore dignity and value: A respectful and inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and values diversity, and actively encourages and includes all participants in the learning process.

Chapter 8 further explores the important role of teaching, learning and curriculum provided by the classroom teacher.

The nature of the school environment provides many instances where teachers will interact on an individual level with a student. These moments are often opportunities to provide valuable support for a refugee-background student. A student may disclose personal information or traumatic experiences to the teacher, or may display behaviours that are of concern and may need to be followed up by the teacher (see Chapter 11).

5.4 Supporting school staff

It is important that the school environment is supportive for staff working with refugee-background students. Working with this group of young people is challenging, so it is essential that peer-support for teachers and other strategies are set up at your school. Working with students who have survived horrific events can have an emotional impact on staff. After hearing their stories and experiencing something of their lives, teachers may find that they are experiencing some of the same trauma responses as the students. These ‘vicarious traumatisation’ responses may include sadness, helplessness, guilt, anger, loss of pleasure in everyday activities, seeking to ‘make it better’ for children, and avoiding discussion about student trauma issues and events (VFST, 1998).

If left unmonitored by the school, the emotional effect of working with refugee students without appropriate support mechanisms may lead to staff burnout. Some of these burnout factors may be avoided or alleviated through professional development, internal organisational assistance, and peer-support programs. Staff management personnel should emphasise clarity of roles, responsibilities and boundaries. It is important that those working with refugee students and families support each other.

5.4.1 Possible feelings and reactions

A range of feelings can be evoked by working with refugee students, which can influence ways of responding to students and affect the worker’s personal life. Understanding such reactions and how to deal with them is vital for effective work.

Helplessness: Feelings of helplessness can arise when confronting information about torture practices, other forms of state-sanctioned violence and war atrocities. This can lead to a loss of confidence in one’s skills and knowledge. It can also lead to an underestimation of the student’s resources and a tendency to try to rescue the student. Judgements about helping too much or ‘rescuing’ can be difficult to make. Nevertheless, it is vital to be aware of personal limits. Where an overprotective attitude or a need to solve all problems dominates, it is usual to simply become exhausted from doing everything. It can also lead to a reluctance to let others help because of the perception that they cannot do it as well or as effectively as you.
5.4.2 Implications for practice

Many emotions are aroused by traumatic material and they can persist for some time. People can respond by suppressing them, or becoming distracted from them, or looking at them further to see what they can tell us about students, their families or our own personal lives. Professionals may engage in a number of processes that reflect a wider position in regard to traumatic material. These include:

- moving towards the traumatic material by learning more
- changing systems and accepting responsibility
- moving away from the traumatic material by neglecting issues or diminishing awareness of the severity of problems.

The most common pitfall is probably taking excessive responsibility for the student. There are many reasons for this, including the need to do something to overcome feelings of helplessness, the desire to protect the survivor from further abuse, and the need to restore hope and faith in humanity. Anyone with an awareness of the circumstances of refugees who have survived violence and displacement could be tempted, in a helping capacity, to extend their efforts to improve systems they are involved with, and to increase community awareness. This is clearly desirable, but the limits of personal responsibility have to be constantly examined.
5.4.3 Burnout
At times, despair and disillusionment can outweigh spirited efforts and lead to 'burnout'. The risk factors are:

- unrealistically high demands from self
- excessively high expectations of others
- limited resources, personnel and time
- lack of control over the situation
- insufficient support from leaders, organisations and colleagues
- unrealistic expectations
- lack of acceptance and acknowledgement by others.

When work is emotionally intense, and where personal commitment is strong, the ideal position to adopt is a degree of detachment alongside empathy, which ultimately enables you to act in the best interests of students.

5.4.4 Dealing with emotional reactions to traumatic events

- Acknowledge your reactions by developing awareness of the signals of distress and by trying to find words to express your inner experiences and feelings.
- Contain your reactions by identifying the personal level of comfort, and by understanding that reactions are normal and unlikely to be overwhelming if their phasic nature is recognised.
- Accept that being influenced by exposure to traumatic material is to be expected, and share trauma-related work with others. Allow for relaxing self-expression.
- In addition to the above, dealing with your reactions involves recognising that it is an ongoing process of thoughtfulness and acknowledgement of your emotional conflict.

5.4.5 Coping with stress
Most people have different strategies to cope with stress. These can include humour, relaxation, exercise, good nutrition and sharing emotions with close friends. Professional coping methods are discussed by Yassen (1995). They include:

- balance in the variety and nature of work-related activities
- pacing oneself in relation to managing work duties
- keeping boundaries in relation to taking work home
- understanding self-disclosure boundaries
- being realistic about the effect you have
- trusting professional relationships and peer-support
- planning ahead for difficult situations
- professional training and opportunity for replenishment.

5.4.6 Debriefing
The concept of debriefing arose from recognising that professionals can be personally adversely affected by exposure to demanding stressful work, such as working with people who have been severely traumatised. The aim of debriefing is to reduce staff stress caused by such exposure. Debriefing is usually conducted in a group setting and conducted by a facilitator. Debriefing processes include:

- acquiring information regarding emotional reactions and the ‘normalisation’ of these responses
- reducing stress by sharing experiences of difficult situations in a group or team setting
- developing effective strategies for stress management
- recognising and reinforcing the value of one’s work
- understanding the causes of one’s difficulties and frustrations, and considering alternatives.
The person who acts as a facilitator of a debriefing group needs to be experienced in this area. He or she clarifies what is being said and elicits responses in order to increase understanding of the current situation, and generate alternatives. The facilitator should be someone who is not a staff member, and who is entrusted with the role of guide.

It is crucial to anticipate the sources of stress because other strategies may be required. Often, the main source of stress for staff relates to organisational issues such as problematic relationships and changing work conditions. If this is the case, boundaries for debriefing need to be set beforehand so that it is clear that it is seen purely as a forum to discuss stress emanating from work with students. Organisational issues will still need to be dealt with, but at another time and in another forum.

Costs can prohibit the employment of an external facilitator for debriefing on a regular basis. The alternatives are to have a number of structures and processes in place to deal with anticipated sources of staff distress. Suitable processes would include: case conferences to discuss difficult situations in the classroom; planning days; clear lines of accountability; a variety of methods for disseminating as well as gathering information; and one-to-one consultations with a designated person for discussing problems.

Staff Matters

MindMatters has developed an excellent Staff Matters website resource, which provides information about how staff can develop mental health and wellbeing in the educational workplace. The material it contains complements the MindMatters resource. Available for staff in all types of schools, the website resource is organised into five domains:

- The Thriving Self
- The Interpersonal
- The Professional
- The Organisational
- The School in the Community.

www.mindmatters.edu.au
6 Implementing and planning for change
Summary

This chapter outlines the process to implement Schools In for Refugees: A Whole-School Approach to Supporting Students and Families of Refugee Background (SIFR). The primary aim is to help schools identify the changes required to more effectively address refugee-background students’ education and wellbeing needs, and to provide a framework by which to plan for these changes.

6.1 Why conduct an audit?

Quotes from school principals:

‘Auditing our college to find weakness in our program, we found we needed to do more on partnerships with parents so we decided to work on our welcome packs among other things. We were motivated through setting our goals and achieved some of the things we set out to do, e.g. induction of new staff, creating a sequence of lessons on science prac for Year 7 EAL, etc.’

Secondary school in Refugee Action Network

‘We have transformed from panicked to focused.’

Primary school in Refugee Action Network

The SIFR Audit allows schools to identify current practices that are working well to support refugee-background students. It also allows identification of priority areas for improvement. The National Safe Schools Framework states that a whole-school audit also identifies possible overlaps of policies, practices and programs and enables opportunities for streamlining and coordinating these features of the school.

DEEWR, 2010
6.2 Steps to implementing School’s In for Refugees

The three stages of the whole-school approach to improving support for refugee-background students outlines important steps and identifies the tools to support the framework.

**Figure 6.1**

The planning framework: the three stages of the whole-school approach to improving support for refugee-background students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review the strategies currently in place across all areas of your school and identify actions that could be taken to better support students of refugee background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tool 1:</strong> SIFR Audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tool 2:</strong> SIFR Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 2: Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write an action plan, prioritise actions and implement change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tool 3:</strong> SIFR Action Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3: Evaluate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on achieved outcomes and identify what is still to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tool 3:</strong> SIFR Action Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 School’s In for Refugees and its place in a whole-school review process

The SIFR Audit is well placed to support schools as they undertake their whole-school improvement and accountability processes. School improvement frameworks require self-evaluation and review, and the development of improvement and action plans. These phases are mirrored in the School’s In for Refugees planning framework. Schools may wish to use the SIFR process as part of data collection for their review, and feed relevant strategies into their strategic plan as part of their school improvement framework.

School profile

An understanding of the school and its local characteristics is strengthened by developing a school profile. It is recommended that the profile of the school be well understood by all stakeholders before undergoing the audit and improvement process. A school profile is a requirement of the DET School Strategic Plan. The profile allows a common recognition of the values of the school, based on an understanding of the socioeconomic-cultural background of the school community.

School census data may provide some of this information, but for the purpose of the School’s In for Refugees process, some of the following questions may add a deeper understanding of your school community for your school profile.

Some of these questions and further suggestions are provided in the National Safe Schools Framework resources (DEEWR, 2003).

1. What diverse cultural, religious and linguistic groups do our students belong to? (include numbers and percentages)
2. What diverse cultural, religious and linguistic groups do our staff belong to? (include numbers and percentages)
3. What percentage of our students come from a refugee or refugee-like background?
4. What percentage of our students have had disrupted schooling?
5. What cultural and/or religious groups within our community contribute to our school’s teaching and learning, and how do they do this?
6. What local community groups do our students belong to?

6.4 The SIFR Audit

A supportive school environment is critical to the educational outcomes, mental health and successful settlement of refugee-background students. The SIFR Audit, located at the end of each of the following chapters and presented in full in Part 2, Tool 1, has been designed to assist schools to assess their level of support for refugee-background students. It could usefully be applied alongside other audits such as that included in the National Safe Schools Framework (DEEWR, 2010).

The SIFR Audit is designed to enable quick identification of the strengths of schools in working with refugee-background students, and the areas that may require a review or additional strategies.
Using the SIFR Audit

Read through Chapters 7–11, answering the audit questions at the end of each chapter. The audit asks schools to consider structures and practices across the five areas.

1. School policies and practices (Chapter 7)

This area of action focuses on determining the extent to which your school has developed policies and practices that provide for full participation and adequate access to all of the resources, activities and learning opportunities offered by the school.

2. Curriculum, teaching and learning (Chapter 8)

The curriculum represents both the formal and informal teaching and learning program offered by a school. This section is used to ascertain the extent to which the school’s curriculum promotes social harmony and an understanding of cultural diversity among all students. This includes an awareness of the needs of refugee-background students and newly arrived migrants. It also promotes reflection on the EAL support structures, roles and programs at the school.

3. School organisation, ethos and environment (Chapter 9)

This section allows you to gain an understanding of the culture of your school as revealed by how school policies, principles and values are put into practice in the school setting. It includes the relationships between school staff, students and families, the general ambience of the school, the physical surroundings, the activities and support structures in place for students, and the classroom environment.

4. Partnerships with parents and carers (Chapter 10)

This section seeks to identify the extent and methods by which your school encourages and develops a relationship with the parents/carers and families of refugee-background students. These connections represent a vital component in the successful integration of refugee-background students into the school environment.

5. Partnerships with agencies (Chapter 11)

This section seeks to ascertain the level to which your school has developed meaningful connections and partnerships with community support and service agencies as providers of expertise, resources and services in working with refugee children, young people and their families. It encourages schools to analyse the nature of their relationships with agencies.

The complete audit comprising all five areas of action can be found in Part 2, Tool 1.

Examine the results of your SIFR Audit and refer to the relevant chapters for more information on how your school can more effectively work with and support refugee-background students. This will help when you are completing the SIFR Review, using the information from the SIFR Audit.

6.5 The planning framework

The planning framework (Figure 6.1) is designed to help schools plan for the implementation of the changes identified during the audit and review process. The framework also encourages schools to evaluate the changes undertaken by documenting strategies, programs and policies implemented.
7 School policies and practices
Summary

- While many policies and practices may be inclusive of all students, some must specifically target the needs of refugee-background students.
- Successful transition into and between school settings relies on effective policies and practices during all phases of transition: preparation, transfer, induction and consolidation.
- Some schools assign an advocate or coordinator to oversee the transition of refugee-background students, in recognition of the complex nature of both education and other transitions for this cohort of students.
- Structures that support communication of information, transition events for students, and professional learning and sharing opportunities for teachers are important strategies that should be encouraged between mainstream schools and feeder school/language schools.
- Personnel, procedures and resources must be in place to ensure a thorough, welcoming and informative enrolment process occurs. This contributes to new families and students feeling supported in an unfamiliar environment, and ensures relevant and accurate information is gathered for the school to best support the needs of the student. Systems must be in place to ensure effective communication of appropriate information to teachers and other personnel if necessary.
- Establishing an understanding of a student’s current EAL stage (or VELS English level), education history and education disruptions, visa code and a thumbnail sketch of their background, should be gathered at enrolment and in subsequent meetings with students, parents and carers.
- There are many issues that arise when considering assessment for learning and language disabilities for refugee-background students. There are specific DET, Programs for Students with Disability (PSD) guidelines for psychologists to follow regarding assessments for refugee-background students.
- Settling into school takes time. Ongoing individual support and flexibility, related classroom curriculum, and targeted programs to ease transition and build connections will benefit students a great deal, especially in the early stages of attendance at the school.
- DET identifies three phases of support for refugee-background students. The first is the New-Arrivals Program: Intensive English Language Support for 6 to 12 months (includes language centres/schools). The second is funding for transition or bridging programs, and the third is EAL index funding for EAL programs and the employment of multicultural education aides.
- Schools should offer and use qualified (on-site or telephone), professional interpreters when conducting meetings with parents and carers who do not speak English. This service is free for all government schools. Using family members as interpreters compromises confidentiality. It is vital that the school has clear procedures regarding the use of interpreters, and ensures that staff are familiar with procedures and practices of working with qualified interpreters.
- Schools should have notices for parents and carers translated into the main school community languages or as requested. This service is also free for government schools within established guidelines.
- The CECV provides a New-arrivals Program that includes school advisers to support refugee-background students in Catholic schools.
• Many government schools entitled to EAL index funding should be employing multicultural education aides (MEAs). When the school has effective guidelines in place, MEAs can improve communication between families and the school, support and help build positive relationships that improve the learning environment, and enhance the experience of schooling for refugee-background and EAL students and their families.
• Students are expected to speak, read and write English in nearly every school context. EAL provision is a whole-school responsibility. Policy must reflect practice that supports the EAL learner needs in all mainstream classes and across all aspects of the school.
• Flexible learning options and pathway choices should be made available, and should also be reflected in policy to meet the learning needs of older students, and their transition into educational pathways beyond the school setting.
• An effective professional learning program that enables development of teacher knowledge and skills, and promotes whole-school practices to support refugee-background students, should be in place. This should be reviewed as the staff group and school community changes over time.
• The school compliance checklist and a range of DET and CEM policies and resources provide system frameworks that will assist schools to support and include refugee-background students.

It is important to develop school policies that support refugee-background students and their families, and establish strategies to ensure policies are put into place. Schools will already have many school-wide policies and practices in a range of areas that are supportive of the needs of refugee-background students. These areas may include student engagement and wellbeing, global and multicultural education, EAL, and other aspects of curriculum, teaching and learning. While a school may have many policies and practices that are inclusive of refugee-background students, there is also the need to have strategies that target the particular needs of students and families of refugee backgrounds.

### 7.1 Supporting students in school transition

*Within educational organisations and systems, policy makers aspire to all children engaging in positive educational trajectories and achieving sound educational outcomes. This is based on commitments to reducing inequalities in educational access and outcomes. Strategies to achieve positive educational outcomes for all include continuity of curriculum and pedagogy and strong coordination between the prior-to-school and school sectors.*

Educational Transitions and Change (ETC) Research Group, 2011

Chapter 2 explores the many transitions in the life of a refugee-background student, both before and after arrival in Australia. A significant transition for refugee-background young people is moving into and between education settings. The consequences of these changes may include anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, a feeling of lack of control and absence of social anchor points, an absence of safety, frustration and loneliness, and an inability to make sense of academic content.

Research suggests key indicators for successful school transition for all students include:
• developing friendships and improving self-esteem and confidence
• settling well into school life so there are no concerns for parents or carers
• showing an increasing interest in school and school work
• experiencing curriculum continuity.
It is important to keep in mind the factors identified by VicHealth to promote mental health – social inclusion, freedom from discrimination and access to economic resources and participation. These factors provide an overarching framework in their relevance to successful resettlement and, for young people, their education environment and their progress through these settings is the primary context to enable these factors to exist.

When a refugee-background student experiences an unsatisfactory school transition, and this is added to the other demands and barriers that all students face, significant problems can result, such as conflict within the family, and non-attendance at school. Schools can play a major role in easing the student’s educational transitions by implementing appropriate policies and practices that address the challenges of moving between education settings.

Some schools have a coordinator to specifically oversee and lead the transition of refugee-background students into their school. In some cases this is the school EAL coordinator or, for smaller schools, the student wellbeing coordinator or assistant principal. This ensures there is a key advocate for these students, and enables an ongoing support person to oversee their progress.

It is helpful to recognise four phases of transition that illustrate both the longitudinal nature of ongoing support required, and the depth of strategies needed for a successful transition between school settings (CEO, 2010). The four phases are:

**Preparation:** carefully planned activities, discussion and contact between settings prior to enrolment

**Transfer:** the time of student movement and interaction between the settings, sharing of information and activities, and enrolment meeting

**Induction:** time of arrival at the new setting, provision of orientation and welcoming activities

**Consolidation:** continue transition activities with initiatives undertaken in the new setting that help the student merge into the school activities and further manage their own learning (including provision of ongoing support for families to feel welcome, informed and included).

The case study below shows a range of strategies in place to support a student through the four phases of school transition.

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**Case study: Atong**

Atong is a Sudanese girl who arrived in Australia when she was 16 years old, having spent four years in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Atong had no formal education prior to attending an English language school (ELS) in Australia. A month before finishing her 12 months at an ELS, Atong was involved in a transition program in which teachers from the local secondary school talked to the exiting ELS students about the new school environment, and matched her with a student ‘buddy’ from the secondary school. The students at the secondary school who were ‘buddies’ for the newly arrived students received training in group work and leadership skills and understanding the role of a ‘buddy’ prior to being matched with a new student.

After meeting her buddy at the ELS, Atong spent a day with her exploring the secondary school and sitting in classes with her. On Atong’s next visit to the new school, she received her uniform, books and locker key.
Atong started at the secondary school in a special EAL bridging program. This meant some classes were specialist EAL classes, and for some classes she was with her buddy in the mainstream classroom. For the first six months, Atong met with her buddy once a week to plan and participate in school activities together. Atong felt this helped her to make new friends and feel comfortable in the new school environment.

*Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2007*

### 7.1.1 Preparation and transfer of students between education settings

**Language schools/centres, feeder schools and mainstream schools working together**

English language schools and centres (ELS/Cs) are important sources of student information and strategies to support refugee children and young people as they enter mainstream schooling. A good relationship and communication processes between schools can smooth the transition process for students. Local networks of schools should be encouraged to provide ongoing communication about student needs and effective strategies. Mainstream schools should have orientation days to welcome English language school students. Professional development days with teachers from the feeder schools and the mainstream school can provide opportunities for discussions about strategies to support refugee-background students and allow a constructive dialogue to begin between teachers of individual students, to ensure a more successful transition process. The transition coordinator in ELS/Cs can assist with this process. They provide a comprehensive exit report for students enrolling in mainstream schools. Student mentors and buddies (including refugee-background students who have settled into mainstream schooling) who are supported by teachers and trained in refugee issues, communication, group work and leadership skills, can be involved in welcome programs and ease entry for new students. Orientation and transition programs are also good contexts for student participation and can assist with building connections between students.

### 7.1.2 The enrolment process: induction phase

**Developing a comprehensive enrolment process**

The enrolment process is an important opportunity to welcome refugee-background students and their parents and carers to your school, and to gather and record useful personal background details about students that may better inform teaching staff about their needs. A positive and carefully considered enrolment process will serve to make new students feel welcome upon their initial arrival. This is a particularly anxious time for refugee-background young people who are unfamiliar with the school system, which they may be accessing for the first time.
Schools are required to submit a wide range of information about their students to DET at the annual census, which includes the EAL survey and the language background other than English (LBOTE) survey. Some of this information can be useful to individual schools to identify refugee-background students, aspects of their previous experience and possible needs. Enrolment information required for DET purposes includes:

- visa code and visa date (schools must keep a photocopy of student visas for the annual audit)
- number of years of disrupted schooling
- language spoken at home
- mother’s country of birth
- father’s country of birth
- date of first enrolment in an Australian school.

ELS/Cs will have completed a comprehensive exit report, which provides information on each student's educational progress and some detail on past educational experiences. It is recommended that schools contact the transition officer from the ELS/Cs whose role is to provide transition support for students transferring into mainstream school settings.

**Establishing English language competency for an EAL student**

School reports for EAL students should indicate the student's current EAL stage and progression point on the EAL continuum. The DET definition of an EAL student is one who comes from a LBOTE, does not speak English as the main language at home, and has been enrolled in an Australian school for less than five years. EAL students learning English should be reported against the EAL continuum and VELS (Victorian Essential Learning Standards) EAL standards. This information should help the school understand the student's current level of English learning, and assist with establishing appropriate learning support on arrival at the school.

**How to identify students who have a refugee background**

When identifying a refugee-background student, two important things to consider are country of origin and visa number. Neither is reliable without a discussion with the student and their family. Most refugee-background young people will bring their visa with them to the school at enrolment. The visa category will indicate if students are refugees by which humanitarian visa category has been granted, and this will determine which government settlement services are available. The information in Figure 3.1 provides an overview of visa catagories that you will come across when enrolling refugee students in school.

Where there is no visa available, a student's country of origin, and knowing how long they have been in Australia, is likely to indicate whether the student has refugee-related experiences. Parents and carers may share with you experiences of living in other countries. It is important to know what language is spoken at home to ensure appropriate communication between school and families and for organising interpreters. Understanding a student’s ethnicity is important. For example, a student born in a refugee camp in Thailand may identify as Karen or Burmese. This is particularly important in terms of identity and dignity, as well as organising appropriate interpreters. Knowledge about previous levels of schooling and the degree of interrupted schooling is particularly crucial information for teachers, to be able to provide appropriate programs for students.
**ADVICE**

Recommended enrolment procedures

**Preparation**
- It is desirable to allocate responsibility for enrolment interviews to staff members such as year-level coordinators or assistant principal, ensuring that relevant staff members are trained to conduct enrolments and have an understanding of the refugee experience.
- When enrolling students of refugee backgrounds, it is good practice to include the student wellbeing coordinator (SWC) and EAL coordinator, who will have a good understanding of experiences such as disrupted schooling, general welfare concerns and special needs.
- Ensure that one person is responsible for collecting the information gathered at enrolment and sharing appropriate student information with relevant teachers to plan for the learning and wellbeing needs of this student.

- Develop a process that ensures that relevant information on refugee-background students is shared with other school staff, without breaching confidentiality.
- Become familiar with visa categories (see Figure 3.1), countries where refugees come from, and specific languages spoken. This information will later help to identify students who are likely to have a refugee background.
- Prepare enrolment questions to gain relevant information from the student and parent or carer without being intrusive, and adopt these as standard procedure.
- Have processes in place to include professional interpreters.
- Request a set interview time if prospective students come for enrolment without an appointment. Ask them to bring their parent or carer, their visa and any documents on past education experience if they have them. Ask which language they speak, and book an interpreter.

**The enrolment interview and determining a student’s educational background**

Follow school procedures for the interview and include these questions where appropriate. Refer to advice regarding use of interpreters in Chapter 7.

1. Where did you go to school?
2. How many schools have you been to? Did you attend schools in more than one country?
3. How long did you attend each school? (What hours each day did you attend school? How old were you when you started school?)
4. Were there times when you had no schooling?
5. Did you attend school in a refugee camp?
6. Can you describe the subjects you learnt at school?
7. What language/s did you learn in?

**GOOD PRACTICE**

A primary school developed a flow chart to meet the needs of refugee-background students as they transitioned into the school.

Resource 4: Enrolment steps to meet the needs of refugee-background students (see Part 2) identifies the preparation stage and the personnel involved from the feeder school and the new school. Appropriate questions and personnel required for the enrolment are identified. Steps are provided to ascertain and pass on information regarding learning needs and background. This process also ensures that appropriate class placement and EAL support is in place.

See Part 2, Resource 4: Enrolment steps to meet the needs of refugee-background students.
Confidentiality: student information

It is important that enrolment information, in particular socio-linguistic and education profile is accessible to teaching staff, year-level coordinators, SWCs, school guidance officers or educational psychologists. It is also important that the school follows school confidentiality guidelines in this regard. A ‘thumbnail’ sketch of a student’s refugee experiences should be all that the SWC (or key advocate) requires, unless further support is needed.

General enrolment information can guide the appropriate distribution of resources and allocation of programs to support student needs. Sharing information in this way should enable staff to be better informed about the situation of students, and strategies and approaches that might suit their individual learning needs.

Developing a good understanding of all students takes time. It is important to have an ongoing process of sharing of information that ensures confidentiality and respects privacy.

1. The enrolment coordinator (SWC, assistant principal or transition coordinator) reads all enrolment forms, and identifies students with refugee backgrounds at each year level by using visa codes and other enrolment information.

2. The enrolment coordinator informs classroom teachers of relevant student experiences and potential needs of all new enrolments.

3. The enrolment coordinator or SWC maintains a confidential file on refugee-background students. The SWC discusses new enrolments with possible support needs at each wellbeing team meeting (made up of visiting school psychologist, school social worker, integration coordinator, school nurse and teacher of principal class). Strategies for support and referrals (if necessary) can be discussed at this meeting. Follow-up discussions on student progress should occur until the student has settled into the school. The file is maintained and passed to new teachers working with the specific students in the following terms and years.

4. The wellbeing team conducts a case meeting for teachers of a particular student. Teachers are told about the particular learning or behavioural needs of the student and the best strategies to support that student. Teachers are also informed about the importance of debriefing; structures should be in place to provide for this process.

5. The wellbeing team coordinates invited speakers for the whole staff team, for example:
   - multicultural education aides (MEAs), who may be able to speak about specific cultural groups
   - workers from refugee support organisations
   - members of local ethnic community groups
   - past students with refugee experience, who may be interested in returning to their school and speaking to staff.

6. The enrolment coordinator/SWC coordinates regular meetings to support refugee-background students as part of a pastoral care or peer-support program.

Using information collected at enrolment

The information collected at enrolment will be used primarily to plan and support the learning and wellbeing needs of individual students. This information can be used in the following ways:

- Cultural and language background information can be used to help plan meaningful curriculum activities. The diversity of students’ experiences can be reflected in the curriculum and include country of origin, journeys, identity, family diversity, cultural and religious celebrations. An appreciation
Assessing students with additional needs

There are many issues that arise when considering assessment of refugee-background students for learning and language disabilities. These are outlined in the advice box below. Schools need to be aware that there are assessment guidelines for psychologists that contain procedures for assessment of refugees and recent arrivals from non-English speaking backgrounds. These guidelines outline factors to consider in assessment, working with interpreters and families, assessment processes, and use of alternative tools when existing recommended tools are not considered appropriate (DEECD 2011).

Research has identified a range of concerns about the use of cognitive assessment tools with recently arrived refugee students. For example:

- cognitive tests are not culturally validated or validated for use with interpreters – assessing and reporting professionals may be required to use a range of quantitative and qualitative methods to form a diagnosis for the student
- there are challenges around the timing of assessments for diagnosis – professionals need to consider individual circumstances and information available in deciding when to assess a student
- developmental problems may be attributed to EAL issues, and EAL/schooling issues may be incorrectly attributed to intellectual disability. Parents’ understanding of cognitive test results is often less than adequate. Paediatricians feel that developmental assessment is often underutilised in assessing refugee students for learning problems. Providers also note there is limited research into the relationship between trauma and learning difficulties.


7.1.3 Consolidation phase: settling in to school

The time it takes for students to settle into a new school will depend on the individual student and their needs. However, the transition will be greatly influenced by the inclusive nature of the school and the programs in place to support the student during this consolidation phase.

Through access and equity policies, the school can ensure that refugee students have equitable access to school resources, including teacher time, counsellors, welfare coordinators, interpreters, MEAs and EAL teachers and programs. Transition programs and associated curriculum initiatives that continue into this settling stage, and over time, have been found to be very beneficial to a sense of belonging for new students.

The School’s In for Refugees newsletters outline a range of programs and initiatives to support transition.

Edition 7: Engagement with parents and carers
Edition 8: Creating safe and inclusive classrooms
Edition 9: Welcome, readiness and belonging
Edition 10: Schools and agencies working together

www.foundationhouse.org.au
DET support for refugee-background students

DET identifies three phases of support for refugee-background students in Victorian schools.

**Phase 1: New-Arrivals Programme**

This includes intensive English language support for 6–12 months, depending on the needs of the students.

**English language centres, schools or outposts**

Some students first enrol in an English language centre, school or outpost. The small class sizes and high number of contact hours enable qualified EAL teachers to deliver an intensive English language program tailored to the needs of students. This assists students, parents and carers with understanding the Australian education system and society. EAL is taught through the content of all learning areas.

**New-arrivals programme support in mainstream schools**

Mainstream primary and secondary schools will be aware of any refugee-background student who has enrolled directly after arrival in Australia without accessing an English language school/centre. These schools must ensure that they have procedures in place to access English language school outreach coordinators, outpost services and the New Arrival Kit, which is provided on request to isolated schools where new arrival students are enrolled.

The kit contains a range of DET publications including *Where's English, Beginning EAL: Support Material for Primary-level New-Arrival Students, No English, No English 2, Questions and Answers*. A number of appropriate commercially produced resources are also provided on extended loan from the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC) in Carlton at: www.education.vic.gov.au.
EAL outposts

A primary teacher from an ELS/C is assigned to a mainstream primary school or cluster of schools to provide an intensive new-arrivals program for eligible newly arrived students at their mainstream school. Outreach services coordinators from the English language school/centre are available to assist teachers to assess the English language learning needs of newly arrived students and recommend the most suitable program support.

Isolated student support

Isolated student support is available for eligible new-arrival students requiring EAL support in isolated and country areas.

Direct funding is provided for a qualified EAL teacher on staff, or to employ a qualified EAL casual relief teacher, to provide EAL support to the new-arrival student.

Funding may also be provided to release a staff member to attend an ELS/C for mentor support in EAL development, strategies and resource support.

Phase 2: Funding for transition and bridging programs

Funding is available for transition or bridging programs, particularly for refugee background students who have low levels of literacy and may have very limited or no previous formal schooling experience. The program may be full-time, focusing on intensive literacy and numeracy, or may be integrated with the mainstream program where students share some classes with mainstream students. This type of program can be for 6–12 months.

More information should be gathered directly from DET regarding the range of initiatives relating to funding for transition and bridging programs.

Phase 3: EAL index funding

EAL index funding is allocated to mainstream schools to provide EAL programs for students based on the number of students at the school who:

- come from a language background other than English (LBOTE)
- speak a language other than English at home as their main language
- have been enrolled in an Australian school for less than five years
- attract Student Resource Package (SRP) funding.

Funding is based on data collected from the LBOTE Census conducted in all government schools in August each year. A weighted formula that reflects both the length of time in an Australian school, and the stage of schooling, is then applied to the identified students. Schools are required to meet a funding threshold before receiving EAL index funding.

MEAs (multicultural education aides)

Funding is allocated to government schools for the employment of MEAs to assist with communication between the school and parents of students from language backgrounds other than English. They also assist students in the classroom or on a one-to-one basis.

All schools reaching the funding thresholds for EAL index funding have a funding component for employment of MEAs. The MEA funding component is approximately 25 per cent of the EAL index funding allocation.

Information regarding EAL support for schools can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au.
Other support provided by DET

EAL regional project officers
These officers, based in each region, assist with school data analysis of EAL learner outcomes, EAL program development and implementation, program evaluation and professional learning.

Transition officers
These officers are usually based at English language schools/centres, and assist with the transition of students from English language schools/centres into mainstream schools.

Professional learning resources and opportunities
TESMC – Teaching EAL Students in Mainstream Classes
DEEP – Designing Effective EAL Programs
TEAL – Tools to Enhance Assessment Literacy

Policy and practice resources
Resources to support refugee-background students in schools can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs.

These resources include:
• DET EAL Handbook
• DET MEA Handbook
• DET Strengthening Outcomes
• DET Student Reports: Reporting the Achievement of Students for Whom English is a Second Language
• DET EAL Developmental Continuum will assist teachers to identify students’ current stage of English language development. This assessment can be used for reporting purposes and to plan for purposeful teaching for individuals and small groups of students with similar needs.
• DET Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship.
7.3 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) support for refugee-background students

CEM has a New-Arrivals Program that is regionally based to allow learning consultant EAL (new arrivals/refugees) to provide services to schools to meet the needs of newly arrived students and their teachers. The program also includes grants made to schools with eligible newly arrived EAL students to employ a teacher to work on a sessional basis with students. Eligible secondary students are entitled to a minimum of six months English language support at an ELC/S if they are enrolled in a Catholic secondary school prior to commencing at the ELC/S or a grant allocation to employ a teacher to work on a sessional basis with the students.

Learning consultant EAL (new arrivals/refugees)

The role of the learning consultant EAL (new arrivals/refugees) is to provide services to schools to meet the settlement and educational needs of students newly arrived in Australia.

This role includes:
- consultancy with schools in the area of needs assessment, planning and program implementation for eligible EAL/new arrival students
- provision of expert advice to program support groups (PSG) and assist in the use of the EAL continuum
- liaison with regional staff to enhance literacy and numeracy strategies to newly arrived students
- assistance to schools in the development and maintenance of relevant documentation
- provision of cultural information and assistance to schools in the establishment of pastoral care provision for students from diverse cultural backgrounds
- assistance to schools in policy development to respond to the needs of newly arrived students
- planning and conducting staff professional learning related to eligible EAL/new-arrival/refugee students
- liaison with Catholic secondary schools with eligible EAL/new-arrival/refugee students in transition from language schools when required
- contribute to the development and maintenance of regionally based networks to support teachers of EAL/new-arrival/refugee students
- liaison with government and non-government organisations as and when necessary, to assist schools in their response to newly arrived students

www.cem.edu.au

7.4 Interpreters and translations

7.4.1 Working with interpreters

Many newly arrived refugee-background students, parents and carers have limited English language skills. Therefore, schools need to book on-site or telephone interpreters for the enrolment interviews. This is a free service for all government schools. The use of family, friends or untrained personnel as interpreters risks compromising confidentiality and the possibility of incorrect translation.

Confidentiality is part of a professional interpreter’s code of ethics. It is important to inform parents and carers of what the rules of confidentiality mean at the beginning of the interview, as parents and carers may be wary of sharing personal information with a stranger, particularly if they have links to a shared community. Optimal communication reduces anxiety and facilitates the meeting or interview. Before booking an interpreter, establish the preferred language of the parent or carer, and the preferred gender and ethnicity of the
Good Practice: Professional learning activity

One school delivered a professional learning activity for all staff on the issue of working with interpreters. The staff viewed the video *Talking in Tune* (a DET resource) conducted role plays, and developed a checklist that led to a new school policy for procedures and protocols when working with interpreters.

The DVD *Talking in Tune* consists of seven scenarios that highlight common pitfalls and effective strategies when working with interpreters. The user guide contains a summary of the key learning points and issues raised in each scenario, together with focus questions to generate group discussion.

www.education.vic.gov.au

Advice: Tips for using on-site interpreters

1. Arrange seating to facilitate communication between yourself and the parent/carer and student. The ideal seating arrangement is a triangle, with participants at equal distances from each other, so that eye contact can be maintained at all times (if culturally appropriate).
2. Introduce everyone and establish roles.
3. Avoid private discussions with the interpreter.
4. Speak directly to the parent/carer/student, on first-person terms.
5. Use short sentences.
6. Speak slowly and clearly but naturally. Avoid jargon if possible and do not raise your voice.
7. Allow the interpreter to translate in regular and short intervals.
8. If you feel that the interpreter and parent/carer/student are speaking together and excluding you to the extent that you are not establishing communication with them, you should stop the interview, clarify the ground rules and start again.
9. Summarise your discussion periodically throughout the interview, to ensure shared understanding of what is being said.

7.4.2 Translating and interpreting support for schools

DET provides interpreting services for matters relating to SRP (School Resource Package) funded students whose parents are from a LBOTE, and require assistance in their first language, to understand the information being presented by the school.

On-site and telephone interpreters are available for:
- parent/teacher interviews
- information dissemination to parents from language backgrounds other than English
- meetings with parents from language backgrounds other than English on issues concerning their children
- educational assessment of students from language backgrounds other than English
- to assist parents from language backgrounds other than English with enrolment of their children in a government school.

Also, parents can initiate assignments upon request for student/school-related matters.

www.education.vic.gov.au
7.4.3 Telephone interpreters

Victorian Interpreting and Translating Services (VITS) (the current DET contracted provider) offers a telephone interpreting service, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Telephone interpreting services can be used effectively for:
- emergencies such as accidents, illness and discipline issues
- contacting parents who have difficulty coming to the school during normal hours
- accessing languages where there are limited numbers of accredited interpreters available
- confirming appointments with parents and carers.

Other interpreting support

It may be very important to inform families that they are entitled to have an interpreter for a range of other services, as older children are often relied upon to interpret for families. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) provides a free translating and interpreting service (24 hours a day, seven days a week) for families to communicate with DIBP and a range of other approved services (medical practitioners, pharmacies, not-for-profit, non-government organisations and others) (DIBP, 2016). Centrelink and Medicare also provide free interpreting services.

7.4.4 Translated information

There is a vast amount of translated information available to schools in a range of community languages. The DET website contains a series of 19 translated multilingual school notices in 37 community languages.

www.education.vic.gov.au

Translated information sheets, guidelines and videos about early childhood transition to school and completing school transition and learning statements are available in the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Auslan, Bengali, Burmese, Cantonese, Chin, Dari, Dinka, Gujarati, Hindi, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Malayalam, Mandarin, Nuer, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sinhalese, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

www.education.vic.gov.au

7.4.5 Translating school notices

Some cultures have a strong oral tradition, and the languages spoken by families may not have a written component. Schools may request translation of documents that fall into specific categories and are within maximum word limits. This service is free to government schools within established guidelines.

7.5 Multicultural education aides (MEAs)

MEAs are employed by schools to support EAL learners, their families and the families of students who require language other than English assistance in their communication with the school. MEAs are an invaluable resource to schools, particularly because of their wealth of knowledge and understanding that can be shared with teachers and other school staff in relation to the refugee experience, the ongoing traumas associated with that experience and the cultural backgrounds of refugee students.

The MEAs skills in a language, or languages, other than English enable them to act as a bridge between the school and families. They can also contribute to making the mainstream curriculum more responsive to the diversity of cultural backgrounds present in Australian schools.

MEAs are able to assist with:
• effective communication between students and teachers in the classroom
• integrating EAL learners into school activities by helping them to understand school expectations and goals
• assisting teachers to understand the home environment, the culture, and the expectations families have of the school and of education in general
• assisting newly arrived families in their settlement into the new educational community.

Where possible, avoid using MEAs as interpreters. Students may reveal delicate personal information, or confidential matters, that could compromise both the MEA and the student. Professional interpreters, on the other hand, while from the same cultural background, are bound by a professional code of ethics.

**MEA Handbook**

This DET resource helps school communities ensure that the best use is made of the skills and expertise of MEAs. The handbook:
• outlines the role of the MEA and provides guidelines for aides and school administrators
• provides advice on implementing effective MEA support for a school’s EAL student cohort
• provides information for MEAs about the education system in Victorian government schools
• provides links and resources, including links to professional development for MEAs.

7.6 EAL policies and the whole-school approach

It is important that all teachers support the literacy needs of their EAL students. While curriculum content varies, all students need and are expected to use English in every class and context at school. The assistance offered to refugee-background and EAL students must be supported by clear school policies that reflect this reality, and that address a range of areas of practice to suit local school needs.

The **DET EAL Handbook** suggests that EAL provision in a school should consider:
• a whole-school approach to EAL programming and provision, including EAL policy development and its implementation at the whole-school level
• the development of a specialist EAL program
• how EAL needs in mainstream classrooms are met, including classroom planning, teaching, and assessment practices that support EAL learners across all learning areas
• meeting the professional learning needs of staff in regard to EAL learners in mainstream classrooms.
One school used the audit from their LBOTE survey to develop a greater awareness of their EAL student cohort. They developed a greater understanding of EAL index funding that led to prioritising employment of MEAs, establishing stand-alone EAL classes at all year levels and appointing an EAL coordinator for the first time.

Other schools developed and implemented strategies including:
- policies ensuring leadership roles in EAL provision
- timetabling of EAL classes
- EAL support in mainstream classes/team teaching
- EAL withdrawal program
- bridging programs
- tailored support (extra EAL classes were conducted through flexible timetabling)
- reporting against the EAL continuum
- more EAL strategies across the curriculum
- strategies to support students with disrupted schooling
- professional learning structures and opportunities to support teachers in assessing and reporting to the EAL continuum
- curriculum initiatives (organising a workshop on differentiating curriculum).

### 7.7 Flexible learning options, pathways and transitions for older students

Policies and practices need to be in place to recognise the learning needs and transitions for older students. Schools can offer a range of programs, including bridging programs, Foundation VCAL for targeted groups, three-year VCAL and three-year VCE including VET subjects. Schools can also be flexible in their timetabling for individual students. As part of MIPs (managed individual pathways), schools are required to develop an individual pathway plan for students over 15 years of age who are at risk of leaving school. This includes pathways programs to enable a successful transition through the post-compulsory years to further education, training or secure employment.

Careers education and work experience options may need to be flexible, particularly for recently arrived refugee-background students. Workplace skills and careers education curriculum may need to be scaffolded and tailored to the needs of certain groups. Policy and practice should reflect this. Chapter 8 outlines a range of flexible learning options used by schools, and important considerations when developing programs.

This project featured a whole-school approach to assisting refugee-background secondary school students with development of career and transition pathways. The process was facilitated by a project officer, and included:
- a series of information sessions for students, focusing on education, training and employment pathways for refugee students
- individual pathway planning sessions (IPPS), which assisted refugee students to access and develop individual career and transition pathways
- a series of information sessions for parents and carers to raise their level of understanding of the Australian educational system and the training and employment options available to their children
- regular meetings with school staff to build teacher capacity to assist refugee students and their parents with the development of individual career pathways.

Details and recommendations from this project can be found at: www.miceastmelb.com.au/documents
DET resources to support pathway transitions

DET has a web page dedicated to careers and transitions that can provide further advice on programs and initiatives: www.education.vic.gov.au.

Engaging Parents in Career Conversations (EPICC) Framework

This is an online resource that careers practitioners can use to engage parents in the career development of young people. The resource includes guidelines for schools working with parents with EAL backgrounds.

www.education.vic.gov.au

DET also provides Career Resource Guidelines for EAL and CALD Young People. This includes lesson activities to explore values and expectations when preparing for the workplace and career experience.

www.education.vic.gov.au

Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report

This report provides a range of school strategies and case studies to increase school completion. It can be downloaded from the DET website.

www.education.vic.gov.au

At Work in Australia – a teaching resource

This two-part resource teaches job seeking and workplace communication skills to EAL learners. It includes DVD scenarios that focus on key topics, which are further explored through activities and listening exercises in two books. This resource is suitable for adult and secondary school EAL learners.

www.ames.net.au

7.8 Professional learning for staff

An effective professional learning program that enables development of teacher and whole-school performance to support refugee-background students should be in place.

Professional learning is important for all staff at the school. This includes principals, reception, administration and ancillary staff, teachers, school nurses, welfare coordinators and MEAs.

Professional learning should raise awareness and understanding of refugee issues, the impact of the refugee experience on learning and behaviour, the school and the classroom teacher’s role in promoting recovery from trauma, and strategies for addressing barriers to learning as a result of the refugee experience and disrupted schooling. It should ensure the whole-school approach is recognised and applied to strategies for support, and initiatives for school systems improvement. It is important to provide information and professional learning around refugee issues to new staff members at the time of their induction.

Some ideas for professional learning

- Provide information on the refugee experience, including the trauma reaction and the process of recovery.
- Provide information on refugee health and welfare.
- Provide information about effective methods of gathering information at the time of enrolment.
- Invite guest speakers to staff meetings (e.g. workers from refugee support agencies, community representatives) to speak about their history and culture; local youth workers can also talk about their programs.
- Develop strategies for professional learning and debriefing that support staff wellbeing.
- Provide cultural background information on the key refugee communities represented in the school.
- Inform and support staff in the development and use of school procedures related to refugee students (e.g. interpreters).
• Provide information and opportunities for staff to develop EAL strategies and strategies for students with disrupted education to apply across the curriculum.
• Develop and implement a whole-school approach that supports the education and wellbeing of refugee-background young people
• Explore strategies for the effective use of MEAs.

Professional development activities may take a range of forms including:
• formal professional development workshops
• information sessions at staff meetings
• mentoring opportunities
• projects and resource development by teachers
• provision of information and literature
• support and advice from outside agencies
• up-skilling for teachers on peer-support and debriefing
• advice from MEAs.

GOOD PRACTICE

A whole-school approach to professional learning to support refugee-background students

Step 1
A team of staff (refugee action team or wellbeing team, consisting of school leader, classroom teachers, SWC and an MEA) attend the six-hour School’s In for Refugees professional learning workshop delivered by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. Topics include the refugee experience, the impact of trauma on wellbeing and learning, classroom and whole-school strategies to support recovery, implementing the whole-school approach to support recovery.

Step 2
The whole-school staff (including all non-teaching staff) receive a shorter version of School’s In for Refugees delivered by both Foundation House and members of the school refugee action team (RAT) or wellbeing team.

The school develops an action plan for further professional learning/ networking opportunities relating to refugee-background students. This could include workshops exploring issues relating to working with interpreters, flexible pathway programs, and managing challenging behaviours.

Step 3
The staff engage in more detailed professional learning relating to disrupted schooling and EAL strategies across the curriculum. This is delivered by school personnel, teachers from feeder schools, DET EAL regional project officers, CEM learning consultants – EAL, or other providers.

The school develops a process to support staff to implement these strategies across the curriculum.

DET professional learning relating to curriculum includes:
• teaching EAL students in mainstream classrooms – language learning across the curriculum
• Designing Effective EAL Programs – students with disrupted schooling (DEEP): www.education.vic.gov.au

Step 4
The school develops a timeline to implement whole-school strategies and changes, as outlined in their action plan. This timeline would include initiatives and links explored in conferences and professional learning workshops. Key areas of interest would include student wellbeing and mental health, school engagement, EAL initiatives, school improvement initiatives and personalised learning.
7.9 Policy, practice and advocacy

It is important that policy and practice support the specific learning needs of refugee-background students.

7.9.1 Reporting

Learning English as an additional language involves different processes from learning English as a first language. EAL students should be assessed for the English domain using the *English as a Second Language Companion to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards*. Their progress should be measured on the EAL continuum.

The EAL Developmental Continuum P–10 assists teachers to:

- deepen understandings of the broad stages of English language development
- enhance teaching skills to enable purposeful teaching
- identify the range of student learning levels
- monitor individual student progress
- develop a shared language to describe and discuss student progress.

Schools should evaluate their reporting to other domains in VELS to ensure EAL learners’ stage of learning is taken into account. All domains are taught using the English language, and progress in these domains will be influenced by a student’s proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking English through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds are exempt from NAPLAN if they have arrived in Australia less than one year before the test. However, their parents/carers must sign the exemption form. Students can be exempted at any time from NAPLAN testing if parents or carers sign the exemption form.

7.9.2 School compliance that supports refugee-background students

The school compliance checklist is mandatory for all Victorian government schools to complete. The checklist is an online self-assessment tool designed to assist schools to comply with legislation and department policy, and also streamline reporting requirements. The following items in the school compliance checklist will particularly support the needs of refugee-background students.

**Multicultural education**

Schools adhere to the requirements of the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004, Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* and the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and:

- have policies explicitly reflecting the principles of multiculturalism
- have developed appropriate procedures ensuring all staff, school council and students understand their roles and responsibilities
- provide support to the school community to ensure compliance with the spirit of the legislation.

**Student engagement policy**

Schools need to have a student engagement policy that:

- is consistent with the *Engaging Schools are Effective Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*
- is in line with the Safe Schools are Effective Schools anti-bullying policy
- includes rights, responsibilities, appropriate behaviour and the school’s response to cyber bullying and safety.

It is recommended that schools review their student engagement policy annually.
EAL interpreting and translating services

Schools should provide interpreting and translating services:
- to parents of students as requested
- according to DET guidelines, using VITS as the preferred provider.

Managed individual pathways (MIPs)

Schools need to provide:
- an identified individual pathway, planning process and documentation for each student 15 years and over
- a planned and systematic process for identifying and supporting students 15 years and older who are at risk of early school leaving
- an associated support program to enable successful transition through the post-compulsory years to further education, training, or secure employment
- a clearly defined process for the follow-up of early school leavers six months after their departure.

7.9.3 Documents that support policy and practice

Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, National Safe Schools Framework 2011, DEEWR, 2010

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Effective Schools are Engaging Schools, DEECD, 2009


Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Building on Our Strengths, VicHealth, 2009

7.10 School’s In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1): School policies and practices

Having examined the material contained in this chapter, please fill out the SIFR Audit.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School policies and practices</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The enrolment process</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Does your school have an advocate/EAL coordinator with a dedicated role to oversee the transition of refugee-background and other new-arrival students into your school?</td>
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<td>2. Are there procedures in place to support office staff as they welcome refugee-background families arriving at the school?</td>
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<td>3. Do you use enrolment as an opportunity to welcome new refugee-background students and their families to the school?</td>
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<td>4. Do you collect information at enrolment about new refugee-background students such as country of origin, education history and visa category?</td>
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<td>5. Do you collect reports and information from feeder ELS/Cs regarding new enrolments?</td>
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<td>6. Do you have a process to encourage and enable relevant teaching staff to access this information so they may be better informed particularly about the needs and issues of refugee students?</td>
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<td>7. Are staff aware of the many issues that arise when considering assessment for learning and language disabilities for refugee-background students?</td>
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<td>8. Are staff aware that there are guidelines for psychologists regarding the assessments of refugees and recent arrivals who have language backgrounds other than English?</td>
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<td><strong>Supporting students (and families) in transition</strong></td>
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<td>9. Has your school developed a comprehensive process to ensure successful transition of students between your school and feeder schools?</td>
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<td>10. Is there a transition timeline outlining processes prior, during and after enrolment, regardless of the time of year and year level?</td>
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<td>11. Does your school run an orientation program to welcome new students?</td>
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<td>12. Are your new students involved later in evaluating their transition and contributing to new orientation programs?</td>
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<td>13. Does your school involve current students in orientation programs (as buddies or guides for visits from new families)?</td>
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<td>14. Do refugee students have equitable access to school resources, including teacher time, counsellors, welfare coordinators, interpreters, MEAs and EAL teachers?</td>
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</table>
### Supporting students (and families) in transition continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Are there EAL policies to support leadership roles in EAL, timetabling of EAL classes, EAL support in classes, reporting against the EAL continuum and EAL strategies across the curriculum?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Do you implement welcome days/ Nights and information and engagement strategies for new communities in community languages?</td>
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</table>

### Interpreters and translations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Do you use on-site professional interpreters as needed or requested?</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Do you use professional telephone interpreters as needed or requested?</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Do you have a system for booking professional interpreters?</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Do you ask students, parents and carers about preferred gender and ethnicity of interpreters prior to booking?</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Does your school have a policy on use of interpreters in line with DET guidelines?</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Are staff trained in working with interpreters?</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Is your school handbook and enrolment information translated into the languages of enrolling families and supported by visuals as appropriate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Does your school use multilingual school notices and translated material from the DET website?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Working with multicultural education aides (MEAs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. Does your school have roles and responsibilities for MEAs in line with the DET MEA Handbook?</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Do your teaching staff utilise MEAs as outlined in school policy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Does your school have information available for new or replacement teachers about how to use MEAs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Does your school utilise MEAs to support and inform staff about refugee issues including country/culture-specific information?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Professional learning for staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. Does your school provide opportunities for professional learning for all staff to understand the refugee-background experience and impact on learning?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Does your school have professional development for all staff in EAL strategies to support the learning needs of refugee-background students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Are the refugee-background students assessed against the EAL companion to AusVELS for English, for the purpose of reporting to parents/carers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>32. Do you involve other personnel in the school, such as reception staff and MEAs, in professional development activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>33. Does your school have specific professional development for teachers who teach curriculum related to refugee issues and cultural diversity?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policies and practices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professional learning for staff continued</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Has your school developed a support policy for staff working with refugee students that includes dealing with disclosure and debriefing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Does your school use the EAL resources on the DET website?</td>
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<tr>
<td>36. Does your school access EAL index funding to support eligible students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Does your school ensure the EAL index funding is used to support the learning needs of EAL students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>38. Does your school use EAL index funding to employ an MEA?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General school policies inclusive of support for refugee-background students (in accordance with the school compliance checklist)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>39. Does your school have policies explicitly reflecting the principles of multiculturalism?</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Does your school have a policy and demonstrate effective use of interpreters and translations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>41. Has your school developed a school engagement policy in consultation with staff, parents and students including rights, responsibilities, appropriate behaviour and the school's response to cyber bullying and safety?</td>
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<tr>
<td>42. Does your (secondary school) have a MIPs program that identifies individual pathways for all students (15 years and over) and identifies and supports students at risk of early school leaving, with support for successful transition from your school, with a six-month follow-up for early school leavers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>43. Does your school have a policy on cultural diversity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>44. Does your school have a school policy on racism?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8 Curriculum, teaching and learning
Summary

• Programs specifically for refugee-background students can support resettlement needs of rebuilding a sense of safety and developing trust, connections and social and emotional skills.

• Programs for mixed or whole class groups can promote a sense of belonging and connectedness, as they foster communication, collaboration and understanding, and strengthen relationships and skills for all students involved.

• Social and emotional learning (a key component of these programs) has clear links to the VELS physical, personal and social learning domains.

• The teaching and learning strategies that support the recovery goals are reflected in a range of principles of learning and teaching (PoLT).

• Personal and social competence and intercultural understanding are key capabilities students are expected to develop in the Australian curriculum.

• Teaching and learning approaches can include differentiated curriculum, personalised and individual learning plans.

• The main responsibility for ensuring that an EAL learner’s needs are met will always be the day-to-day responsibility of the classroom teacher.

• Collaborative planning is an important approach to supporting the needs of EAL learners, to enable classroom teachers to set appropriate goals, plan effective strategies and design appropriate assessment.

• EAL teachers can support classroom teachers through collaborative planning, team teaching, parallel teaching and separate EAL classes.

• There is a wide variety of strategies implemented in schools to meet EAL learner needs.

• Teachers are expected to incorporate multicultural and global perspectives into the classroom, provide a safe and inclusive teaching environment, and address racism and stereotyping.

• Teachers should consider the background experiences of their students before using texts that incorporate refugee issues, or when teaching about war or refugee-related issues in the classroom.

• Flexible learning options for older students can include bridging and transition programs, Foundation VCAL, the inclusion of VET options, and targeted programs such as Ucan2.

• Homework clubs can provide an important opportunity for students to gain assistance with school work and develop connections to others. There are a range of configurations of homework clubs in schools and local communities.

• After-school programs provide opportunities for students to build links with others in the school and wider community.

This chapter explores the content and structure of curriculum, teaching and learning that supports the transitions, wellbeing and learning of refugee-background students. Many of these strategies build connections and promote diversity and harmony across the whole school. Schools are now required to teach multicultural and global perspectives, and provide safe and inclusive teaching environments that address racism and stereotyping. It is helpful for schools to review their current curriculum, teaching and learning approaches in this regard and to identify opportunities for improvement.
8.1 Programs targeting refugee-background students

Some schools may decide to conduct a small-group program specifically for refugee-background students who may have recently arrived. These schools may identify aims for such a group that are based around the goals of restoring safety and trust, building dignity and self-esteem, building social and emotional skills, discussing resettlement issues (which may include talking about the past) and setting goals.

Some schools deliver a program that incorporates a range of cooperative games, challenges, circle time, problem-solving and group projects that build connections and trust. There are many good programs used in schools that focus on social and emotional learning (SEL). Many schools have the expertise to deliver these programs, or adaptations of the programs, to suit the needs of the group.

Schools may choose to conduct a stand-alone program specifically designed for supporting refugee-background students such as the Rainbow (primary) and Kaleidoscope (secondary) programs developed by Foundation House (see page 99 for a summary of programs).

These programs have a higher therapeutic component, as they often incorporate sections about journeys and loss specifically related to the refugee experience. They are designed to be delivered with the support of a school psychologist, student wellbeing coordinator (SWC), or a counsellor advocate from a service such as Foundation House.

8.2 Programs for all students or mixed groups

All schools will conduct programs and deliver curriculum that focus on social and emotional learning (see the advice box on page 95). Often, the topics will include relationship skills, values and beliefs, decision-making, bullying and cyberbullying, life skills, healthy behaviours, celebrating diversity and more. Schools will also deliver curriculum to enable students to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for active global and multicultural citizenship, an expectation of the DET Policy on Global and Multicultural Education (DEECD, 2008). Personal and social competence and intercultural understanding are key capabilities students are expected to develop in the new Australian curriculum.

Some schools identify a need to build connections between newly arrived refugee-background students and the wider student cohort. Some of these schools conduct specific programs that promote social and emotional skills in the context of a culturally diverse classroom. These programs foster communication, collaboration and understanding and help build a sense of belonging and connectedness for recently arrived refugee-background students while strengthening relationships and skills for all students involved. Two such programs developed by Foundation House are Klassroom Kaleidoscope – a 10-week classroom program, and Beaut Buddies – a program that brings together a group of recently arrived refugee-background students with other students to meet on a weekly basis, engage in a range of games and activities, and work on a collaborative project together.
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process for helping students develop the knowledge, understanding and skills that support learning, positive behaviour, and constructive social relationships. SEL is an approach that teaches students to recognise, regulate, and express the social and emotional aspects of their lives, so they can operate successfully in the world and manage life tasks. SEL programs are aimed at developing five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

Social and emotional learning is now a key component of KidsMatter, the national mental health promotion initiative for primary schools. Social and emotional learning has clear links to the VELS physical, personal and social learning domains, particularly the areas of building social relationships, working in teams (interpersonal development), and the individual learner and managing personal learning (personal learning).

SEL programs are widely used in schools across Australia. The competencies developed through these programs are necessary for all students and can be clearly linked to the recovery goals for trauma (restoring safety and control, restoring attachment and connections to others, offering emotional support, restoring meaning and purpose to life and restoring dignity and value). Victorian schools use resources such as KidsMatter, MindMatters, You Can Do It, Bounce Back and Rock and Water, and often combine and adapt resources to suit the needs of their students.

For a summary of programs, go to: www.education.vic.gov.au

8.3 Teacher practice: curriculum, teaching and learning

8.3.1 The teaching and learning environment

Good teaching facilitates an environment that supports the recovery goals and successful resettlement for refugee-background young people. A safe and predictable learning environment, where needs are understood, acknowledged and met, restores a sense of safety and control. Pedagogy and content that encourages positive relationships, and develops social and emotional skills, can restore attachment and connections to others. When teachers respond to learning needs by providing differentiated curriculum, scaffolding, recognition of skills and engaging activities, there is a strong sense of meaning, purpose and future. A respectful and inclusive classroom acknowledges, includes and values all participants.

8.3.2 Recovery goals and the principles of learning and teaching

DET has identified six principles of learning and teaching (PoLTs) that acknowledge environments and strategies where students learn best. These principles must be demonstrated by teachers. Three of the six principles highlight a teacher’s responsibility to be inclusive of those students with diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs, and can be directly linked to the recovery goals. These are:

• The learning environment is supportive and productive.
• The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation.
• Students’ needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program.
Figure 8.1 links the strategies identified under each of these three PoLTs to the recovery goals.

### Figure 8.1

**Linking the recovery goals to the principles of learning and teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recovery goals</th>
<th>Strategies Identified in the PoLTs 1, 2 &amp; 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To restore a sense of safety and control</td>
<td>use strategies that promote students’ self-confidence and willingness to take risks with their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>encourage and support students to take responsibility for their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To restore attachment and connections to others</td>
<td>build positive relationships through knowing and valuing each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uses strategies that build skills of productive collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To restore meaning, purpose and a sense of future</td>
<td>use a range of strategies that support the different ways of thinking and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>builds on students’ prior experiences, knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>capitalises on students’ experience of a technology-rich world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To restore dignity and value</td>
<td>promote a culture of value and respect for individuals and their communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ensure each student experiences success through structured support, the valuing of effort, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recognition of their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use strategies that are flexible and responsive to the values, needs and interests of individual students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The principles of learning and teaching can be found at: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

### 8.3.3 Differentiated curriculum, personalised learning and individual learning and behaviour plans

Many schools use personalised learning approaches, differentiated instruction and individual learning plans. These approaches support the key PoLTs that students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program; and that the learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation (PoLTs 1, 2 & 3 – elements in Figure 8.1). This means the teacher has a good understanding of the student, what the student knows and the skills they have, and consequently considers individual approaches that promote self-direction and mastery, tailored to the student's needs.

These strategies can feature varying degrees of student involvement in negotiating curriculum, personal goal setting, flexibility and more opportunities for interactions between the individual student and teacher, and between the students. Some schools formalise these approaches with personalised learning plans or individual learning plans. Other schools have a whole-school approach to differentiating curriculum, student-led learning or personalised learning.

#### Individual learning and behaviour plans

Many refugee-background students benefit from an individual learning and behaviour plan as it is based on a thorough assessment of needs and current skills, and identifies appropriate teaching strategies to work towards realistic goals. The plan should include short- and long-term individualised goals for both learning (skills and knowledge for a particular learning area) and behaviour (personal and interpersonal and social behaviour).

A thorough plan must also:

- teach desired behaviours
- include multiple effective pedagogies to suit a range of learning needs
- include curriculum content that focuses on social, emotional and behavioural skills
- consider and include appropriate and effective teacher behaviours
- focus on strategies that are safe, inclusive and consistent.
8.3.4 EAL and disrupted schooling

EAL provision and support will depend on the numbers of EAL students at the school, the particular needs of the students, and the priorities and resources of the school.

EAL learners spend the majority of their school time with their classroom teacher, even though they may have additional support from an EAL teacher. Therefore, the main responsibility for ensuring that EAL learner needs are met will always be the day-to-day responsibility of the classroom teacher. The main way in which this responsibility can be met is through planning and implementing a teaching program that caters to the EAL learner’s particular needs (DEECD, 2007).

Collaborative planning

Collaborative planning is an important approach to supporting the needs of EAL learners. The classroom teacher and EAL teacher come together with their shared knowledge of curriculum content and the needs of EAL learners. Together they set appropriate goals, plan effective strategies to enhance learning (e.g. modelling language and processes, scaffolding demanding tasks), use resources that are culturally appropriate and accessible for all students, and plan appropriate assessment. This enables EAL teachers to have input into the ongoing classroom program and to assist classroom teachers to develop appropriate units of work.

Program options utilising the skills of EAL teachers include:

**Team teaching:** The classroom teacher and an EAL teacher share responsibility for assessing students and planning, teaching, and evaluating the program.

**Parallel teaching:** Parallel teaching involves both the classroom teacher and the EAL teacher presenting the same content to students, but with an EAL teacher teaching the EAL students, and focusing on the language demands of the task.

**Similar-needs classes:** Sometimes a school has enough EAL students with similar needs, and adequate staff, to provide a stand-alone EAL class. In similar-needs classes, content is chosen that is most appropriate to the students at their level of development.


Examples of strategies schools have developed:

- Teachers adapted practical science lessons (with EAL teacher support).
- Contextual learning opportunities were conducted, e.g. exploring at the beach, shopping at the supermarket, bike safety, etc.
- Students made a list of questions for a teacher regarding an assignment, and the answers were translated by a telephone interpreter.
- Older students read with younger EAL students (buddy reading).
- Resources were sourced from LMERG in community languages.
- An EAL class developed a welcome pack in key languages.
- The EAL teacher emailed classroom teachers on a regular basis about the needs of EAL students.
- The literacy teacher helped EAL students, and EAL resources were provided in each classroom.
- EAL support was provided across some classes, and similarly skilled students were grouped to support literacy.
- Differentiated curriculum was used school-wide.
- There was extended EAL support in the secondary classroom (maths, SOSE and science).
- There was intensive EAL support for new-arrival students in maths.
- The EAL coordinator conducted a workshop for all staff about EAL learning needs and strategies. Each faculty then chose a unit of work to adapt, applying the learning from the professional development session.

‘We have developed an oral language program for our ESL students. We include the parents from the AMES program in these experiences, so parents and students can develop a shared vocabulary about what they are doing at school. We have trips to the beach, neighbourhood discovery walks, traffic school, bike education, road safety, etc.’

A primary school in a Refugee Action Network
8.3.5 Multicultural perspectives

Schools are expected to incorporate global and multicultural perspectives across the curriculum. There are some schools with a diversity of cultural backgrounds, while others have one dominant cultural group. The nature of the school cultural composition may determine certain approaches towards education for global and multicultural citizenship. Chapter 9 explores how schools understand and support diversity and multiculturalism, and how they promote an environment that is safe, inclusive and addresses racism.

There are a range of resources that incorporate global and multicultural perspectives. Many of these can also foster safe and inclusive learning environments in culturally diverse environments, through the pedagogy and content included.

8.3.6 Learning about refugee issues in the classroom

Learning about refugee issues is important for all students. However, care needs to be taken when there are refugee-background students in the class. English texts that include refugee stories can trigger emotional responses from refugee-background students. Alternative choices of text can easily be made to ensure a sense of safety and inclusion for all students. Using students to tell their own refugee story is not recommended, particularly for the purpose of enlightening others about general refugee issues. There are many resources available for this purpose. However, teachers should always consider the choice of resources they use, and be sensitive to the experiences of their particular student group.

8.4 Curriculum, teaching and learning resources

8.4.1 Foundation House

Small-group programs to support refugee-background students

Early-intervention programs specifically for refugee-background students can support the resettlement needs of rebuilding a sense of safety, building trust, connections and social and emotional skills.

*The Rainbow Program for Children in Refugee Families* © VFST 2002

(9–12-year-olds and their families)

This is a school-based approach to providing support to refugee children and their families. It is an early-intervention measure for delivery to children and their families soon after arrival. The main aim of the Rainbow Program is to make a positive contribution to the settlement of children from refugee backgrounds.

Designed in close collaboration with a number of schools and DET, the program is usually offered with the support of a counselling agency working with people from refugee backgrounds. The Rainbow Program is targeted at children aged 9–12 years attending ELS/Cs or mainstream schools with a significant enrolment of new-arrival families. There are seven sessions, three of which include parents.

The program has three components:

1. A core children’s component recognising the importance of children’s own understanding and personal skills and attributes in the resettlement process.
2. A component for parents that seeks to establish links with the school, provide an opportunity for parents to learn about their children’s resettlement experiences, and share any concerns they might have about their children at school.
3. A professional development component for teachers, the aim of which is to enhance a teacher’s capacity to provide a supportive environment for refugee children and their families.
**Kaleidoscope: Cultures and Identity Program** © VFST 1996  
(14–24-year-olds)

The Kaleidoscope: Cultures and Identity Program is a six-session group program for young refugees aged 14–24 years currently enrolled in a secondary school.

The program seeks to:
- explore the impact of living in a new culture
- break down social isolation, alienation and dislocation
- build trust, bonding and an understanding of others
- promote self-esteem and identity
- integrate past experiences and build a vision of the future.

The program has three integrated components:
1. The first component seeks to break down social isolation resulting from previous trauma experiences through the restoration of trust and the acquisition of communication skills.
2. The second component aims to promote the development of self-identity through the integration of past experiences, and promote an understanding of their influences on the present and on young people’s view of the future.
3. The third component seeks to identify emotions that influence everyday behaviour, and look at ways to deal with distressing emotions, as well as enhancing emotions that promote wellbeing.

*Kaleidoscope* provides a setting in which trust and communication can develop. It is a useful way for participants to discover that they are not alone, and that others share some of their beliefs and feelings. Each individual is given the opportunity to talk about their past experiences, their present concerns and their view of the future in a variety of ways.

**Classroom programs**

**Klassroom Kaleidoscope** © VFST 2004

This 10-lesson unit for the mainstream classroom is adapted from the Kaleidoscope group program. Suitable for Years 5–10, this program is designed to increase all students’ understanding of their own cultural background, and the diversity of cultural backgrounds in their classroom. It aims to break down social isolation, alienation and dislocation. Activities explore identity issues, promote an understanding of emotions and their influence on health, and assist in developing trust and belonging through inclusive teaching approaches. This resource is suitable for VELS levels 5 and 6, and meets aspects of the National Goals for Schooling.

**Taking Action** © VFST 2005

Human Rights and Refugee Issues Teaching Resource

This 11-lesson unit aims to develop attitudes and behaviours that promote human rights. The program promotes participants’ understandings of the experiences and aspirations of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. Targeted at the upper primary and middle secondary level, it is suitable for SOSE and HPE VELS outcomes, but can work across all key learning areas to foster harmonious relationships and social connections between new arrivals and the wider student body.
EAL resources to support recovery and resettlement

*HealthWize: A Health Literacy Teaching Resource for Refugee and Other ESL Students* © VFST 2004

*HealthWize* is a teaching resource developed by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc., in partnership with a number of schools. It is targeted at newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds aged 12–18 years attending EAL/Cs. It was developed in response to the particular health issues faced by refugee students as a result of their refugee and resettlement experiences.

*HealthWize* uses language learning as a medium for refugee young people to develop health awareness and health literacy skills. It teaches them how to access formal and informal health care and support services. *HealthWize* is also suitable for classes comprising other migrants and fee-paying international students, as it has been designed for a whole-of-class approach.

The resource can also be used in other teaching environments such as TAFE, and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

VFST resources can be found at: [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au).

### 8.4.2 Other resources

**Languages and Multicultural Education Resources Centre (LMERC)**

LMERC is a DET specialist support centre for teachers in: languages other than English (LOTE), EAL and multicultural education. It has a wide range of resources available for teachers to borrow including print, audio, video and poster materials.


**World of Values**

*World of Values* is a student-centred website that explores values through personal, intercultural and global perspectives. Designed for students across five levels of schooling, students are challenged to expand their world view and explore issues outside their own perspectives through the themes of Communities, Peacemakers, Boundaries, Future Makers and The Big Questions. While the website is student-centred, access to the material is teacher-mediated. Review the site first to decide how you wish to engage with it in your classroom.

[www.curriculum.edu.au](http://www.curriculum.edu.au)

**Building Resilience: A Model to Support Children and Young People**

*Building Resilience: A Model to Support Children and Young People* ‘supports schools to foster the learning and wellbeing of children and young people through enhancing resilience and providing an evidence-based approach to developing personal and social capabilities’.

All of Us: multicultural perspectives in Victorian schools

This resource, developed by DET, provides teachers and schools with a practical guide for assisting students to explore and understand cultural diversity and the values and practices common to ‘all of us’. The resource consists of activities and suggestions for embedding multicultural and global education within the Victorian Essential Learning Standards domains, using cross curriculum perspectives including values education, Asia education and global education.


8.4.3 Websites with links to school resources

Australia

Multicultural Education (DET)
www.education.vic.gov.au

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
www.hreoc.gov.au

Immigration Museum Victoria
museumvictoria.com.au

Racism. No way! (classroom activities)
www.racismnoway.com.au

International

Amnesty International
www.amnesty.org.uk

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
unhcr.org.au/unhcr

UNICEF
www.unicef.org.au
ADVICE

Curriculum tips for schools

For refugee-background students:
• Consider conducting a group program for recently arrived refugee-background students to support settlement transition needs (possibly Rainbow or Kaleidoscope).
• Teach refugee students about their new country and its culture.
• Include modules that teach refugee students about health and wellbeing by using resources that have been developed for this purpose (VFST’s HealthWize).
• Enable students who may have a low level of English literacy to explore other forms of expression in the classroom context such as drama, art, media, IT, etc.

For all students:
• Teach about human rights, and the effect of racial discrimination.
• Teach social and emotional skills and behaviours that promote diversity and harmony and address racial discrimination and stereotyping.
• Teach and be inclusive of multicultural and global perspectives.
• Provide an age-appropriate political understanding of the causes of war and refugee experience, being sensitive to the experiences of the students in your class.

8.5 Flexible learning options and supports

8.5.1 Key principles in supporting older refugee-background students

Chapter 2 identifies the need to support older students who may have large gaps in their schooling and be negotiating a range of challenges associated with refugee trauma and resettlement. They also may have adult responsibilities and high aspirations, yet need time, flexibility and opportunities to engage in meaningful education pathways.

Some fundamental principles have been found to be valuable when responding to the needs of this group, whether it is providing on-arrival support, tailored programs, mainstream programs, transition programs or offering advisory support. These include flexibility, sensitivity to the wide range of issues and interconnectedness of the issues, and ensuring connection of individuals, families and communities. Consultations with a wide range of service providers, agencies and young people, revealed that some key principles important to consider are:
• providing students with supported choices and being flexible
• recognising and building on existing strengths and skills
• looking for diverse and inclusive ways of doing things (including community involvement)
• communication across and between jurisdictions, institutions, programs and pathways
• identifying the interrelated barriers to participation and transition
• scoping and creating linkages that align existing resources to integrate/connect education and other service systems
• where gaps are identified, providing programs and funding in ways that address the interconnectedness of the barriers.
8.5.2 Bridging and transition programs

Bridging programs in primary and secondary schools recognise that, because of their disrupted schooling, the majority of refugee students making the transition from an English language school or centre will still need intensive literacy teaching and targeted support to develop concepts and skills appropriate to their level of entry at the mainstream school.

Bridging programs also aim to support students to acquire concept development and study skills, and help them decide on educational and vocational pathways. Bridging programs are established for students who are at the early stages of literacy development, and are often run parallel – but integral – to all other programs within the school. Schools are encouraged to keep the structure of the program flexible so that students' strengths and needs can be acknowledged and catered for. In some schools, a full-time program will provide at least 20 hours of instruction in a class of at least 15 students. Where the school decides on a part-time program, intensive instruction will be combined with mainstream classes and supplementary EAL classes.

DEECD, 2008

Sample timetable of an integrated bridging program

The bridging program students complete EAL, numeracy and pathways content together for 12 hours a week. The rest of the time they attend their regular mainstream classes (which include extra EAL support) in science, health and physical education, and elective subjects. This enables them to mix with the mainstream students, and build relationships and connections, as well as increasing familiarity with the mainstream school environment and structures.

Figure 8.2
Sample timetable of an integrated bridging program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1 EAL</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>EAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 EAL</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>EAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 Numeracy</td>
<td>Food Tech</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4 Numeracy</td>
<td>Food Tech</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Food Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 Science</td>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6 Science</td>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bridging students in a bridging program

Mainstream classes
GOOD PRACTICE

Refugee student bridging program

This program was developed by an English language centre (ELC) and a secondary college (SC).

The program is based on the acknowledgement that most of the refugee-background students transitioning from ELC/SC to secondary colleges are not equipped to cope with the language and academic demands of secondary education. It was evident that students required additional literacy support if they were to succeed in secondary education or other vocational pathways.

The secondary college entered into a partnership with the AMES literacy program for young adults. The VFST counsellor advocate convened a series of planning meetings between the ELC, SC and AMES, which resulted in the development and piloting of the Bridging Program. The program provided an additional year of teaching for Year 10 students with a focus on numeracy and literacy, and an introduction to academic subjects. Close contact was established with parents to familiarise them with the education system and discuss educational pathways for their children. After completion of the program, students could transit into Year 10, enrol in a secondary college providing Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), or pursue other educational pathways such as TAFE.

When developing a bridging program, consider:

- establishing a steering committee to develop, guide and review the program
- selecting students carefully for participation
- providing for intensive parent contact to ensure students are supported by their families throughout the process.

8.5.3 VCAL options

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an option for students in Years 11 and 12. The VCAL’s flexibility enables students to design a study program that suits their interests and learning needs. Students select accredited VCE and vocational education and training (VET) modules and units from four compulsory strands. These are:

- literacy and numeracy skills
- work-related skills
- industry-specific skills
- personal development skills.

DEECD, 2008a

A range of transitional, EAL and Foundation VCAL programs are run in Victorian schools and some TAFEs and universities. Some of these programs target recently arrived and refugee-background students, considering their level of English and disruption to schooling. These programs have a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and personal development skills. There is often a component of community involvement and projects, and a focus on workplace skills and career education. Some programs include a VET component and a qualification.

GOOD PRACTICE

There are many examples of TAFEs and adult education providers who have responded to the needs of refugee-background learners. Here are two examples:

Foundation EAL VCAL

EAL VCAL (Foundation) – the EAL VCAL program is offered at Foundation level and includes a Certificate I in Information Technology. The course has a specialist EAL English component for young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and concentrates on literacy skills, community projects, career investigation, developing work readiness, and personal development. (Kangan Institute, 2011)

VCAL EAL YAMEC

This VCAL (Foundation) course is offered at Northern Metropolitan Institute of Technology (NMIT) through the Youth Unit’s Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC). Foundation VCAL is an accredited senior secondary school completion certificate. This program is designed for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who have not completed secondary school, and who need to develop their English, numeracy and communication skills in order to go on to further study, an apprenticeship or employment. NMIT also offers other VCAL programs through the Youth Unit.
A secondary college in the inner suburbs of Melbourne recognised the need to be more responsive to students from a diverse range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, many of whom come from a LBOTE.

In addition to the usual secondary school curriculum, the school developed a middle school bridging program and Year 11 and 12 Foundation VCAL class for newly arrived refugees who have had little or no schooling. The school’s managed individual pathways (MIPs) program supported a broad range of transitions, from university and TAFE entrance, to post-school literacy programs and employment.

They have identified some good-practice tips that can inform policy for managing individual student pathways. These include:

- a process to establish the goals and aspirations of students
- pathways plans to inform curriculum needs
- close collaboration between the VCE, VCAL and VET coordinators, welfare staff and the MIPs coordinator
- procedures for the identification, support and monitoring of students at risk
- recognition that retention and engagement issues begin prior to Year 10
- encouragement of parental involvement
- procedures to regularly review pathways plans
- supporting early school leavers for six months post-exit
- ensuring people who counsel the students know them well. This applies to careers counselling, subject selection and Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) application facilitation
- establishing a team that coordinates and supports students in the senior years of schooling. These regular meetings should aim to promote communication regarding teacher queries or concerns about particular student’s welfare or progress, and allocate responsibility for following up regarding such concerns.
- being prepared to be flexible and change practices depending on the cohort.

Adapted from www.education.vic.gov.au

8.5.4 Ucan2

Ucan2 aims to facilitate and support the social inclusion of recently arrived young people of refugee background, aged 16–25. It does this by fostering cooperation between education, social support, training and employment services to provide refugee-background young people with:

- access to, and engagement in education, training and employment
- mental health and wellbeing support
- social connections and networks

Ucan2 was developed and is delivered through a collaborative partnership between Foundation House, Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and AMES Australia. It runs for 16 consecutive weeks, one day per week, in education settings that deliver on-arrival English language, VCAL or transition programs. Program planning and referrals of program participants requiring additional support, are addressed through fortnightly case coordination meetings of the delivery team.

Experiential learning increases language acquisition, work-skills development and opportunities for work experience. This provides a highly motivating learning context and opportunities to increase social networks.

Social networking skills are further developed through sharing experiences and receiving support from peer volunteers, by increasing knowledge of support agencies, and through group processes that create strong connections within the Ucan2 group.
Wellbeing is supported through providing a relevant and accessible curriculum, increased social connections and a psychosocial support program. The psychosocial support program develops strategies and skills that build on the young person’s strengths, integrating their past and present experiences, and supporting their future.

In the 6 months following the 16-week program there are four ‘catch-up’ sessions with Ucan2 participants to support transition and pathways. During this time a number of young people are selected to participate in a mentoring program, which offers 12 months additional support.

### Figure 8.3

**Sample timetable for Ucan2 day**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Program components</th>
<th>Lead facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 min</td>
<td>Part-time work-skills development (relevant agencies visit class)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 min</td>
<td>Psychosocial support – strengths-based approach (group work)</td>
<td>Foundation House worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 min</td>
<td>Social connections – learning and sharing with peer volunteers</td>
<td>Centre for Multicultural Youth worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside class</td>
<td>During delivery phase: case coordination meetings held fortnightly to plan the program and enable appropriate support for individuals</td>
<td>Post-delivery phase: ‘catch-up’ meetings with program participants to support transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GOOD PRACTICE

**A Framework to Support Transitions for Young People from Refugee Backgrounds (2007)**

This framework was developed to help education settings to improve the sensitivity and responsiveness of support provided to young people from refugee backgrounds moving through education, training and employment by building on the three core values of the Good-practice Principles: understanding, trust, and social justice and access. It describes practical approaches to implementing these core values at two levels: ‘What you can do’ as individual workers; and ‘What the relevant sectors can do’, including program managers and policy makers. The framework also provides case studies. For details, see: [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au).

### 8.6 Out-of-school-hours learning support programs (OSHLSPs)

Out-of-school-hours learning support programs (OSHLSPs), which include homework clubs, can provide an important opportunity for students to gain assistance with school work, increase enthusiasm for learning, and develop connections to others. There are a range of models and delivery approaches both in schools and local communities. Some programs may exist within one
PART 1 8: CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING

GOOD PRACTICE

Learning Beyond the Bell (LBB)
– Centre for Multicultural Youth

The LBB program supports and provides coordination to out-of-school-hours learning support programs (OSHLSs), including providing coordination and volunteer training, and resources and program management advice and support. LBB aims to increase the accessibility of OSHLSPs, promote program quality and standards for good-practice, increase the connectedness of refugee and migrant young people and their families to school and the community, and assist families to better support their children’s learning at home.

LBB has produced a DVD with many examples of good-practice, and their website provides a range of information including:
- Volunteer management
- Tutor training resources
- Parental permission forms
- Coordinators’ guide
- Case studies
- Sample child protection policy
- Student tips and educational resources
- Tools for LBB-funded programs
- LBB survey tools.

www.cmy.net.au

Refer to good-practice example in Section 11.3.

8.7 After-school activities

Many schools organise after-school activities, designed in an early-intervention context, to provide additional support to newly arrived children and young people during the early years of resettlement. These activities are social as well as educational, and can include after-school sport and recreation programs, social clubs, computer and cooking clubs, and even mechanics, woodwork and drama courses. These activities seek to build self-esteem and social connection, and encourage participation and engagement in supervised social activities.

In a similar way to the additional educational support programs, the best approach to setting up these activities is to:
- make contact with other schools that have already trialled these programs
- access funds through the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) or school-focused youth service (SFYS) programs
- enlist the aid of local service agencies, sports clubs, YMCAs or project workers already based in your school.

GOOD PRACTICE

One ELS developed an after-school sport and recreation program for refugee students. The underlying philosophy of the program was that through increased participation in sporting and recreational activities, young people could improve not only their physical and mental health, but also their ‘social health’. Program goals were realised through strategies designed to increase the social connectedness of young people with their families, friends, schools and local communities. The program achieved these aims by:
- linking secondary students from the ELS with after-school activities and programs during the school holidays
- increasing student awareness of the location of sport and recreation stadiums and venues (including travelling with students on public transport to the venue)
- linking students to local sporting clubs, junior competitions and their local community
- increasing students’ knowledge and confidence to use these sport and recreation programs during and after their time at the ELS.

Throughout the life of the program, students participated in a variety of activities, including soccer, volleyball, basketball, aerobics and teen fitness (Francis, S., 2003).
8.8 **School’s In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1): Curriculum, teaching and learning**

Having examined the material contained in this chapter, please fill out the SIFR Audit.

**Figure 8.4**

SIFR Audit: Curriculum, teaching and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum, teaching and learning</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45. Do you currently deliver any programs (such as HealthWize, Rainbow or Kaleidoscope) with the explicit aim of enhancing the wellbeing of your refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Do you currently run any classroom or mixed group programs with the aim of building connections among a culturally diverse student cohort?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Does your curriculum provide opportunities for students to learn about refugees?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Do classroom and EAL teachers come together to set appropriate goals and plan effective strategies to enhance learning for EAL students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Do classroom teachers apply appropriate teaching strategies, set appropriate goals and assessment tasks to meet the needs of refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Does your school provide flexible learning options to meet the needs of refugee-background students (e.g. EAL, VCAL, transition or bridging programs, tailored programs)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. Does your school deliver global and multicultural perspectives across the curriculum?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Does your school run a homework club or program?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. Is your school affiliated with a local homework club and do you encourage students to access this club?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. Does your school offer after-school activities for your refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. Have you collaborated with local agencies in order to establish a homework club, after-school activities or other initiatives and activities for your refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. Have you sought funding for these programs?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 School organisation, ethos and environment
**Summary**

- A range of school structures and practices contribute to a supportive school ethos and environment that builds a sense of safety, connection, respect and belonging.
- School structures can include a refugee wellbeing committee, a welcome committee, and an established transition program that includes a range of orientation and transition activities, resources and programs.
- Beaut Buddies is a semester-long, school-based peer-support program designed to ease the transition for students of refugee backgrounds from an ELS/C to the mainstream school environment.
- Students can reach their full educational potential only when they are happy, healthy and safe, and when there is a positive school culture to engage and support them in their learning (DEECD, 2009b).
- A positive school environment is sometimes difficult to measure. However, there are factors that contribute to a supportive and connected school culture, which can be used as indicators.
- Schools can use school surveys like the DET Attitudes to School survey to gather feedback on student, teacher and parent perceptions of the school culture.
- Providing a positive school culture includes explicitly supporting multiculturalism, diversity and harmony.
- A whole-school student engagement policy encourages teachers to provide a consistent and appropriate response to wellbeing issues within the school environment, and is an integral aspect of prevention and early-intervention strategies for students at risk.
- Teachers are expected to identify and address with confidence overt, subtle and institutionalised racism, stereotyping and other forms of prejudice.
- Understanding and addressing racism is complex and fraught with many challenges. In understanding experiences of racism, school is the main setting in which an overwhelming majority of students experienced racist behaviours (Mansouri, F. et al., 2009).
- VicHealth has identified guiding principles for schools to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity.
- Schools should provide a range of opportunities for student ownership and decision-making, student voice and peer mentoring.
- The ideal classroom for all students, including those with refugee experiences, provides a predictable and safe environment that is engaging and stimulating, with clear goals, boundaries and consequences for inappropriate behaviour.
- Providing high-challenge activities with high levels of support is effective for assisting students with disrupted schooling.

The school organisation, ethos and environment are reflected in how school policies, principles and values are put into practice in the school setting. It includes the relationships between school staff, students, parents and carers and the wider community; the general ambience of the school; the physical surroundings; the activities and support structures in place for students; and the classroom environment.
9.1 School structures: refugee wellbeing committee

A useful way to best meet the needs of your refugee-background students is to create structures that enable you to strategically develop program and policy ideas as well as coordinate, review and evaluate activities. An effective structure of this type is the refugee wellbeing committee. Smaller schools may incorporate this subcommittee into their student wellbeing committee.

A refugee wellbeing committee may take on a number of roles depending on the size of the school, the size of the refugee student population, and the particular needs of the refugee-background students. The primary roles played by such committees include:

- coordinating, reviewing and developing curriculum materials on refugee issues for inclusion in the broader teaching framework of the school
- coordinating professional development on refugee issues for school staff
- providing advice on effective strategies for working with refugee-background students to other members of the teaching and ancillary staff
- establishing referral protocols with outside agencies
- seeking information and advice on effective strategies for working with refugee-background students
- addressing the support needs of teachers working with refugee-background students
- coordinating additional educational support and after-school activities in relation to refugee-background students
- coordinating transition between schools
- providing advice on effective enrolment procedures for refugee students and their families
- ensuring effective flow of information in relation to critical data collected about individual students at the time of enrolment (particularly crucial in providing background information to teaching staff about the refugee students they are teaching)
- ensuring that professional interpreters are used in relation to refugee students and their families and that translated material is up to date
- regularly reviewing school policies in relation to refugee students
- addressing wellbeing issues and processes that take into account the refugee experience.

GOOD PRACTICE

Setting up a refugee wellbeing committee

1. Organisation

One secondary college, with a co-located ELIC, formed a refugee wellbeing committee to support refugee-background young people and their parents or carers. The impetus for the committee grew from the recognition that, with such a large and ongoing intake of refugee students at both schools, some form of inter-school collaboration and coordination was required. Rather than create a new structure, it was decided that every third meeting of the school wellbeing committee would be dedicated to refugee issues.

2. Role

The committee addresses wellbeing and discipline issues and develops processes that are inclusive of the refugee experience. It reviews the curriculum, suggests new policy and programs in relation to refugee students, ensures that translated material is updated and liaises with outside agencies and relevant experts.

3. Membership

Membership of the committee should consist of teachers with the relevant knowledge and skills to schedule meetings and coordinate with other teaching staff. It is also useful if a worker from an outside agency is involved, because they may organise outside expertise for the committee, as well as for other activities such as staff professional development.

Membership can include:
- secondary college deputy principal
- ELIC coordinator
- secondary college Year 10 coordinator
- EAL/ELC transitions coordinator
- MEAs
- careers teacher/support personnel
- a range of program and project staff from outside agencies, e.g. community health, VFST
- other interested teachers.
9.2 Transition and orientation

A new school can be a daunting environment, a place of risk, uncertainty and unfamiliarity for refugee-background students. The size of the student population and the demanding academic environment of the school can be overwhelming for some students. The consequences of the transition process for refugee students are explained in Chapter 2, while Chapter 7 provides advice for policies and procedures to better support students to manage their transition. This chapter describes in more detail programs and initiatives that promote a safe and welcoming transition for students.

A welcome committee

For refugee-background families, settlement in Australia represents an ongoing set of adjustments to new and unfamiliar customs and systems. In this context, the first day at school is a particularly challenging experience, and anything that schools can do to ease the fear and uncertainty of new students will help the students and their families. Welcoming new refugee-background students represents an excellent opportunity for schools to make a connection with students and their families, as well as to encourage the engagement, participation and attendance of students from the commencement of their school experience.

A welcome committee can involve members of the administration, teaching staff and school wellbeing personnel. The committee would ensure that professional interpreters are booked, and that former students from the same cultural backgrounds greet the new arrivals. They would also ensure an up-to-date welcome handbook was available to guide the new students through orientation and transition.

9.2.1 Orientation days prior to enrolment

It is important to conduct an orientation day or days for students planning to enrol in mainstream schools. This allows the student to familiarise themselves with aspects of the school and gives them time to prepare for the transition ahead. It is worthwhile buddying students up with students from the mainstream school on these days. They can then reconnect during transition activities after enrolment. These days are vital for newly arrived young people who enrol directly into mainstream schools, to ease their transition, and help them settle more smoothly into the new education setting.

GOOD PRACTICE

Orientation Day

‘We have developed a transition program in partnership with two feeder primary schools. We have the students from Grade 6 and Year 7 (including refugee-background students) get together one afternoon each month throughout Terms 3 and 4. This is in addition to the mainstream orientation days, etc. This has been very successful over the long term. We have consequently found that Year 7 and 8 students are more happy and settled than two years ago. Students of refugee background begin at our school with connections already in place.’

Secondary school in a Refugee Action Network

Orientation Day is held prior to the end of Term 4, enabling students to spend a few hours at the school they will attending the following year. A bus is organised, and on the way to the new school, staff familiarise students with public transport options they may wish to utilise.

A welcome committee made up of teaching staff and school wellbeing workers organises and coordinates the welcome to the school for the new students.

The committee ensures that professional interpreters are booked and that former students from the same cultural backgrounds greet the new arrivals. A tour of the school grounds and facilities helps students adjust to the new environment. Students are allocated to classes for a day with a student buddy. They attend classes, meet their new teachers and get a feel for the new school.
9.2.2 First day at the new school

Ideas that have been implemented by schools in order to welcome new refugee-background students on their first day include:

- having older students from the same cultural backgrounds in the reception area to greet young people and their families when they arrive
- displaying a multilingual welcome sign in the reception area, while also informing parents and carers that interpreters are available for the school to use
- a welcome or greeting from the principal or assistant principal
- a short orientation trip through the school with the student wellbeing coordinator (SWC)
- discussion and assistance with books, uniforms and fees
- meeting all teachers who will be involved with the student prior to the first class
- organising professional interpreters to be available
- preparing translated material on school procedures, structures and expectations for students and their families. This could include school layout, subjects, timetables, extracurricular activities, homework expectations and exam requirements (see Section 7.4 for more information on translated material).
- booking a conference room and guiding new arrivals through information on school procedures, structures and expectations (with the aid of interpreters and translated material).

The transition process into a mainstream school can take some time. Schools need to ensure that strategies are in place to support students and their families.

See Chapter 7 for policies to guide these processes.

GOOD PRACTICE

Welcome handbook

One ELC has developed a welcome handbook for parents and carers to give to students and their families on their first day at school. Developed by teachers and a VFST worker based at the school, the handbook has been translated into a number of community languages.

The handbook contains:
- Welcome to the English Language Centre
- Information about the language centre
- Meet our staff
- The English language program
- Student progress and transition
- Communication with parents

- Food and nutrition
- A typical day at school
- Travel to school
- Financial assistance
- Supporting our students
- Student discipline
- Some useful local community services.

Springvale English Language Centre, 2003

GOOD PRACTICE

Transition kit

Similar to the welcome handbook discussed above, a refugee wellbeing committee from one school developed a transition kit, which was translated into a number of community languages for distribution to new refugee students. The committee developed the idea in combination with VFST workers based at the school. The kit included information on:
- Who to talk to
- Settling into the secondary college
- What students learn at the college
- The school day – what happens
- Homework – why and how much

- Parents involvement at the school
- What to wear for school
- Getting on well together
- Staying healthy and happy at school
- Covering the cost of school.
GOOD PRACTICE

Using drama

One school developed a method of enhancing social connectedness and a feeling of dignity and purpose among its refugee-background student population (particularly those new to the school) by staging a drama production in which refugee students participated alongside students from the mainstream school. This was viewed as a means of breaking down social barriers and building trust.

ADVICE

Easing the transition: the consolidation phase

- Place the student into classes on a gradual basis (e.g. phase in attendance over a week)
- Link the student with a classroom buddy in their first week, if possible a student who speaks their first language
- Give students time to settle into their new environment. There will be a lot of information, names, rules and systems to absorb and remember (all spoken in a second (or third or fourth) language)
- Ensure teachers can pronounce student names and encourage them to get to know their students
- Encourage parents and carers to become part of the school community
- Organise specific information sessions for parents using professional interpreters, to outline school expectations including discipline and homework
- Meet regularly with new students on a formal or casual basis for the first few months to see how they are settling into their new school. This process can provide valuable feedback for teachers and the school.
- Organise for students to pay a return visit to their ELS/C.

GOOD PRACTICE

Beaut Buddies
a school-based peer-support transition program

Beaut Buddies is a semester-long, school-based peer-support program designed to ease the transition for students of refugee backgrounds from an ELS/C to the mainstream school environment. The program was supported by Building Bridges, a VicHealth grant scheme that aimed to improve mental health and wellbeing by promoting positive contact and cooperation between people from a range of cultural backgrounds. Its aim is to address discrimination affecting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.


Through intercultural contact and the development of peer-based relationships in which students work together on a collaborative project, transitioning students are assisted with the practical aspects of school life. Their communication and language skills are expanded, and a sense of belonging and social connectedness generated. This can also reduce marginalisation and reduce discrimination within the school environment.

A group of 10–15 mainstream student buddies are recruited to support a group of transitioning students from a language centre. ‘buddies’ who then work cooperatively with the transitioning students to host welcome days at their respective schools, produce welcome kits (show-bags) for future newly arrived students, and implement a joint student-led project within the school community called a 2Gether Project.

Core staff who may be involved in the program are the EAL coordinator, EAL staff, other interested teachers, student wellbeing coordinator, SRC support teacher, and school chaplain.

See Resource 1
9.3 The school environment, student wellbeing and student learning

‘Students can reach their full educational potential only when they are happy, healthy and safe, and when there is a positive school culture to engage and support them in their learning. Student wellbeing and student learning outcomes are inextricably linked, and schools should aim to promote an understanding of this link in both the school environment and in the classroom.’

DEECD, 2009b

‘Student safety and wellbeing are enhanced when students feel connected to their school, have positive and respectful relationships with their peers and teachers, feel confident about their social and emotional skills and satisfied with their learning experiences at school.’

DEEWR, 2010

The National Safe Schools Framework (2011) identifies factors that contribute to a supportive school culture. These are:

1. Student connectedness to the school
2. Staff modelling and promotion of explicit pro-social values, and expectations for behaviour in accordance with these values
3. Clear demonstration of respect and support for student diversity in the school’s inclusive actions and structures
4. Positive, caring and respectful student/peer relationships, student/teacher relationships and teacher/teacher relationships
5. Parent and carer connectedness to the school
6. A focus on staff wellbeing and safety
7. Appropriate monitoring of, and response to, child protection issues
8. Recognition of the distinctive needs of specific groups in the school community (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, refugee and immigrant families).

DEEWR, 2010

Schools can use surveys to help gather feedback on student, teacher and parent perceptions of the school culture. These surveys collect opinions and perceptions, which can be used alongside other data, such as structural measures and statistics, for schools to reflect on practice as well as identify areas for change. These surveys give valuable insights, and enable schools to respond to issues, and create the optimum environment for learning and wellbeing. MindMatters provides a range of surveys that schools could use for this purpose.

www.mindmatters.edu.au

DET also expects schools to conduct an annual survey and recommends the Attitudes to School survey:

www.education.vic.gov.au

9.3.1 Multiculturalism: promoting inclusive environments

Part of providing a positive school culture is explicitly supporting multiculturalism, diversity and harmony. VicHealth uses the following definition of multiculturalism:

‘Multiculturalism is an approach that respects and values the diversity of ethnicities, cultures and faiths within a society and encourages and enables their ongoing contribution within an inclusive context that empowers all members of the society.’

Schools are required to adhere to legislation that supports diversity through the Multicultural Victoria Act 2004, Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. However, it is the actions promoting inclusion, contributions, respect and belonging that create the most supportive environments for a diverse range of students. Providing a safe school culture also involves recognition of, and teaching about, diversity and teaching skills to enable students to engage successfully with a culturally diverse society. These expectations are outlined for teachers and school leaders in Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship DEECD Strategy 2009–2013.

According to the strategy, teachers will:
• develop, through professional learning, the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to educate students for global and multicultural citizenship
• incorporate global and multicultural perspectives into their teaching, thereby engaging all students in their learning
• foster safe and inclusive learning environments in which all students and staff are treated with respect, regardless of their cultural identities or belief systems
• identify and address with confidence overt, subtle and institutionalised racism, stereotyping and other forms of prejudice

School leaders are expected to:
• model high-level intercultural skills and lead the implementation of Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship
• shape, support and sustain an inclusive school culture using a whole-school approach
• effectively and equitably provide programs to meet the additional needs of EAL and new arrival students
• maintain and continually build effective partnerships with parents, communities, regional networks, other schools and businesses, and establish global linkages
• capitalise upon the cultural and linguistic capabilities of all members of the school community, including staff and new-arrival, EAL, refugee, international and exchange students
• provide opportunities for the study of LOTE.

9.3.2 Shared expectations across the school: student engagement policy

A whole-school student engagement policy encourages teachers to provide a consistent and appropriate response to wellbeing issues within the school environment, and is an integral part of prevention and early-intervention strategies for students at risk. An effective student engagement policy should operate as a means to identify students who may benefit from other student support structures within the school. DET stipulates that the student engagement policy should include a school profile statement, a whole-school prevention statement, school rights and responsibilities, shared expectations and school actions and consequences (DEECD, 2009b).

This is particularly relevant for refugee-background students who are showing signs of being angry. Anger is part of the psychological response to traumatic events and is also a secondary reaction to the experience of anxiety, helplessness, loss, injustice and shame. Therefore it is important to explore the causes of anger. Different causes will require different responses. Refer to Chapters 5 and 7 for resources to support individual students.
9.3.3 Understanding and addressing racism in schools

‘Understanding and addressing racism is complex and fraught with many challenges. In understanding experiences of racism, school was found to be the main setting in which an overwhelming majority of students experienced racist behaviours.’

Mansouri, F. et al., 2009

A school community needs to have a shared understanding of:

- racism in the school context
- what constitutes racism and raced-based discrimination
- examples of racism in a school setting
- factors that can lead to racism
- themes for action to address racism
- guiding principles for schools to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity.

GOOD PRACTICE
Promoting an inclusive environment

There are a number of ways to encourage and engender a diverse and inclusive environment among the student population.

- Encourage an ownership of, and responsibility to demonstrate, multicultural principles by all students.
- Present multicultural perspectives in the curriculum across all learning areas.
- Make culturally appropriate food, such as halal meats, available in your school canteen.
- Create a quiet prayer or relaxation space for students.
- Acknowledge and celebrate significant cultural and religious occasions.
- Involve students in painting or constructing a mural or making a sculpture celebrating diversity.
- Encourage students to create a photography exhibition.
- Construct a peace garden.
- Use role play and drama to develop empathy and understanding of other perspectives and experiences.
- Allow variations in the school uniform to cater for religious and cultural practices and different perspectives on concepts of appropriate dress (e.g. being flexible regarding head coverings, long sleeves and length of uniform).
- Be flexible with physical education, sport and health topics and organising gender-specific activities where appropriate.

GOOD PRACTICE
An inclusive celebrations policy

One school developed a school policy regarding holidays and celebrations. This included the establishment of a list of key cultural and religious holidays, and the development of a procedure for negotiating with families in relation to the absence or release of students during cultural holidays or religious occasions.

Acknowledging and celebrating ‘days’ with particular cultural and religious meaning for refugee communities can be informative events for the entire school population. Opportunities for holding such days include:

- Refugee Week (June)
- UN World Refugee Day (20 June)
- Harmony Day (March) – Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) event designed to promote diversity and harmony
- Cultural Diversity Week (March) – Victorian Government initiative to promote diversity and eliminate racism
- National Youth Week (March)
- Eid (Muslim celebration to mark the end of Ramadan)
- Chinese New Year
- Easter
- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March)
- International Day of Peace (19 September)
- Human Rights Day (10 December).
9.3.4 Student voice

In some schools, students play a passive role in school processes and activities where they participate but have little part in planning, creating, designing, coordinating initiatives or influencing processes.

The National Safe Schools Framework identifies key characteristics of student wellbeing and student ownership important to a supportive school environment. These include:

- effective pastoral care and peer-support structures
- opportunities for students to develop a sense of meaning and purpose
- a strengths-based approach to student learning and participation
- a range of opportunities for student ownership and decision-making, student voice and peer mentoring.

GOOD PRACTICE

Peace garden

The students and staff at Cabramatta High School created a ‘peace garden’ in the grounds of the school as a project designed to counteract the negative image portrayed in the media about the local community. The aims of the peace garden were:

- act as a symbol of the importance of peace, tolerance and goodwill
- provide a place for discussion and contemplation
- remember those who had suffered from the trauma of war and conflict
- highlight the peaceful and harmonious community at the school
- help in the promotion of peace initiatives.

An important aspect of the peace garden was to empower refugee-background students. The students were consulted on all aspects of the concept, including the selection of plants and the planning of the multi-faith opening ceremony held to officially open the garden.

Cabramatta High School, 2002

GOOD PRACTICE

Student participation

As part of their VCAL personal development studies at one school, the Year 12 students were responsible for organising many of the activities held at the school during Refugee Week, to recognise and celebrate the participation of refugee students and their families. These activities included:

- a soccer match featuring newly arrived students of refugee backgrounds, followed by a pizza lunch. Each student also received a special medallion to commemorate the event
- an excursion to the zoo, involving a diversity of students including newly arrived students of refugee backgrounds
- preparing publicity posters for the library and school foyer advertising Refugee Week
- a lunch for refugee-background students and their families in the school library. Some members of the class also participated in a performance prior to the lunch
- a sausage sizzle, ‘out of uniform’ day for the whole school and a raffle to raise funds for an organisation that assists refugees to settle in Melbourne.

One of the key celebrations for Refugee Week was held in the school library. Invitations were sent to the parents and students, especially those of newly arrived refugee background. Food representing the cultural backgrounds of new communities was prepared by VCAL hospitality students. A group of about 60 parents, students and staff enjoyed not only the food but a fantastic student performance. The MEA was also involved and was able to provide a valuable link between the parents and school.

‘It was great to see the families of our refugee students participating in Refugee Week many said it was the first time they had attended a special event at the school.’

School principal

‘My friends and I organised the parents’ lunch at the library, and my friends and I were dancing in the performance. The parents were so happy. They feel like they are in their own country.’

Year 12 VCAL student
PART 1  9: SCHOOL ORGANISATION, ETHOS AND ENVIRONMENT

9.4 The classroom environment

‘It is fundamental to acknowledge that each teacher is a vital source of support and a determinant in the success of their students.’

DEECD, 2009b

The ideal classroom for all students, including those with refugee experiences, provides a predictable and safe environment that is engaging and stimulating, with clear goals, boundaries, and consequences for inappropriate behaviour. The principles of learning and teaching are clear general guidelines for teachers to follow (see Figure 8.1).

Teachers should model the attitudes and behaviours that they expect from the students in their care. The school must ensure that there are mechanisms in place for debriefing, mentoring and professional development to support teachers in this role (see Section 11.2).

**ADVICE**

Creating an ideal classroom environment inclusive of refugee-background learners

Understand your students’ needs

In developing a supportive classroom environment, teachers should understand and respond to common learning issues for refugee-background students with disrupted education who:

• experience difficulty adjusting to different education styles (e.g. problem-solving as opposed to didactic and rote learning styles)

• need to learn personal organisation skills for the first time, such as the use of a diary, bringing correct materials to class, folder organisation, use and care of equipment, and time management

• are challenged by school routines such as punctuality, attendance, timetables and school notices

• need to adjust to classroom expectations such as routines, participation, completion of work and tasks, listening, following instructions, sharing, taking turns, cooperating, group work (van Kooten-Prasad, 2001a).

Teachers should also have a degree of understanding in relation to:

• refugee experiences leading to trauma reactions, and resettlement experiences that can exacerbate these reactions

• individual cognitive functions that underpin learning, and the impact of trauma on learning capacity.

**ADVICE**

Utilise a wide range of strategies

Classroom strategies to overcome blocks to learning.

Tool 5 provides a detailed list of strategies for teachers to assist refugee students in overcoming blocks to learning caused by the effects of trauma. The list can guide staff, with ideas for a range of teaching approaches, means of communication, classroom agreements, responsibilities and guiding principles. These approaches are inclusive of all students.

**ADVICE**

School’s In newsletter: Safe and inclusive classrooms

A summary of good school practice, support documents and resources for safe and inclusive classrooms for refugee-background students can be found in the School’s In newsletter, Edition 8, available on the Foundation House website.

www.foundationhouse.org.au
PART 1 9: SCHOOL ORGANISATION, ETHOS AND ENVIRONMENT

9.5  The playground/schoolyard environment

The playground or schoolyard environment can be a challenge for new and refugee-background students. There is an increased degree of freedom and choice at recess and lunchtime, alongside a lack of structure and order that can be challenging. For refugee-background students (and for many other students) such a situation can translate as a lack of safety and control. Teachers need to apply strategies to support students in this position. Teachers might need to teach students how to play and appropriate behaviour in the playground. This might also include talking during class time about what students might do in the yard at recess and lunch, and then talking again when the children return to the classroom. It is important that the school provide quiet places for children to sit, and to have gentle games and structured activities available if appropriate. It is often important to ensure students know there will be teachers with whom they can connect at these times.

9.6  General approaches to support refugee-background students

9.6.1  Understanding silence

Silence – listening and observation – is often a natural reaction to a new situation. It is important, however, to get communication occurring in some form. In any communicative interaction, the student will need thinking time to process information and formulate a response.
9.6.2 Using positive reinforcement

A simple strategy for creating an 'ideal' environment for refugee-background students is to utilise positive reinforcement strategies. Try to:

• encourage and recognise achievement
• give praise and encouragement for small gains
• be specific regarding praise and feedback
• celebrate achievements and progress (with announcements, rewards and certificates)
• avoid negative feedback
• highlight success stories.

9.6.3 Establishing positive relationships with refugee-background students in the classroom

• Acknowledge that students have experienced great difficulties.
• Model and encourage relationships that rebuild trust.
• Develop a good relationship with your students by demonstrating positive regard and by intentionally making contact with refugee-background students.
• Provide students with appropriate responsibilities to improve self-confidence.
• Encourage and support students to solve problems.
• Address concerns that students raise. adding text here is pretty instantaneous
• Address problems that you observe in class and in the playground.
• Support students during times of conflict and heightened emotion.
• Provide opportunities to restore relationships and facilitate participation for students following times of distress and conflict.
• Consider the role of an advocate for students, particularly those more at risk of being marginalised in the classroom and playground.
• Organise excursions and activities that are fun for all involved.

9.6.4 Promoting academic development in the classroom

Provide high challenge with high support to support students with disrupted schooling. It is important to have high expectations for refugee-background students, but teachers must provide the appropriate support to enable high achievement.

To create an optimum classroom environment for academic development:

• set learning goals that accommodate the blocks to learning and participation as a result of experiences of trauma
• focus students' attention and revisit frequently
• ensure students are engaged and can contribute in a meaningful way
• provide specific and regular feedback to students
• scaffold content and activities
• give students time to consolidate language skills and strategies.
• encourage students to work with their parents and carers on setting goals for education and career ambitions.

9.6.5 Promoting social and emotional development in the classroom

There are a number of ways to promote the emotional development of refugee-background students in the classroom. Chapter 8 outlines a range of resources and approaches for refugee-background students and for the whole class.

9.6.6 Ensuring students understand their rights and responsibilities

Students come from different educational systems with different disciplinary procedures and behaviour codes. For many newly arrived refugee-background students with little or no formal schooling prior to arrival in Australia (including older students), school routines and expectations are likely to be new.
Therefore, you need to explain the expectations of the school in relation to student behaviour towards staff and other students. Offer opportunities in the curriculum to practise and apply expectations that are reflected in the school rules and classroom codes of conduct. Be flexible and allow opportunities for students to learn through this process. Learning about and practising these skills can also be linked to social and emotional learning as outlined previously. Contact with parents and carers and counselling of students are important aspects of the approach. Many schools work together with their students to formulate a rights and responsibility document.

9.6.7 Being prepared for disclosure and referral

Identifying and referring students at risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties is crucial for a stable classroom environment. Where problems of anxiety, grief, depression, anger and distrust are persistent, and severely disrupt the student's capacity to attend classes, learn or participate, it may be necessary to refer to Foundation House or another counselling service. Schools should have a referral process established and teachers should have confidence in following this process. For more information, see Chapter 11.

9.6.8 Dealing with disclosure

Children and young people re-enact trauma in their play, drawings or verbally, when they ask questions or tell stories, and when they show their feelings. An adult's usual response to such expression is to deny it as no longer appropriate because the trauma is in the past, or hastily reassure that ‘it is all right now’. Denying distressing feelings and reassuring quickly are understandable reactions, because adults want to make things better for children and young people, and it is distressing to acknowledge that they are suffering. Activities that lead to the disclosure of trauma are usually of benefit, if the disclosure is acknowledged by adults and is met with understanding and support.

It is unlikely that students will disclose traumatic material intentionally. If they do, it is important that they control the level of disclosure about past and current issues. When disclosure occurs in a group context, it is important to be mindful of both the needs of the student concerned and of other students in the group. Do not be afraid to talk about the traumatic event; students do not benefit from ‘not thinking about it’ or ‘putting it out of their head’ (Petty, 1995). If a student does disclose, don’t avoid discussion: listen to the student, answer questions and provide comfort and support on a one-to-one basis. Children and young people can be afraid of upsetting adults by displaying fear, sadness and anger, and therefore may be reluctant to show their feelings. The best possible response is to:

- listen to what a student is saying without moving on to something else too quickly
- acknowledge that all children and young people feel sad or angry at times, but that these feelings are all OK
- appreciate that children mix fact and fantasy when they recall events, and it is best not to correct fantasies.

The important thing is to acknowledge the associated feelings. This means saying things such as:

- ‘That must have been frightening.’
- ‘That must have made you feel sad.’
- ‘You feel there was more you could have done to stop it happening.’

To deal with children’s fears of being overwhelmed, offer your support. Tell them that they can come to you if they are feeling worried, sad or angry.
To determine a student’s suitability for referral and their interest in obtaining further assistance, you need to make time to discuss the student’s problem. Teachers have expressed concern about conducting such a discussion, mainly because they anticipate hearing about difficulties that they can do nothing about, or they fear that it is intrusive to probe. The suggestions in Figure 9.1 may be used in most situations to discuss problems sensitively, and to ensure the teacher does not accept undue responsibility for a student’s emotional reactions to events.

Students may disclose sensitive issues, often without warning. Strategies to support teachers regarding such disclosure are discussed in Chapter 5.
Figure 9.1

Guide for discussing sensitive issues with refugee-background students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher role</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share observation</td>
<td>In a one-to-one setting, share with the student your observations about what you have noticed in the classroom, e.g. ‘I have noticed that it seems difficult for you to concentrate in the classroom.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask about the issue</td>
<td>Ask if what you have noticed has anything to do with the tasks being set, other students’ behaviour or what you are doing. At this stage, the student may reveal their concern or indicate, in some way, such as saying they are fine, that they do not want to discuss it further. In this way, the student is given an opportunity to control the amount of self-disclosure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Should they indicate directly or indirectly that they do not want to discuss it, let them know that other students in the past have shown similar behaviour. Even if the discussion goes no further, it is an opportunity to convey that there can be difficulties for the newly arrived in the classroom situation, especially if they have experienced hardships before coming to Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer time to speak about the issue</td>
<td>Time can be offered to speak with them again, should there be anything that would make things easier in the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can the issue be solved in the classroom?</td>
<td>Should the student articulate the problem, determine whether it is something that can be solved in the classroom situation. If it is not a problem that can be solved in the classroom, see if they are interested in speaking to another person at school, such as the SWC, or to involve parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is behaviour connected to a physical ailment?</td>
<td>In the case of young people, a student may not be interested in talking further about difficulties, but may be interested in receiving medical or dental assistance. This is best established by asking if the behaviour you have noticed in the classroom may be connected to any physical ailment. Whatever the response, you can enquire whether the student has a GP they can go to should they need to and, if not, appropriate information could be provided.</td>
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</table>

9.6.9 Implications for all classroom teachers

- Be informed about the refugee experience.
- Understand the implications of the refugee experience on learning and wellbeing.
- Implement strategies to support recovery.
- Know when to seek support and know when to refer.
- Develop positive and supportive relationships with your students.
- Find out about the interests and backgrounds of your students.
- Ensure students are engaged, contribute and are included in a meaningful way.
- Talk to students about their progress, achievements and issues of concern.
- Be an advocate for your students and their needs.
- Promote student wellbeing.
- Provide a safe, predictable, inclusive, non-threatening environment.
- Teach and facilitate positive behaviours, health literacy and social skills.
- Value and celebrate diversity and address racism.
- Promote relationships and connections to others through sharing of stories, games and structured group activities.
- Adhere to the school student engagement policy and code of conduct.
- Use appropriate referral protocols and interventions when necessary.
- Promote student learning.
- Identify and utilise students’ current skills, strengths and interests.
- Provide appropriate curriculum and methodology to match students’ skills and needs.
- Inform students of their progress, set individual goals and provide ongoing feedback.
- Ensure your ongoing professional development and wellbeing (related to working with refugee-background students) is supported through school policies and protocols.
9.7 School’s In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1):
School organisation, ethos and environment

Having examined the material contained in this chapter, please fill out the SIFR Audit.

**Figure 9.2**
SIFR Audit: School organisation, ethos and environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School organisation, ethos and environment</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School structures</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>57. Does your school have a refugee wellbeing committee made up of key school personnel and workers from outside agencies?</td>
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<td>58. Does the committee meet regularly?</td>
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<td>59. Does the committee have input into the sourcing and development of curriculum materials and teaching resources in relation to refugee issues?</td>
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<td>60. Does the committee provide strategic advice on school policy in relation to issues affecting refugee-background students, such as settlement issues and education pathways?</td>
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<tr>
<td>61. Is the committee involved in welcoming initiatives and activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>62. Does your school use the <em>Attitude to School</em> survey, or other surveys, to understand and respond to student, teacher and parent perceptions of the school environment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>63. Have you sought to gain an understanding of how refugee-background students feel about your school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>64. Do school staff reflect on their practice of consistent and appropriate responses to wellbeing issues including prevention strategies, shared expectations, actions and consequences as outlined in the student engagement policies?</td>
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<td>65. Does your school acknowledge significant cultural and religious occasions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>66. Has your school organised activities/displays to celebrate the cultural diversity of the student population?</td>
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<td>67. Does the school provide a prayer room and/or quiet relaxation spaces for students?</td>
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<td>68. Does the school have programs that empower refugee-background students within the school community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>69. Are there a range of opportunities provided for student ownership and decision-making, student-led initiatives, student voice and peer mentoring at your school?</td>
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<td>70. Does your school incorporate integrated, long-term initiatives to address racism and promote multiculturalism?</td>
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<td>71. Has your school run a Harmony Day activity or Cultural Diversity Week activity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>72. Is culturally appropriate food available in your school canteen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>School organisation, ethos and environment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Review</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>73. Do staff members act as role models in their interaction with refugee-background students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>74. Do teachers in your school implement strategies to create a supportive learning and inclusive environment for their refugee-background students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>75. Do teachers in your school implement strategies to promote positive relationships with refugee-background students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>76. Do teachers in your school have a good understanding of the learning barriers experienced by refugee-background students?</td>
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<td>77. Does your school use strategies to support students in the playground/schoolyard, including preparing for break times, teaching appropriate behaviours and providing quiet spaces and structured activities?</td>
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<td>78. Does your school have support mechanisms for school personnel who interact with refugee-background students, such as debriefing or peer-support groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>79. Are your teachers equipped to manage disclosure and referrals?</td>
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<tr>
<td>80. Does your school have strategies in place seeking to address feedback provided by refugee-background students about issues such as lack of safety, anxiety, fear and insecurity?</td>
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</table>
10 Partnerships with parents and carers
Summary

- Parental and community involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family.
- Good communication must occur if schools and parents are to reach a mutual understanding of the expectations and needs of both parties.
- Schools should not rely on the same universal engagement strategies for all parent/carer groups, without including targeted strategies to suit specific needs.
- A school/parent/carer engagement policy should include strategies for welcoming and inclusive enrolment procedures.
- A range of information and welcome opportunities should be provided for new families with a range of times, settings and contexts. Inclusive strategies for communicating with parents and carers about these opportunities should be well established.
- Topics for information sessions can be broad and require a series of sessions, a range of formats, and be ongoing as children and young people move through the school years.
- Types of family and community involvement can include informing, communicating, volunteering in a range of contexts, learning support at home, contributing ideas, decision-making and collaborating.
- A range of resources exist to support schools in exploring parent engagement strategies and conducting information initiatives.
- Schools must ensure they provide interpreting and translating services to parents of students as requested, and as standard practice for processes such as parent/teacher interviews and information nights.

‘Research demonstrates that effective schools have high levels of parental and community involvement. This involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family.

Family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education and is part of the core business of schools.’

DEEWR, 2008

This chapter focuses on the relationship between schools and the parents and carers of your refugee-background students. Establishing good communication and rapport with refugee-background parents and carers is crucial to the educational success of the refugee-background students at your school.

The terms ‘families’, ‘parents’ and ‘carers’ have been used interchangeably throughout this resource. This is in recognition of the diversity of families and that many children and young people of refugee backgrounds may be in the care of older siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents and other adults.

Note that many young people of refugee background are here without a family member or a significant adult (known as unaccompanied humanitarian minors). These students will be supported through the DHS Refugee Minor Program and the school will need to work in partnership with these case workers.
10.1 The importance of partnerships: communication and support

Partnerships between schools and parents or carers should encourage greater communication about the schooling experience. This will help refugee-background students understand the education system in Australia, the role played by teachers, and the expectations on students, which can vary between schools. Depending on their educational experiences (or lack of experience) in their countries of origin, refugee-background students can encounter problems if effective communication is not established. Good communication must occur if schools and parents are to reach a mutual understanding of the expectations and needs of both parties. Some of the issues that may arise include:

- The school needing a deeper understanding of the issues that may arise between the school and refugee-background families in regard to parent involvement; this includes understanding the specific effects of the refugee experience on families (see Chapter 4)
- The school relying on the same universal engagement strategies for all parent/carer groups without including targeted strategies to suit specific needs
- Parents and carers fearful of, and intimidated by, the school environment
- Many parents not understanding the transition between English language schools/centres and mainstream schools. Some parents are particularly anxious about their children moving to the mainstream school
- A lack of understanding by parents about the school’s requirements concerning academic tasks, including homework
- A lack of understanding about school structures and systems including curriculum, activities and expectations, rights and responsibilities, assessment and reporting, parent/teacher nights, excursions and camps
- A lack of knowledge and understanding of the need for flexible learning pathways for young people (including TAFE, bridging programs, VCAL)
- A belief that schools and teachers alone must deal with any problems that arise in relation to education
- Parents being unable to support their children as they struggle with settlement tasks and the trauma associated with their refugee experiences
- Concern by parents about the influence of Australian friends and the dominant culture on their children.

10.2 Welcoming and informing parents and carers

It is important to keep parents and carers informed at all stages of a student’s education. Providing an orientation and information session before their child enrols at the school is ideal. This is possible when there is good communication and processes established between feeder and mainstream schools, and good communication within the local community. Chapter 7 outlines the process for enrolment. However, a parent engagement policy that includes procedures for welcome and enrolment is recommended. Key features of a welcoming approach to new parents include:

- Information sessions prior to enrolment, for prospective families and communities, that involve professional interpreters
- A welcome handbook in the family’s first language that is engaging and relevant and informs families of procedures, expectations, important people, processes and dates
- Interview times for families that are convenient to both parties and sensitive to family commitments
- Providing interpreters and asking if a gender-specific interpreter is preferred
- Ensuring office staff are warm and welcoming to all new parents
- Ensuring parents understand how the school encourages parents’ involvement in the school, how they can support their children at home, the key personnel at the school, and who they can approach for help
- Providing different options for a series of welcome information sessions for
newly arrived parents in recognition of the complex issues for students in a new school in a new country.

• establishing opportunities to have parents and carers welcomed and involved at the school in a range of contexts to build relationships and a sense of trust and belonging at the school
• recognising many issues may need revisiting in different contexts, and using these opportunities to further build and strengthen connections
• providing a range of times and settings to conduct sessions, including informal get-togethers (e.g. in the library, staffroom, over morning tea)
• following up initial welcome and enrolment sessions with telephone calls from the school or MEA and providing other opportunities to connect with parents and carers.

Group sessions with refugee-background parents and carers are a useful way for the school to communicate. Topics for information sessions can be broad, and may require a series of sessions, a range of formats, and be ongoing. Sessions can be used to explore parents’ expectations and their aspirations for their children. They can provide a forum for parents and carers to share their thoughts, concerns and ideas as their children move through the school years. This type of information sharing will encourage mutual understanding between your school and the families of your refugee-background students and help build stronger relationships.

**ADVICE**

Topics for information sessions

- Welcome and orientation (school curriculum, policies and procedures)
- Transition to mainstream schools
- The Australian school system, curriculum and assessment
- Study skills for students
- The role of the family in supporting the student at school and at home
- Challenging issues in society and how schools and families can support the student (racism, bullying, drugs, cyber safety, sexual health)
- Post-compulsory options such as VCAL, vocational education and training (VET), school-based apprenticeships, VCE
- School issues workshop: provide interpreters to run small-group discussions to allow parents to share concerns and ideas and to develop a better understanding of school issues
- Family and community support services.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

Involving refugee parents

One school observed that no parents of refugee-background students were attending school social events such as barbecues. The school became proactive in encouraging their attendance, forming a committee to reach out to refugee parents. As a result, refugee students felt included in the life of the school and the parents started to play an important role in the school canteen. Both students and parents felt valued and this eased aspects of their settlement.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

Parent information session

One ELC held an information session for parents from four small language groups. The session focused on welcoming refugee students to the centre and providing parents with a forum for discussion. The aim of the session was to make parents feel comfortable at school. Approximately 20 parents and young people participated in the session, the participants being separated into the four small language groups represented. Professional interpreters were used in each of the groups. Parents were welcomed to the school and encouraged to talk about their aspirations.
Many schools have organised a series of information sessions, workshops and groups for parents and carers of refugee backgrounds. Figure 10.1 outlines steps to assist with planning such sessions.

### Figure 10.1

**Strategies for involving parents and carers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Send notices</td>
<td>When sending notices to refugee-background parents and carers, ensure that they have been translated (see Section 7.4 for a list of translated school notices available for download from the DET website).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make follow-up telephone calls</td>
<td>Make follow-up calls to parents and carers about the session, using an MEA or telephone interpreter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make home visits</td>
<td>Have an MEA, staff member or agency worker meet the parents and explain the purpose of the session (you may need to organise a telephone interpreter).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide transport</td>
<td>Provide parents and carers with taxi vouchers or bus fares in order to ensure attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MEA attendance at information sessions</td>
<td>Ensure that an MEA or a cultural liaison officer attends the session, in addition to teachers/principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use interpreters</td>
<td>Book professional interpreters in the relevant community languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide same language group work</td>
<td>Group parents of same language together with relevant interpreters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allow for questions and feedback</td>
<td>Do not ‘over-structure’ the session, and ensure that you allow time for parents to ask questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide childcare</td>
<td>Provide childcare to encourage attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide culturally appropriate food</td>
<td>Consult MEAs and community representatives about providing culturally appropriate food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepare for late arrivals</td>
<td>Prepare for late arrivals (advertise an earlier commencement time than your actual start time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distribute invitations to be involved in school activities</td>
<td>Invite parents and carers to be involved in special days, assisting or demonstrating skills in classes such as cooking, music, art, dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide flexible meeting times</td>
<td>Offer meetings during the day and in the evenings to suit different family needs and schedules.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 10.3 Involving, engaging and collaborating with parents and carers

Enabling the involvement and contribution of parents and carers in school life takes time and effort. However, if the school is proactive, parents of refugee-background students can become a crucial part of the school community and can be included in support structures such as school council, social and cultural events, the canteen and fundraising initiatives. As many schools have found, simply sending written notices to refugee-background families is not effective. There is a range of strategies that have been successfully trialled in school settings that are designed to encourage participation by refugee-background parents and carers in school activities.
Parent involvement, engagement and collaboration strategies used in schools to build relationships, a sense of trust and belonging at the school

- Playgroups for parents and preschoolers – playgroups at primary schools help parents to connect with the school, and are very helpful for preschoolers’ transitions into primary school. MEAs can be involved in facilitating playgroups.
- Computer classes/facilities – a primary school wellbeing officer organised a series of practical after-school lessons for families of refugee background – working through the online practice – driving instruction tests. Another secondary school supported parents who were applying for citizenship to practise the tests online, using the school computers.
- Community gardens can involve students and families. Families are rostered to care for the garden and the harvest can be a reason for a get-together and shared meals.
- English classes – one school organised for teachers from AMES to come to the school to provide English classes for families of refugee background.
- Toy library – one primary school set up a borrowing system in the school library for toys, DVDs, books and games for families from refugee backgrounds to take home and use with their children. Another primary school organised the local library to bring a selection of toys and books suitable for pre-schoolers to the school once a week for parents to borrow.
- Breakfast club – a primary school has established a free breakfast club that invites families to come to school and share breakfast together once a week.
- Multicultural women’s group – a school wellbeing officer organised a series of speakers to come to the school and present information on a range of topics suggested by the group, including parenting, consumer affairs, women’s health, child development and immigration advice.
- Sewing workshops – regular sewing workshops were organised at one school for mothers of refugee-background students to come together and sew. These sessions enabled a lot of informal sharing of information between the school and families, and helped the school understand issues important to these families.
- Saturday workshop – a combined workshop was held by a number of secondary schools to share information and provide an opportunity for families to raise issues of concern.

Six types of family and community involvement

Parent involvement with schools can cover a wide range of activities, processes and outcomes. In terms of recovery from trauma, a range of types of involvement from informing to collaboration with parents can build safety and trust, reduce anxiety, build connections with community, and rebuild a sense of dignity, meaning and purpose. This contributes to a positive sense of future not just for the students but their families, which is integral to resettlement.

Epstein’s framework identifies six types of family and community involvement. Schools can use these descriptors as a checklist to ensure their parent involvement strategies are thorough and inclusive. The framework also creates some new definitions that provide a much broader understanding of processes involved in parent involvement.

For further information, refer to: Epstein’s Framework of Six types of Family and Community Involvement in Schools.
10.4 Resources that facilitate partnerships with parents and carers

_Schools and Families in Partnership: A Desktop Guide to Engaging Families from Refugee Backgrounds in their Children’s Learning_ ©VFST 2015

This desktop guide was developed through a state-wide partnership involving parents from refugee backgrounds and school staff. The strategy aimed to improve student educational outcomes by supporting schools to enhance their capacity to engage with parents from refugee backgrounds. The group discussed barriers and facilitators to parents' engagement in their children’s learning. The guide includes recommendations for schools in the areas of: using interpreters and translations; employment of MEAs; supporting transitions; how parents can help children at home and in the classroom; the value of school tours and learning walks; how to manage information sessions including careers advice and student management; and how to be involved in school governance. [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

_Opening the School Gate: Engaging Migrant and Refugee Families_ © CMY 2015

_Opening the School Gate_ is a resource kit that provides teachers and other school staff with a range of strategies to encourage parents and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds to fully participate in the educational experience of their children at school. [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au)

_Talk’s In: Families of Refugee Background and Schools in Dialogue_ © VFST 2009

_Talk’s In_ is a resource developed by VFST to assist schools looking to provide support and assistance to their students from refugee backgrounds and their families. It was developed in response to newly arrived communities expressing their desire to have more information and understanding about the Victorian education system.

The resource booklet outlines a strategy that interested schools can employ to welcome families of refugee background into the school community. This includes a set of four workshops for families, covering topics such as school council, staff roles, school values, student behaviour, school uniform, homework, food at school, subject choice, camps, excursions and careers.

The resource booklet is accompanied by two optional PowerPoint slide presentations – one to promote the strategy to school staff, and one to use in the actual workshops with the families. Each workshop contains activities to encourage discussion and sharing of experiences among the participants.

The strategy has been used in both primary and secondary schools, and the resource has incorporated the innovative activities and creative ideas initiated by schools. [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

The Family–School Partnerships Framework is intended to help school communities build effective partnerships with families. It identifies the principles for effective partnerships and highlights strategies that schools and parents can use to guide and develop partnerships. The framework has been prepared by the national parent bodies in Australia – the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the Australian Parents Council, the Australian Government and other key stakeholders, including state and territory governments, and non-government school authorities and school principals’ associations.

www.familyschool.org.au

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Family Engagement with Schools Project © DEECD 2007

This document provides a summary of 15 case studies of school approaches to engage students and parents from varying cultural backgrounds in drug education and student wellbeing. This and other parent engagement resources addressing involving parents in children’s learning, preparatory documents for parent events, parent partnerships, drug information for parents, and alcohol fact sheets can be found at the DET website.

www.education.vic.gov.au

Raising Children in Australia © VFST 2007

This is a resource kit for early childhood services working with parents of refugee backgrounds from various African countries. It has information on country and cultural backgrounds, the refugee experience, issues regarding raising children in Australia, and information on Australian support services. The DVD explores the opportunities and challenges of raising children in a new culture and provides information on child development, discipline, child protection, and services for parents and their young children, in the following languages: English, Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Dinka, Nuer, Kirundi, Kiswahili, Liberian and English.

Organisations have used the DVD with parents and community leaders to:
• encourage discussion on child-rearing practices
• improve parenting training
• incorporate into existing parenting or family programs
• screen in reception areas for waiting parents to watch
• view in a group setting and provide a copy of the for all parents to take home
• use for professional development of staff.

www.foundationhouse.org.au

Creating Conversations © DET 2002

This program encourages conversations between young people in secondary schools and their parents about drug issues in Australia. The program uses the peer education model where Year 9 and 10 students facilitate an interactive parent meeting, which involves discussions relating to drug issues for young people. The program allows for training of students in their first language, to allow presentation to specific cultural groups. Manuals to guide schools through this process are available in English, Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, Macedonian, Somali, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Talking Tactics © DET 2002 is a primary school version of this program.

www.education.vic.gov.au
10.5 School’s In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1): Partnerships with parents and carers

Having examined the material contained in this chapter, please fill out the SIFR Audit.

**Figure 10.2**
SIFR Audit: Partnerships with parents and carers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnerships with parents and carers</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and informing parents and carers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81. Is there an understanding at your school of the needs and issues that may arise between the school and refugee-background families in regard to parent involvement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82. Are parents and carers of refugee background provided with information about the importance of the partnership between themselves and the school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83. Does your school combine targeted parent engagement strategies alongside universal parent engagement strategies to meet the needs of their diverse parent/carer cohort?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84. Does your school have a policy on welcoming parents and carers of refugee-background students to the school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85. Do you provide parents and carers of refugee-background students with an updated list of key school contacts?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86. Does your school hold information sessions for parents and carers of refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87. Do you send translated information to parents and carers of refugee-background students about school issues?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88. Do you have translated consent forms for parents and carers of refugee-background students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89. Do you make phone contact with parents and carers of refugee-background students prior to information sessions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90. Do parents and carers of refugee-background students understand their role, rights and responsibilities in supporting the student and the school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving, engaging and collaborating with parents and carers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91. Are parents and carers of refugee-background students encouraged to participate in and learn about school curriculum, processes and structures?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92. Are parents and carers of refugee-background students encouraged to be involved in decision-making and policy development within the school e.g. involvement in focus groups, committee and school council?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93. Do you provide opportunities or forums for parents and carers to ask questions about the education of their children?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94. Are parents and carers of refugee-background students informed and supported to help students with homework and other activities, to support their learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95. Do you involve refugee-background parents and carers in the organisation and development of school information sessions and special days?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96. Are parents and carers of refugee-background students involved in collaborative projects and activities where their skills and knowledge are shared?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11 Partnerships with agencies
Summary

• Community agencies play an important role in supporting schools, individual students and family members.
• The National Safe Schools Framework and the Health Promoting Schools Framework outline an evidence base for the importance of schools and agencies to work together on both prevention and intervention strategies.
• It is important for schools to have a good working knowledge of agencies and services to which they can refer students and families for specific support.
• Many agencies look for a partnership approach to working with schools. This can include referral protocols between schools and agencies, as well as project-based work.
• It is important for schools and agencies to be clear about how they are able to work together and to have a planned approach that identifies their aims.

Partnerships between schools and agencies in the broader community are an important element of support for refugee-background children, young people and families. Whether it is sharing information, establishing referral systems, networking or collaborating on a project, partnerships with agencies create greater opportunities and support systems for refugee-background children, young people and families.

11.1 Knowledge of agencies and services

It is important to be aware of the local services and agencies available to your school. Partnerships formed with these organisations can strengthen prevention and intervention strategies for your students.

It is important that your school maintains an up-to-date directory of local and state-wide services. If there are workers from external agencies already based at the school, it is likely they have developed good working relationships with other services and agencies, and may be able to help the school compile a list of relevant contacts.

Anyone working with children and young people (including volunteers) must have a working with children check (WWCC) and a police check.

Here is a list of agencies you might find in the local area around your school:

Local government
• Youth services
• Children’s services
• Family services
• Community development
• Multicultural services
• Libraries
• Parks
• Leisure centres (swimming pools and gyms)
• Sports centres (indoor sports and sports grounds)
• School holiday programs

Community health centres
• Health promotion programs
• Walking school bus
• Dental health care promotion
• Programs for carers
• Programs supporting people with disabilities
• Alcohol and drug information
• Sexual and reproductive health information
• Primary health care
• Playgroup
• Youth health nurses
• Women’s health nurses
• Refugee health nurses
• Nutrition programs
Family services
- Counselling services
- Disability services
- Youth support
- Education programs
- Support for parents and carers
- Material aid
- Financial counselling

Community centres
- Men’s sheds
- Rooms for hire
- Playgroup
- Parents’ groups
- After-school care
- School holiday programs
- Material aid
- Computer access
- Community kitchens
- Sports facilities
- Adult education
- Support groups
- Children’s activities
- Art projects and spaces
- Youth programs

11.2 Referral protocols

11.2.1 Ensuring a staged response to supporting students

Schools are expected to have processes in place to identify and respond to individual students who may require additional assistance and support. A staged response is appropriate to support individual students at risk. Further reading on this issue is available in the Student Engagement Policy Guidelines (DEECD, 2009b).

The first component of a staged response encourages schools to ensure they have prevention strategies in place for all students. Resource 5 identifies a range of general strategies that can be implemented to help support recovery from trauma. For many students this may be adequate support to facilitate engagement and success in their schooling experience. Some students may, however, display ongoing behaviours of concern that require further assistance as a result of refugee-related trauma.

11.2.2 Referral policies

It is important that an effective referral policy and system is developed before dealing with issues that arise among students. See the advice box on page 144: A school referral process. A number of schools have developed refugee resource folders, including referral systems facilitated by their refugee wellbeing committees. The types of structures required include:
- the development of comprehensive referral protocols
- a referral form

Refugee students and their families can experience a range of difficulties in their settlement in Australia. Migrant resource centres (MRCs) are a useful local resource. Most cities with large populations of refugees and migrants have MRCs, which can provide support to refugees for a range of settlement-related issues. These include:
- housing
- accessing English language classes
- legal or migration matters (e.g. sponsorship)
- income-support payments through Centrelink
- establishing a household
- employment
- childcare and children's services
- social isolation
- advocacy.
11.2.3 Indicators for a referral to counselling

It is important that school staff members are able to recognise when a refugee student is showing signs of needing counselling and support. It is necessary to observe a student's behaviour over time to know if they are having difficulties that do not seem to improve. As suggested in Chapter 9, a teacher or SWC may raise their concerns with the student first if appropriate. If any of the behaviours or student-reported difficulties outlined in the list below are persistent, this may indicate the need for a referral.

Behaviour requiring specialised assistance include:

- deterioration in school performance
- frequent or extended school non-attendance
- persistent pain such as headaches, stomach aches or other illness
- regressive behaviours such as tantrums
- risk-taking behaviour (e.g. inappropriate sexual activity, drug and alcohol abuse)
- depression or withdrawal
- sleep problems; too much or too little
- frequent nightmares as an explanation for poor sleep
- re-enactment of a traumatic event in play
- very poor concentration
- guardedness
- uncontrolled frequent crying or other extreme emotional reactions to mild events
- fierce self-sufficiency, rejection of help
- easily startled by noise.

11.2.4 Discussing referral with the student

Guidelines for making a referral to counselling are provided in Figures 11.1 and 11.2. Although as a teacher you may see the need for a referral, it may not be possible to achieve one for some time. Where an immediate referral is not possible, plan future meetings to discuss the situation again.

For older students (parents if students are younger), a successful referral always requires their consent, except in circumstances where the student is at imminent risk of doing serious harm to themselves or others. Identifying such circumstances can usually only occur if problematic behaviours have been observed and followed up with the student.

Some students and families may not feel comfortable with discussing problems outside more familiar problem-solving channels, such as extended family members or community leaders. Therefore, it may be necessary to explain that many students receive assistance to help them cope with stress related to school and other issues, and that there are workers trained to help students. It is also important that refugee-background families understand that the service provided will be confidential.
ADVICE

A school referral process

1. As part of professional development to support refugee-background students, teachers are informed about the refugee experience and its implications for the classroom; strategies to support refugee-background students; range of behaviours of concern that may need referral.

2. A student wellbeing committee exists and meets weekly to discuss support strategies for particular students.

3. The student of concern is identified by the classroom teacher and referred to the student wellbeing committee or SWC.

4. The student receives acknowledgement; they are approached by the SWC or classroom teacher that they appear to be having difficulty or displaying behaviour of concern and that the school would like to help (see Chapter 9 for information on how to discuss sensitive issues with refugee-background students).

5. A preliminary review of a student's progress and background is established (the classroom teacher may be involved).

6. If the student is under 16, the student is informed that the school would like to meet with their parent/carer to discuss ways to help.

7. A torture/trauma agency can be contacted by the SWC or school worker who knows most about the student. An intake worker at Foundation House will have a preliminary discussion with the school about an anonymous student to identify if referral to trauma counselling is appropriate (to access this service, call 9388 0022).

8. If the student is under 16, parents or carers are contacted, informed and involved (consent for referral to an external agency is required for this age group).

9. A plan of support is established that may include referral to a service specialising in trauma support (Foundation House).

10. A plan of support should include a range of interventions such as an individual learning/support plan including classroom strategies, a small-group program, behaviour support plan, parent and out-of-class support strategies, and an ongoing support process.

11. Principles of confidentiality and privacy should be practised at all times, and care should be taken with personal information regarding students and their families.

11.2.5 Approaching an older student about referral for counselling

Approach young people individually and in private. Express what you have noticed about their behaviour (e.g. ‘I’ve noticed you often seem tired/sad/angry.’) and that you are concerned that they may be having difficulty with something at the moment.

Figure 11.1
Approaching an older student about referral for counselling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ask whether you can help</td>
<td>Ask what might make things easier and whether you can help in any way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reassure</td>
<td>Let them know that it is not unusual for young people to feel that way, particularly if they have experienced hardships and violence before coming to Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ask about pre-arrival experiences</td>
<td>Ask if they have had any bad experiences, prior to or since arrival, which they may not want to talk about but they think might be affecting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ask about problems sleeping or concentrating</td>
<td>Ask if they are having problems caused by not being able to concentrate or if they are having difficulty sleeping or if they are crying a lot when alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ask if they would like help</td>
<td>Ask if they would like some help with their problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discuss possibilities</td>
<td>Discuss possibilities for help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11.2.6 Facilitating referral for counselling for a younger student

Consultation with parents or carers is needed for young people under 16.

**Figure 11.2**

Facilitating referral to counselling for a younger student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inform student</td>
<td>Inform the student about what you have noticed in the way of a difficulty. Inform them that you would like to meet with their parent or carer to discuss ways to help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Noticed difficulties at home</td>
<td>Ask parents or carers if they have noticed any difficulties at home – sleeplessness, irritability, anger, withdrawal, or crying a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Connection with pre-arrival experiences</td>
<td>Ask them if they think these difficulties are connected to any bad experiences they or their child may have had before coming to Australia or since arriving in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Outline possibility of help</td>
<td>Discuss the possibility of getting additional help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outline referral options</td>
<td>If they are receptive, discuss the possibility of a referral to an appropriate agency. If a service specialising in torture and trauma is the most suitable referral point, tell them about Foundation House. Ask if they would like you to make a referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Another meeting</td>
<td>If it seems unlikely that they will pursue a referral without your assistance, plan another meeting with them in the future to discuss what is happening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.3 Understanding the range of partnerships between schools and agencies

11.3.1 Outside agencies’ presence in school

Agencies often become involved in a school program or initiative. This can include a youth worker or counsellor based one day a week at the school. This enables appropriately referred students to see the worker on a one-to-one basis in a more familiar setting. This worker may also co-facilitate a group program conducted in the school and be part of a support committee to assist with student advocacy and referrals.

An outside agency may provide:
- direct casework with refugee-background students and family
- telephone advice to support teachers in addressing concerns for a student
- leadership and participation in networks or working groups
- collaboration with other agencies in providing services to the student and their family
- referral to another agency
- a source for funding or resources
- professional development with school personnel
- lunchtime, after-school, or holiday programs
- a hub or venue for activities
- a specialised group program for students or parents and carers (discussing issues such as refugee-background issues, personal development, gender-specific groups, mentoring and leadership)
- collaboration with teachers to run group programs or events for students, parents and carers
- collaboration with the school and other agencies on a joint project.
It is important for a school to acknowledge the nature of the partnerships they have with agencies so that expectations of the relationship are clear. VicHealth identifies a continuum of the purposes and nature of partnerships, suggesting partnerships can range from networking, coordination, cooperation to collaboration. The nature of the partnership will depend on the need, purpose and willingness of participating agencies to engage. It is also important to acknowledge that the nature of these relationships may change over time.

### 11.3.2 Types of partnerships

- **Networking**: involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires little time and trust between partners.
- **Coordinating**: involves exchanging information and planning activities for a common purpose.
- **Cooperating**: involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, high level of trust between partners and sharing ground between agencies.
- **Collaborating**: in addition to the other activities described, collaboration includes enhancing the capacity of the other partner for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Collaborating requires each partner to give up a part of their turf to another agency to create an improved service system.

VicHealth, 2011

### 11.3.3 Partnerships with agencies to support refugee-background students

Figure 11.3 identifies the nature of the partnerships a school may hold with agencies that support refugee-background students and is based on the mapping exercise in the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool.

A sample school has partnerships with the local police, local youth service, migrant resource centre, school-focused youth service and Foundation House. The activities that the agencies and schools are involved with are an indication of the nature of the partnership.

Schools should have an understanding of features of partnerships that assist with cooperation and coordination. It is helpful to have these outlined in agreements or memorandums of understanding between the school and agency, so that both parties are clear about their role and expectations.

Actions to help schools and agencies work together and assist with partnerships and cooperation, may include the school:

- developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or partnership agreement
- conducting a breakfast meeting with school leadership
- conducting meetings with key community agencies
- holding workshop meetings for schools/agencies with invitations for agency/school participation
- conducting individual meetings at schools
- ensuring an ongoing presence in the region by participating in local opportunities and initiatives
- joining in regional advocacy platforms, opportunities and projects
- being clear about what you can do and what you are asking others to do
- establishing regional advisory/steering groups
- using audit tools (for example, School’s In for Refugees Audit, VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool)
- using planning tools (for example, an annual implementation plan)
- conducting evaluation and review.
Figure 11.3: School partnerships analysis

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (collaboration)
A referral process is in place, a VFST counsellor visits the school weekly to see clients, has a desk at the school, and participates in weekly wellbeing meetings that formulate support plans for students. The SWC runs a small group program with a FH counsellor, the staff have received PD from FH and use some of the classroom resources, and school participates in the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP).

Local youth services (cooperation) Youth workers assist a group of students from surrounding schools to create a performance for Cultural Diversity Week.

The Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) (networking)
A representative from the local MRC attends a RESP professional learning workshop to talk about the services they provide to families of refugee background.

School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) (coordination)
The SFYS worker assists the school to develop a project and provides funding. A report is required at the end of the project.
Partnerships, cooperation and collaboration

A partnership among a group of parents, a primary school and a family support agency could be described as one of ‘cooperation and collaboration’ if using the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool.

Early Learning is Fun (ELF) – a playgroup for refugee-background parents, a primary school and a family support agency working together to build trust and share stories.

Berry Street, through its ELF program, worked in partnership with a local primary school to develop an ethno-specific playgroup that aims to:

- improve universal access to services for preschool children and families
- enhance child/parent relationships so that children’s learning can be enriched and supported
- increase families’ understanding (that learning starts at birth and early literacy and numeracy skills are built through nurturing relationships and play).

One outcome of the sessions was that the women and their children published a book, *The Book of Sudanese Cows*. This book also serves as a resource to share the ‘read, talk, sing, play’ learning approach.

The parents involved welcomed the opportunity to come together as a group, and to be able to share their culture and stories through this book with the broader community.

The initiative aligned well with the school’s goal of strengthening family–school partnerships in order to improve learning outcomes for students. The initiative also provided the opportunity for the community to trust and work collaboratively with the family support agency.

Global Gathering – a one-day celebration of cultural diversity

Selected schools in the Eastern region participated in the Global Gathering as part of the Refugee Education Support Program. A committee was formed to organise and plan a whole-day program that promoted positive interactions between students from different cultural backgrounds who attended RESP schools. Eighty middle-year students, supported by teachers from each participating school, came together and participated in a range of activities that aimed to build connections between students and celebrate the rich cultural diversity within schools in the Eastern region.

Activities included an African drumming workshop, circus skills, understanding emergency services, cooperative team-building games and drama improvisation. The day involved schools, school-focused youth service (SFYS), DET, the CEM, the English language school, CMY, the LLEN, the MIC, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, the local community health centre and Foundation House. The event was primarily funded by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and SFYS. Many participating agencies provided in-kind support and access to their resources.
A program was developed by a secondary school, the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), the local community health service and city council.

The program was designed to give the students a broader picture of the employment opportunities available in the local area and to show them how they could access these opportunities. The program included preparation activities at school and then a three-day road trip to explore a range of work places.

The program involved three stages:

1. Building relationships
   • Classroom activities to share stories and explore identity, interests and strengths.
   • Parent or carer dinner to share stories, learn about the Australian education system and career and training pathways.

2. Involving community
   • Local workplace visits, exploring the TAFE and a range of industries, including retail, hospitality, building and construction, hair and beauty, local government, automotive and Victorian Police.

3. Looking ahead – work experience
   • The students who are already 15 years or older will do work experience in a chosen field.
   • All students have been supported to build a portfolio and write their résumé (if over 14 years old).

An important outcome of this program was building community relationships. The girls took over the hairdressing department at their TAFE college and gave demonstrations of hair braiding, and a fantastic lunch was prepared at the TAFE college restaurant. The students visited a supermarket and were surprised at the huge work area that is ‘behind the scenes’.

A large school with four campuses sought assistance from the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Learning Beyond the Bell (LBB) program to apply for a good-practice grant – a three-year grant, funded by DET, to improve the quality of homework programs. Through these discussions, the LBB regional officer successfully supported the college to partner with Embrace Education, a not-for-profit-organisation that recruits students from Monash University to provide free tutoring to high school students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The two parties formed a memorandum of understanding and were ultimately successful in obtaining the good-practice grant.

The school provides a venue and staff support, benefiting from the provision of reliable and high-quality volunteer tutors from Monash University. Similarly, Embrace Education was able to expand its organisation and employ someone to coordinate the program and the volunteers. The strength of this partnership was again recognised when the two parties successfully applied for a National Australia Bank (NAB) Schools First grant.
### 11.3.4 Financial support: community grants

As part of a planned process, community grants can support projects between schools and agencies. Here are a few grants schools and agencies are encouraged to explore.

1. School-focused youth service (SFYS)
2. Local council community grants program
3. NAB Schools First funding
4. Newsboys Foundation
5. Sports without Borders (SWB)
6. Victorian Multicultural Commission
7. Western Chances
8. Western Young People’s Independent Network (WYPIN)
9. The Smith Family – Learning for Life Program
10. Community support grants
11. Lord Mayor’s Charitable Trust.

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### 11.4 School’s In for Refugees (SIFR) Audit (Tool 1): Partnerships with agencies

Having examined the material contained in this chapter, please fill out the SIFR Audit.

#### Figure 11.4

**SIFR Audit: Partnerships with agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnerships with agencies</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>97. Are school personnel aware of refugee-related services and programs provided by community agencies?</td>
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<tr>
<td>98. Does the school maintain an up-to-date database of appropriate support and referral agencies for refugees, with adequate contact details?</td>
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<td>99. Do school personnel collaborate and consult with community agencies providing services to refugees in your area?</td>
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<td>100. Has your school invited service agencies with expertise in working with refugees to run an information session or undertake professional development with staff?</td>
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<tr>
<td>101. Is your school aware of agencies that can work in partnership with your school to develop programs that support refugee-background students, parents and carers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>102. Has your school invited workers with expertise in working with refugee-background children and young people to participate on your refugee or student wellbeing committee?</td>
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## 11: PARTNERSHIPS WITH AGENCIES

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Partnerships with agencies</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<th>Review</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Referral</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>103. Has your school developed a referral system and forms for refugee-background students?</td>
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<td>104. Has your school developed referral protocols with outside agencies?</td>
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<td>105. Do you have a designated staff member to oversee the referral process and coordinate activities with outside agencies?</td>
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<td>106. Are school personnel aware of referral protocols for community service agencies?</td>
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<tr>
<td>107. Are school personnel able to identify refugee-background students who should be referred to community service agencies?</td>
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<td>108. Do agencies have opportunities to have a presence in your school for either one-to-one support or to support program initiatives?</td>
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<td>109. Does your school acknowledge the nature of the partnerships they have with agencies so that expectations of the relationship are clear?</td>
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<td>110. Does your school use planning tools such as memorandum of understanding, partnership agreement or steering committees to assist with cooperation in partnerships?</td>
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<tr>
<td>111. Has your school cooperated and/or collaborated with agencies to share resources and activities, and build capacity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>112. Has your school applied for community grants to support new initiatives?</td>
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