

# Case study: Lalor Primary School

## Family Learning Club

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



### Background and Identified Needs

Lalor Primary School is located in the North of Melbourne, and currently has 263 students enrolled. Of these students, 178 are from an EAL background. 74% of the students come from a language background other than English, with Vietnamese, Arabic, Greek and Italian being the predominant linguistic backgrounds.

As part of RESP the school identified that more literacy support was required for students from refugee and EAL backgrounds. The need to support students' emotional and social development was also identified as a priority need. The school also identified the need to support families to support their children's learning at home.

### The RESP Project

As a part of RESP, the school partnered with Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) to deliver a Family Learning Club, specifically targeting students and families from refugee and EAL backgrounds. This consisted of a weekly out-of-school hours session which provided intensive reading and general literacy support to students. Families were also invited to attend club sessions with a focus on building family capacity to support their children's reading at home.

The project aimed to increase the capacity of students to engage in learning and social connections at school, and increase capacity of families to support their children's learning at home.

WCC has strong expertise in a number of areas including education and settlement services, with a strong focus on assisting students and families from refugee backgrounds. WCC worked closely with Lalor Primary School to support the Family Learning Club by coordinating weekly club sessions and recruiting and managing volunteers.

### Outcomes for Students

#### Learning outcomes

The Family Learning Club improved students' English language capacity, particularly English vocabulary. As observed by the school's EAL teacher this improvement was supported by practical and hands on group activities, and reading support with a focus on learning new vocabulary.

There were clear improvements in students' reading capacity. Tutors observed week to week improvements through one on one reading support. Students started borrowing more books and parents reported how participating in Family

Learning club made their children more motivated to read at home. This had positive flow on effects for learning engagement in the classroom.

*"Most students are from non-English speaking backgrounds; they get extra input in terms of vocabulary and assistance with reading and comprehension, things that they wouldn't get if they were at home." - Volunteer tutor*

#### Social and wellbeing outcomes

There was a clear increase in students' social confidence. The club coordinator observed how students enjoyed weekly 'talk time' with volunteer tutors, building strong student-tutor relationships.

Students participating in Family Learning Club also showed an increase in confidence to learn and 'have a go' at learning tasks. This outcome was supported by assisting students to express their interests and take ownership over what they were learning. The school's EAL teacher reported how students now ask for support with their reading in class and have developed the confidence to read in front of their peers.

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### Outcomes for Families

#### Capacity to engage with the school and their child's education

Families who attended Family Learning Club reported increased confidence to support their children's learning at home. The club coordinator observed how parents developed confidence to read books to their children in their first language and English when possible.

Participating in Family Learning Club led to an enhanced sense of belonging for families. Families felt that being involved in club sessions made it easier to participate in the school community, for example attending the end of year school family picnic event. Families also reported feeling more comfortable to discuss their children's learning with school staff.

### Outcomes for the School

#### Capacity to meet the needs of refugee students

The EAL coordinator observed how the project raised awareness of the needs of students from refugee backgrounds among school staff. Classroom teachers visited the Family Learning Club to support their students. Visiting the club

supported classroom teachers to connect club learning content to classroom teaching.

#### Engagement with families

The Family Learning Club supported the development of positive relationships between school staff and participating families. The club provided an opportunity to learn about families' needs and expectations of the school, and promote other school activities.

*"Now I have confidence to speak English with my son, the club helped me with parenting...I know to speak more calmly, no need to get angry."*  
- Parent



#### Work in partnership

The partnership between Lalor Primary School and Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) grew to be strong and dynamic. The club coordinator (WCC) and the school's EAL teacher developed a positive and effective working relationship with social work and teaching skills that complemented each other. This has contributed significantly to the achievement of positive project outcomes. In addition, WCC has been able to support the school by making family referrals when appropriate to WCC settlement services.

#### Lessons Learned

It was challenging to maintain family attendance at Family Learning Club sessions. Once families felt more comfortable supporting their children to read many stopped attending. The club hopes to address this issue by consulting with families about how the school can better support parents to support their children's education, and based on this feedback build in relevant content.

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

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