

Whittlesea Community Connections

Strategic Plan 2009-2012

**Connecting Individuals
Connecting Agencies
Connecting Communities**

June 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) acknowledges the City of Whittlesea for providing financial support to the strategic planning process.

We would also like to thank the volunteers and representatives of stakeholder agencies who shared their views and perspectives during the consultation process that informed the plan.

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INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Committee of Management, staff and volunteers of Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), it is my honour to introduce the strategic plan 2008-2010.

This plan is the culmination of several months of work by staff, the WCC Committee of management and volunteers. During that period of time, staff have participated in group and individual interviews, completed a workplace survey and been involved in staff forums about the strategic direction of our agency.

The contribution of external agency stakeholders in developing this plan has also been highly valued. Twenty five key agency stakeholder representatives participated in individual and small group interviews with the external consultant. These interviews have helped us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of our agency as perceived by others.

In producing this plan we have examined our strengths as well as our weaknesses. As a result, over the next 3 years we have decided to focus on five areas of organisational performance. These areas of work reflect our commitment to:

promote access and equity by addressing disadvantage and by increasing opportunities for community participation

The Plan contains these 5 strategic directions. Three of the strategic directions align directly with the intended community outcomes of WCC. These are:

- Improve community access to services within the community
- Increase community participation and engagement in decision making
- Maintain responsiveness and sustainability

The other two directions address critical enabling functions that we must achieve if we are to maintain a viable and sustainable agency within the municipality. These are:

- Enhance internal organisational work processes to support service delivery and effectiveness
- Strengthen existing agency partnerships

WCC cannot meet the challenges and service needs of the future alone. Collaboration with other agencies will continue to be critical in

addressing community need and ensuring the sustainability of our services.

Our commitment is to the Whittlesea community and it is through partnership with the community that we believe we can best respond to challenges and more proactively shape services that will meet current and future needs.

I commend the strategic plan 2008-2011 to you and invite all of you to work with us to realise a positive and thriving future for the city of Whittlesea. Thank you for your interest in WCC.

Signed

Raziye Baftiyar

Chair – WCC Committee of Management

June, 2008

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

A strategic planning process was initiated by Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) in late September, 2007. Financial support for the strategic plan was provided by the City of Whittlesea.

An external consultant was contracted to undertake consultations with key agency stakeholders staff and volunteers to prepare the plan.

The purpose of the strategic planning process is to assist WCC in making decisions about the best ways to respond to the needs of the community, and to identify priorities for service development and provision that are consistent with WCC values.

ORGANISATIONAL HISTORY AND PROFILE

Whittlesea Community Connections is a not-for-profit community based organisation that has been providing services in the City of Whittlesea since 1973. WCC was started by the community to meet community needs and has a history of working in partnership with local people. WCC operates out of premises in Epping Plaza, but delivers outreach programs and services in a range of other locations and in partnership with other community organisations.

The late Peter Cleeland chaired the Committee of management for ten years between 1997-2007 and, alongside a relatively stable Committee of Management, presided over a period of consistent growth of the agency. WCC is currently supported by a Committee of management with 10 members and is chaired by Ms Raziye Baftiyar. All but one member of the committee are residents of the City of Whittlesea.

Over the last ten years agency resources (staff, volunteers and funding) have grown along with the population and growing community needs. In the 2006-2007 financial year the organisation's operating budget exceeded just over 1 million dollars. The agency currently has 18 positions (15.5 FTE) supported by 150 volunteers. However, less than half of these staff positions are funded on a recurrent basis.

In 2007 our revenue was generated from 6 main sources, Department of Justice (Victoria Legal Aid), City of Whittlesea, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Specific project grants from these government agencies have enabled us to be responsive to needs in the community, needs that have been identified through our local research projects, case work and community programs.

All services are provided free at the point of delivery to community residents. The current staff team and volunteers work within and across **six core program areas**.

- The six core areas of the agency are:
 - *Information, support and referral services*
 - *Whittlesea Connect Community Transport Service*
 - *The Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service*
 - *The Emergency Relief Service*
 - *The Whittlesea Community Legal Service*
 - *The Settlement Support Program*

The core areas cover a broad spectrum, from prevention and early intervention work undertaken through community education, grounded research and support programs to the provision of short term emergency funding and case work support for people in crisis. Specific initiatives and services we undertake include,

- Crisis intervention, support and assistance
- Direct casework and client advocacy
- Targeted community education, information and training
- Research and consultation with members of the Whittlesea community
- Partnerships with other agencies and organisations that share our goals and aspirations in providing services to communities within Whittlesea
- Community development initiatives that resource and support disadvantaged communities and new arrivals
- Advocacy on behalf of, and with, members of the Whittlesea community to build capacity, and to contribute to increased access and equity of service provision in the municipality

OUR PLANNING CONTEXT

The agency has a number of unique characteristics which have shaped this strategic plan, and which will influence the future delivery of services.

- ***Our volunteer resource:*** WCC has 150 volunteers, who alongside the core staff team, provide information, collaborate in service provision, undertake consultations with the wider community, and participate in service planning and review. WCC places a strong emphasis on maintaining this volunteer resource through ongoing recruitment, training, education and support. The contribution of these volunteers to our own agency and other agencies is considerable and enables the agency to extend its reach within the community.
- ***Short term funding:*** Short-term funding arrangements mean that key staff are required to write proposals each year for funding to ensure that core positions are maintained and that services continue to be provided. For some programs this is necessary each and every year (e.g., the Settlement Support Program) This funding context places additional requirements on staff time and makes strategic planning beyond the short term extremely challenging.
- ***Collaboration and partnerships:*** To address the needs of the community, WCC works in partnership with other agencies to provide services and referrals, to collaborate on projects of mutual interest, and undertake research. These partnerships require investment of time by staff and volunteers. The value of these ongoing partnerships to the community and to the agency needs to be balanced with WCC's emphasis on responding to community need.
- ***The Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework (WCEF):*** In November 2007 WCC launched the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework and its eight principles. The WCEF was developed by Whittlesea Community Connections (funded by the Department of Planning and Community Development) and a project reference group, consisting of local community members, organisations and government representatives. Through extensive community consultation, residents participated in a range of research methods, ensuring that the framework represents the diverse experiences and aspirations of the Whittlesea community. Whittlesea Community Connections is committed to working in

partnership with local stakeholders in order to implement the framework across Whittlesea. Implementing the framework will ensure that the needs and aspirations for community involvement of Whittlesea's communities are realised. The community engagement principles are important foundations for meaningful and inclusive participation.

Prevention and service provision: A key challenge for WCC is finding the right balance between responding to community need (direct service and case work) and focusing on pro-active strategies to improve access and equity– e.g. advocacy, prevention, and early intervention activities.

While Whittlesea Community Connections provides services to the whole community, it is recognized that people from marginalised communities have the lowest access to community services, and are often unaware of their capacity to influence decisions about their community. While continuing our commitment to serve the needs of the community, we allocate maximum resources to those communities who are at most risk and have most need in order to improve the equity and access of services.

MISSION – WHY WE EXIST

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) offers services and programs

- To address disadvantage in the community, and
- To promote community participation and involvement

OUR VISION

WCC's vision is for a Whittlesea in which people and agencies work together to make a positive difference to their community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services.

OUR VALUES

Our values guide all aspects of our work. They are:

- **Self determination:** We support individuals and communities in making choices and decisions that best meet their own needs
- **Non-judgmental:** We provide services that are impartial and supportive of all forms of diversity
- **Not-For-Profit:** We provide services that are free at the point of delivery to residents of the communities within Whittlesea
- **Confidential:** We provide services in a manner that protects clients' and community residents' privacy and confidentiality
- **Diversity:** WCC values the diversity of Whittlesea and commits to strengthening inclusiveness in all aspects of its work
- **Independence:** WCC values and guards its independence. This includes the right, within the law, to comment and advocate on local, state and federal government policy and to decide upon and manage our own affairs.

OUR THEORY OF ACTION: WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

OUR PURPOSE:

PROMOTE ACCESS AND EQUITY BY ADDRESSING DISADVANTAGE AND BY INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

OUR OBJECTIVES

Whittlesea Community Connections exists to serve the community of Whittlesea. Its core objectives are to:

- Identify and address the specific information and service needs of community residents within the City of Whittlesea
- Advocate for and with community residents for increased participation in decision making
- Support the formal and informal roles of volunteers and community residents within the Whittlesea community
- Collaborate with agencies and Government to develop or sustain services that serve local community needs
- Continue to develop and improve the quality, efficiency and accessibility of our services
- Identify opportunities for greater community involvement and leadership so that community residents can contribute to decisions that affect their lives.

WHAT WE DO

WCC supports the Whittlesea Community by working towards the creation of an environment in which individuals and communities can flourish and develop. We provide a wide range of information and support services, opportunities for community connection and involvement as well as advocating for the needs of Whittlesea communities when dealing with governments and policy makers.

WHAT WE ACHIEVE

Our casework, service provision, advocacy for improvements in access and equity of services, and our support of community participation result in outcomes for community residents, including in the short term:

- An increased knowledge of the service system
- Reduced barriers to participation and service access
- Increased community connection and reduced isolation
- Improved navigation of the service system
- Enhanced awareness of rights and responsibilities
- Improved access to needed resources and services in the community

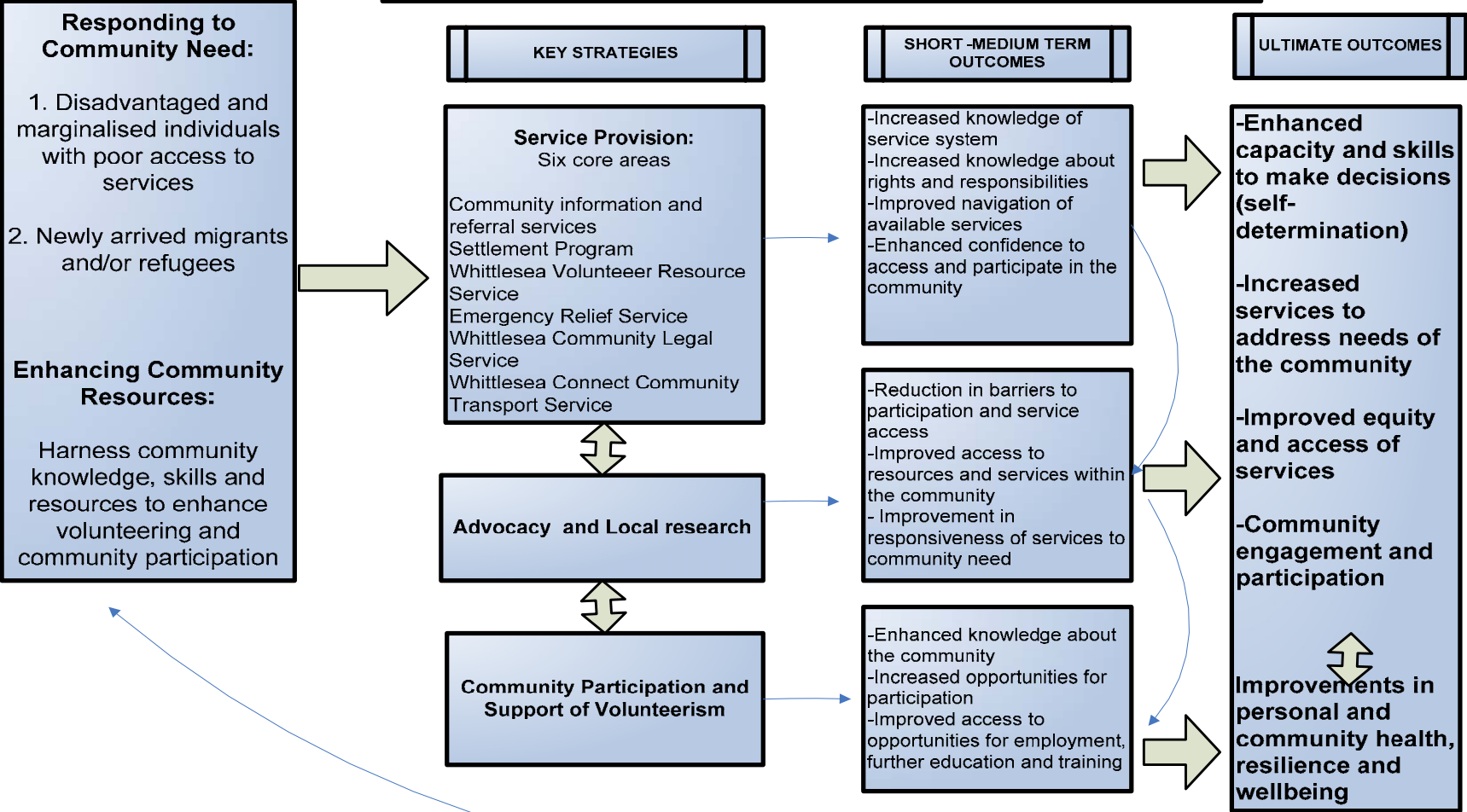
In the medium to longer term the services we provide will have the following outcomes for community residents

- Increased opportunities for participation in the community
- Increased capacity (confidence, knowledge and skills) to make decisions that affect their lives, and
- Improved access and equity of local services to meet community needs

We believe that the achievement of these outcomes will ultimately result in demonstrable improvements in personal and community health, resilience and wellbeing.

Our purpose, our core activities, the way we work and the intended results of what we do is summarised in Fig 1.

Whittlesea Community Connections - Our Theory of Action



FEEDBACK FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

OUR STAKEHOLDERS

The work of Whittlesea Community Connections is informed by two key stakeholder groups, the communities of Whittlesea, and key organisation partners.

Individuals and groups within the City of Whittlesea

- Community residents with poor access to services
- Newly arrived migrants and refugees
- Individuals and their communities who face social marginalisation and/or economic disadvantage
- Community Volunteers

Key Organisation partners

- City of Whittlesea (local council)
- State Government – Victoria Legal Aid, DPCD,
- Federal Government - FAHCSIA, DIAC
- Local agencies and organisations
- Regional agencies and project partners
- Whittlesea Service networks

LOOKING FORWARD OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Whittlesea Community Connections has identified five strategic directions, which are outlined on the following pages. The context, areas of priority and key initiatives that will be undertaken to support each strategic direction are also identified.

These strategic directions will inform service direction, funding and preparation of annual work plans and performance measures.

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. IMPROVE COMMUNITY ACCESS TO SERVICES WITHIN WHITTLESEA

The context

- WCC has grown considerably over the last ten years. There are more people working for it, more community members involved in it and it is generating more income and spending more money to help more people than ever before. Though we have come a long way, each step has been characterised by, restricted and short-term funding and an uncertain future. It is WCC's vision that in the next ten years this agency will be a strong agency no longer striving for survival but focusing its strengths, energy and skills on doing what it does best, helping those in most need in our community
- WCC's on the ground service provision and research provides a robust basis for the development and implementation of new programs
- WCC responds to growth in population size and diversity by advocating for groups within the community that face disadvantage and by reducing barriers for those who are socially and geographically isolated

Key initiatives

- WCC will advocate for a strong voice and for the active participation of the community in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services
- WCC will strengthen its research capacity and monitor service trends to underpin its ability to support new programs and approaches
- WCC will work with the community and other key partners to ensure that the needs of the Whittlesea community are central to the debate about the allocation of the resources of governments to the area.
- WCC will support key groups that face social and economic disadvantage and that are currently under-served within the municipality
- WCC will target specific obstacles to service delivery and access (e.g., community transport) by identifying sustainable funding mechanisms

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2. STRENGTHEN EXISTING AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

The Context

- WCC believes that it is strongest when it works together with the community and that its future will be shaped by strong partnerships with the community
- WCC recognises that the commitment of individuals, communities and agencies to come together to change things is what drives our work
- To a large extent WCC has spent much time and effort on focusing on partnerships with governments and other agencies. This has brought many and significant benefits and we must work to ensure that these are maintained.
- WCC is mindful that the resourcing of partnerships and networks needs to be balanced with provision of direct service delivery to the community

- WCC will work hard to build and enhance its connection with the community. To give the community a real sense of who we are, what we are and how it can be involved. WCC will focus on strengthening its relationship and partnership with the community
- WCC will develop greater understanding with external key stakeholders of our core values, service delivery models and strategic direction.
- WCC will prioritise partnerships that match our values and service and strategic direction and that are based on mutual trust and on responding to community need.
- WCC will establish regular processes for monitoring and reviewing of partnerships and networks
- WCC will maintain support of key networks that support ongoing partnerships and service delivery within the municipality

Key initiatives

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

3. INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY IN DECISION MAKING

The Context

- WCC believes that people and communities can make a positive difference to their own lives and to the lives of others. We also believe that coming together should be easy and rewarding and that the very best opportunities, advice and support should be available to do this.
- Community engagement is a mechanism that contributes to a sense of community and enables people to have a voice in decisions that affect them.
- While the local community want and have the right to contribute to their local community access barriers prevent effective and full participation
- There is a keen interest by organizations in the development of community engagement practices that improve the impact and relevance of their services and programs to the community

Key initiatives

- WCC will work with others to implement the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework (WCEF), developing a greater understanding of its' principles and how they can be implemented to create meaningful opportunities for people to make decisions
- WCC will identify ways that the WCEF can be implemented within WCC core services in partnership with the local community
- WCC will work with partners to bring a range of expertise to the development of community engagement in Whittlesea that removes barriers to effective community participation and involvement
- WCC will develop support, advice and training for community organisations in developing and implementing community engagement activities
- WCC will work with the community and other partners to engage with new arrival and refugee communities to ensure that their voices can be heard and have an influence.
- WCC will explore the development of mechanisms (such as 'citizen panels') that maximise the impact of community expertise on community services and programs

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

4. ENHANCE ORGANISATIONAL WORK PROCESSES TO SUPPORT QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS

The Context

- WCC believes that the most important resources available to it are the people who work within it. The contribution of staff and volunteers will continue to be enhanced, valued and promoted
- Effective evaluation processes within the context of multiple services and funding, much of which is short- term and non- recurrent, is difficult to achieve
- The nature of presenting service need provides significant challenge for longer term planning and review of our work
- WCC believes remaining connected to the community, enables the planning and delivery of services to remain responsive and appropriate.

Ensure our services and programs are of high quality

- WCC will create a culture of openness, transparency and accountability to those we work with and for.
- WCC will identify and put in place an effective evaluation process that works within the organizational context and one that actively involves the community
- WCC will work in partnership with the community and other partners to ensure we make the best use of our skills and resources for the community, that we do not duplicate the work of others, and that we complement existing services and activities.
- WCC will work to ensure that the conditions of employment of its employees are protected and where possible improved.
- WCC will work to ensure that the support, guidance and training of its volunteers are prioritised and resourced.
- WCC will identify and implement appropriate staff appraisal and support systems to ensure that staff contributions are aligned with our strategic goals

Key initiatives

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

5. MAINTAIN THE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS OF THE AGENCY

The context

- In response to growing community need the agency has grown in service development and delivery. This growth has been embedded in providing opportunities for communities to identify and respond to their own need. Future growth of the organization should build upon this strength to ensure services and programs continue to be relevant
- WCC acknowledges that core services, that meet fundamental needs and rights, will continue to be delivered within a context of changing government policies and funding strategies. This is further complicated by the need to plan ahead when the ongoing viability of existing services is unknown
- Working within a diverse and dynamic community means that the organization will need to find the right balance between strategies for prevention, intervention and community development
- WCC, along with all other agencies and the community itself, faces specific challenges in responding to the rapid growth in population and service need occurring in Whittlesea

Key initiatives

- To increase capacity to meet growing, on-going and emerging community needs, WCC will explore independent and new sources of income. This will include:
 - Exploring and developing new partnerships including with philanthropic agencies and local businesses in order to diversify our funding base and strength
 - Establish WCC as having expertise within the fields of community development and engagement, and explore developing and marketing this as an income generating activity
 - WCC will work to increase opportunities for direct-giving and sponsorship
- WCC will increase opportunities for Committee of Management members to assist with marketing, fundraising, public relations and promotion.
- WCC will continue to advocate to governments to ensure policies and strategies meet community needs and strengthen capacity of communities to participate
- WCC will work with other community sector partners to raise the understanding and commitment of governments to appropriate target-setting and reporting requirements that take a sensible approach to risk and are focused on outcomes and benefits for the community

OUR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

We report on the progress and outcomes of our programs and services to funding bodies and in public forums to the community. We build-in formal and informal opportunities for feedback and evaluation from the community. We are committed to using this information to maintain and improve the quality of our services. The specific strategies we adopt are:

- **We collate and analyse data, including demographic, program area and stakeholder data to inform service planning and program delivery**
- **We document the processes, outcomes and learnings from collaborative partnerships and projects**
- **We construct work plans and have regular reviews of our performance against objectives set in workplans**
- **We actively solicit feedback from community and agency partners and act on feedback**
- **We incorporate client, volunteer and community feedback at all levels of the agency, in planning, delivery and evaluation of services**
- **We systematically evaluate all core programs and all new projects**
- **We assess the appropriateness of services to meet client needs – client feedback, quality reviews and audits, and stakeholder consultation**
- **We document outcomes of actions and their implications for service delivery to clients**
- **We seek to collect evidence that demonstrates that consultation processes are reflective of community principles of engagement and participation**

<p>OUR MISSION Whittlesea Community Connections is a not-for-profit community based organisation providing a range of services and programs designed to increase community participation and to address disadvantage within the municipality of Whittlesea</p> <p>OUR VISION WCC's vision is for a Whittlesea in which people and agencies work together to make a positive difference to their community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services</p> <p>OUR VALUES <u>Self determination:</u> We support individuals and communities in making choices and decisions that best meet their own needs <u>Non-judgmental:</u> We provide a service that is impartial and supportive of all forms of diversity <u>Not-for Profit:</u> We provide services that are free at the point of delivery to members of the community of Whittlesea <u>Confidential:</u> We provide comprehensive services that protect clients' and community residents' confidentiality <u>Diversity:</u> WCC values the diversity of Whittlesea and commits to strengthening inclusiveness in all aspects of its work</p>	<p>KEY WORK AREAS Information and Service Delivery: to respond to community needs through provision of information, tailored services and advice (e.g. information, public access computer room, tax help) Volunteer Resource Service: to provide effective training, placement of volunteers and support volunteerism and community participation in the City of Whittlesea Settlement Support Program: to support newly arrived migrants and refugees through research, casework, advocacy, community education and information Community Legal Service: to provide information, casework, community legal education, law reform and advocacy to improve access and equity to legal resources Emergency Relief Service: to provide financial assistance and referral for those in need Whittlesea Connect - Community Transport Service: to provide residents with access community transport that addresses transport disadvantage</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OBJECTIVES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Identify and address the specific information and service needs of community residents within the City of Whittlesea • To advocate for, and with, community residents for increased participation in decision making • To support the formal and informal roles of volunteers and community residents within the Whittlesea community • To collaborate with agencies and Government to develop or sustain services that serve the needs of the local community • To continue to improve the quality, accessibility and efficiency of our services 	<p>MEASURES OF SUCCESS - Collation and analysis of data, including demographic, program area and stakeholder data - Involvement in advocacy including, law reform activities, transport, settlement and their outcomes - Documentation of processes and outcomes of collaborative partnerships and projects - Performance management and annual staff review - Feedback from community agency partners - Evidence of client and community feedback at all levels of the agency, in planning, delivery and evaluation of services - Evaluation of all core programs and all new projects - Appropriateness of services to meet client needs – client feedback, quality reviews and audits, stakeholder consultation - Outcomes of actions implemented to improve service delivery to clients - Consultation processes reflective of principles of community engagement and participation</p>
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