

**Working to build healthy and connected
communities across Melbourne's outer north**

Snapshot March 2026



Whittlesea is a proudly culturally diverse community.

Two thirds of Whittlesea residents have at least one parent born overseas, meaning that a significant majority have either migrated themselves or were born to at least one migrant parent. More than half (56.4%) of residents stated that both their parents were born overseas. Of those born overseas, close to one in five residents (19%) migrated to Australia only within the previous five years.

More needs to be done however to ensure people feel safe, included and connected to our community. The Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project identified that 59% of survey respondents (or a member of their household) had experienced racism in the previous 12 months. Women and younger people were more likely to experience racism.

In order to build relationships between communities from different backgrounds there needs to be opportunities for people to meet and exchange information, resources, knowledge and connections. Social capital both increases access to information and provides social support.

We know many people across our communities face barriers including language, financial hardship, discrimination, legal issues, and settlement challenges that prevent them from accessing services, asserting their rights, and living safe, connected, and healthy lives. Equity of access underpins the approach, objectives and long-term outcomes Whittlesea Community Connections is working towards.

We aim to identify and break down barriers to accessing information and specialised support services and work towards building individual and community resilience. WCC works alongside individuals, families and groups to create opportunities to build and strengthen connections, supporting a community that is better able to support itself.

Our work is:

- connected to community in places and spaces where they live, work, study or play – Place based
- driven by, for and with community and encourages volunteer and community participation
- responsive to multiple and diverse community needs as they emerge and change
- built on the belief that Whittlesea's multicultural and diverse community brings opportunities and strength



Our 5 strategic priorities:

1. Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence
2. Young People have a sense of belonging & voice in their community
3. There is equitable access to employment opportunities within a sustainable local economy
4. People lead healthy lives connected to community and services
5. Whittlesea is resilient community that is empowered to protect, prepare and adapt to a changing local environment in partnership with our First Nations and diverse communities

Healthy & Connected Communities Theory of Change

PROBLEM:

Refugees and newly arrived migrants with history of torture, trauma and/or violence, discrimination, lack of trust in the Australian system and many other disadvantages make their settlement journeys more complex and exposed to vulnerability.

ACTIVITIES:



Casework



Group Activities
(Social Groups,
Events)



Capacity
Building
(Driving, Digital
Literacy)



Volunteering



Refugee
Employment
Pathways



Legal &
Migration
Advice



Cohesion
Projects
(Palestinian
Women)



Multicultural
Issues
Network

OUTCOMES:

INCREASED



Individual &
Community
Support



Education &
Employment



Health &
Wellbeing



Independence



Family
Reunion



Sense of
Belonging



Understanding
of Rights &
Civic
Participation

IMPACT:



Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence



People lead healthy lives connected to community & services



There is equitable access to employment opportunities within a sustainable local economy

Program Overview

A significant part of our work to build Healthy and Connected Communities is providing culturally safe, trauma informed settlement and support services for migrants and new arrivals.

The table below maps our activities against the National Settlement Outcomes Framework (<https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NSOS-2020.pdf>). The NSO Framework aligns with the Department's Refugee and Humanitarian Entrant Settlement and Integration Outcomes Framework (<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/settlement-policy-and-reform/refugee-and-humanitarian-entrant-settlement-and-integration-outcomes-framework>).

Examples of our programs and projects are included in the following pages with most addressing two or more settlement outcomes.

Settlement Priority	Outcome	WCC work
Education and Training	Newly arrived people can readily access and participate in high quality education and training pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SETS support with understanding education system, enrolments, homework clubs, mentoring ● Strong partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic to support AMEP and YAMEC ● Learn Local courses to compliment and extend learning ● Volunteering, practical training and placements
Employment	Newly arrived people achieve positive employment outcomes, supported by services which are responsive, diverse, sustainable and effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) ● Learn Local courses focused on employability - resume workshops, enhancing digital literacy, job searching, interview preparation ● Relationships with Workforce Australia providers ● Advocacy with Employers to reduce barriers ● Enhancing employees' knowledge of rights and responsibilities ● Capacity building including readiness and pre-employment support
Health and Wellbeing	Newly arrived people experience positive health and wellbeing, and are fully engaged in effective and responsive health and wellbeing programs and services, including primary prevention and early intervention programs	<p>SETS casework support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Warm referrals to GP's and mental health supports ● Multicultural Women's groups ● Cancer Council Victoria partnership to improve health outcomes ● Active living/exercise with DPV Health ● Bi-cultural Health navigator program
Housing	Appropriate, affordable and long term housing is available and accessible for newly arrived people, within reasonable proximity to social and community supports and employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SETS casework support with public housing, securing rental properties, providing support letters ● Partnership with Haven Home Safe (regional homelessness entry point) to outreach at WCC

Settlement Priority	Outcome	WCC work
Language Services	Translating and interpreting services, and a wide range of high quality translated and interpreted resources, are widely available and accessible for newly arrived people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bi cultural and multilingual staff and volunteers to reflect communities arriving ● Diverse communication methods and strategies ● Support with document translation
Transport	Affordable and accessible transport options are readily available to newly arrived people, to facilitate their social and economic participation, and their wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Road Safety programs ● Multicultural Women’s driving program ● Using public transport programs
Civic Participation	Newly arrived people are fully engaged and participating in the Australian community, and exercising their individual and collective rights and responsibilities under the law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SETS casework and advocacy ● Citizenship preparation and practice Migration advice ● Support with citizenship applications ● Community legal education – civil matters, family law and family violence
Family and Social Support	Newly arrived people are fully supported to establish and maintain safe, healthy, positive and meaningful family and social relationships throughout their settlement journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parenting support and programs ● Family violence information, assistance and referrals ● Youth mentoring, activities and events ● Community information sessions ● Culturally safe spaces where families can connect with others who share similar experiences
Justice	Newly arrived people have full access to the legal and justice systems, in order to ensure the realisation of their rights and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anti-racism project and support service ● Referrals to WCC legal services for family law, family violence, fines and debts ● SETS support with documentation, advocacy with service providers, and assistance to access family violence support services where required
Finance	Newly arrived people are able to confidently navigate the financial landscape, and make good decisions that enable their financial and material wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SETS casework and advocacy ● NILS loans and saving programs ● Let’s Talk Money program ● Micro business programs ● EPRI small business project



Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) is an Australian Government program funded through the Department of Home Affairs.

WCC's SETS program, our SETS program supports humanitarian entrants and eligible permanent migrants to address their settlement needs and build a strong foundation in their new communities. The program focuses on improving social participation, economic wellbeing, personal independence, overall wellbeing, and community connectedness, empowering individuals and families to thrive in Australia. In 2025 we supported xx people through 2,428 sessions and 3,158 attendances.

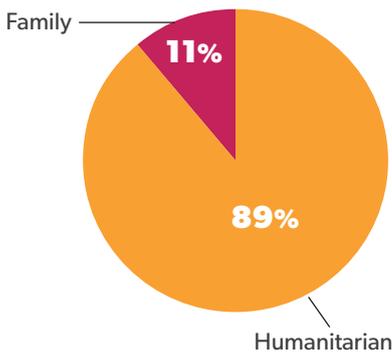
SETS provides support to clients through:

- Intake and assessment
- Advocacy and casework support
- Information, advice, and referrals
- Social participation activities
- Domestic and family violence support
- Child-focused support
- Mentoring

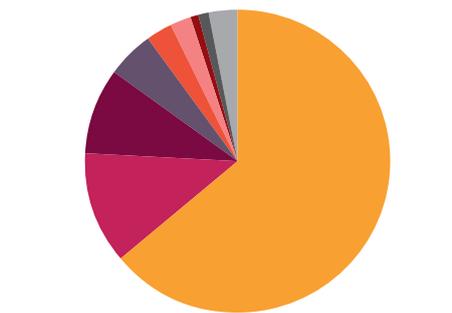
Through both individual casework and group programs clients are supported to address challenges related to housing, employment, education, system navigation, racism and discrimination, health, and family relationships. Group information sessions also play an important role in educating clients about tenancy rights, financial literacy, the health system, and opportunities for social participation, contributing to stronger, more informed, and healthier communities.

Community reached:

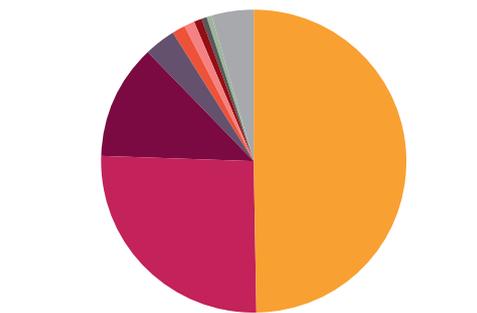
Visa type



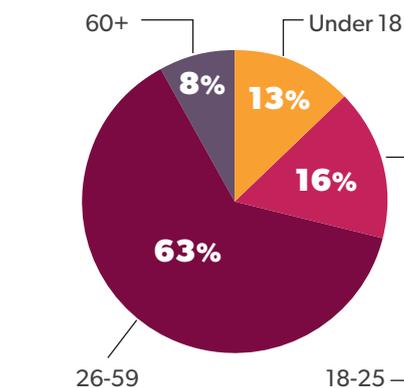
Main Languages spoken



Country of Birth



Aged group supported



Arabic	64%
Kurdish	12%
Dari	9%
Persian	5%
Pashto	3%
Assyrian Neo-Aramaic	2%
Chaldean Neo-Aramaic	1%
Somali	1%
Other	3%

Syria	50%
Iraq	25.7%
Afghanistan	12.2%
Iran	3.3%
Gaza	1.5%
Lebanon	1%
Pakistan	1%
Ethiopia	0.5%
Sri Lanka	0.4%
Other	4.4%

Supporting a Kurdish Family Transitioning from HSP to SETS

A Kurdish family of six was referred to WCC SETS program after exiting the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). Although the family had completed the HSP support period, they continued to face significant settlement challenges and required ongoing support to navigate services and systems in Australia.



During the initial intake and assessment, the SETS caseworker identified several urgent needs. The parents had limited formal education and very low literacy in their first language, along with limited English skills, which made it difficult for them to understand official processes and access services independently. One key concern was that the children were not yet enrolled in school, as the parents were unfamiliar with the enrolment process and required support to navigate the system.

The SETS caseworker provided targeted casework support and engaged with Collingwood English Language School to facilitate the children's enrolment. The caseworker accompanied the family to the school and supported them through the enrolment process to ensure the children could begin their education as soon as possible.

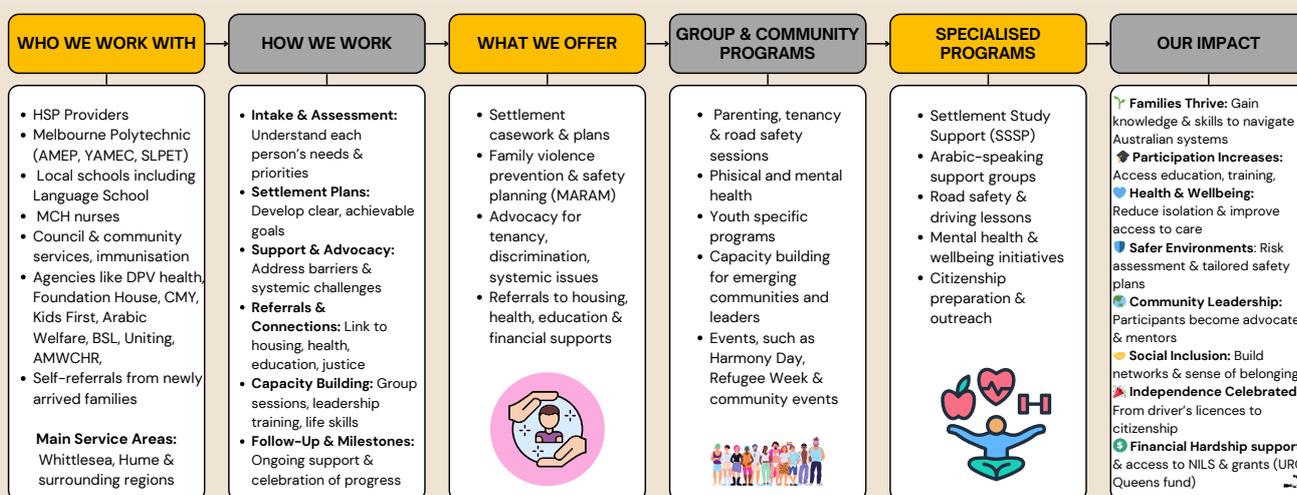
To support the parents' long-term settlement and independence, the SETS caseworker also assisted them to enrol in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at Melbourne Polytechnic – Epping campus, helping them to build their English language skills and confidence.

SETS support has helped the family take important steps toward accessing education and developing the skills needed to navigate life in Australia more independently. The case highlights the importance of continued settlement support after exiting HSP to ensure families do not fall through gaps during their early settlement journey.

WCC SETS, Empowering New Beginnings in Australia

WHO WE ARE

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) delivers the SETS program to help newly arrived migrants and refugees feel welcome, supported, and empowered. We use a trauma-informed, culturally safe approach, with bi-cultural workers who speak community languages, ensuring clients feel heard, respected, and supported.



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES, CLICK THE QR CODE



OR EMAIL US ON [SETTLEMENT@WHITTLESEACC.ORG.AU](mailto:settlement@whittleseacc.org.au)



Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) Program

The EPRI program is an Australian Government pilot program funded through the Department of Home Affairs.

Economic participation is essential to successful settlement, and EPRI creates accessible entry points and pathways to employment and self-employment for refugees and humanitarian entrants with low skill levels and/or limited English proficiency.

Since its launch in February 2023, the WCC's EPRI program has supported over 510 participants to improve their employment readiness, build meaningful pathways and secure employment. EPRI offers a tailored, hands-on approach that includes:

- Employment pathway planning
- Foundational skills training
- Job-specific skills development
- English as an Additional Language training
- Supported work experience, volunteering
- Paid internships and on-the-job training
- Link participants with job opportunities and local employers

These supports build confidence, skills, and long-term economic independence. WCC's EPRI program participant journeys through working across four WCC social enterprises and our small business program:

CASE STUDY

Loreen Ali "Don't Give Up"

Loreen's Journey of Resilience & Opportunity

Loreen's story is one of remarkable strength, and hope. A Kurdish refugee woman originally from Syria, lived the discrimination, born in her ancestry land but was denied having citizenship by the Syrian regime. Her first dream was only to hold a valid ID, she also dreamed to pursue her education and employment. Her hope of studying to be a teacher was interrupted by war and the barriers of not having citizenship or identification. Forced to flee to Erbil, Iraq, she spent years in a refugee camp where opportunities for education and employment were extremely limited.

Arriving in Australia with her husband and daughter brought renewed hope. While Australia represented safety and opportunity, **starting over was not easy**. Loreen faced

significant challenges, limited English, no local work experience, family responsibilities, and unfamiliar systems. Despite her determination, she initially navigated this new chapter with the help of Whittlesea Community Connections.

When Loreen joined EPRI program, everything began to change and Loreen start feel that her dreams are achievable. With guidance, mentoring and encouragement, Loreen completed her AMEP hours and enrolled in a Diploma of Community Services, a pathway aligned with her passion for supporting others.

dreams are achievable.

loreen successfully completed her studies and undertook a meaningful placement where she applied her learning in real-life engaging clients, supporting service access, and contributing to community education.

EPRI's flexibility allowed Loreen to balance study, placement, and family life, while its culturally responsive approach made her feel welcomed, respected, and supported.

Drawing on her own lived experience, she developed a deep ability to understand and assist newly arrived migrants facing challenges similar to those she once faced. Her journey's title, it would be simple yet powerful:

"Don't Give Up."

Because Loreen's story proves that with the right support, determination, and opportunity, **dreams that once felt impossible can become reality.**



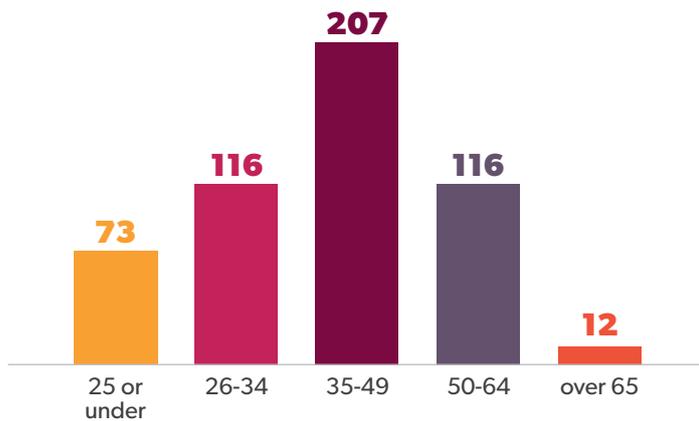
Whittlesea Community Connections: Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration Project

The project has successfully reached over 500 refugees, helping them achieve both short- and medium-term outcomes.

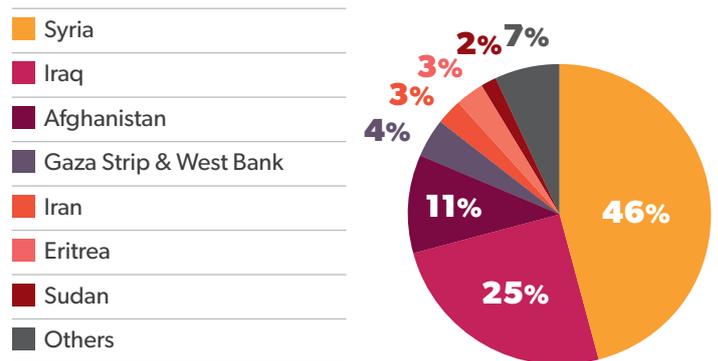
95% of participants reported an increase in skills, confidence, and English language proficiency related to economic participation.

58% of participants enhanced their economic participation through paid placements, employment, or self-employment.

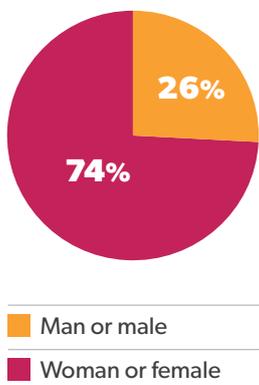
Age Band at Session*



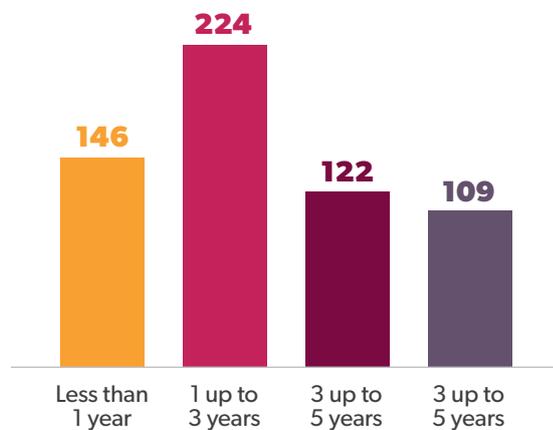
Country of Birth



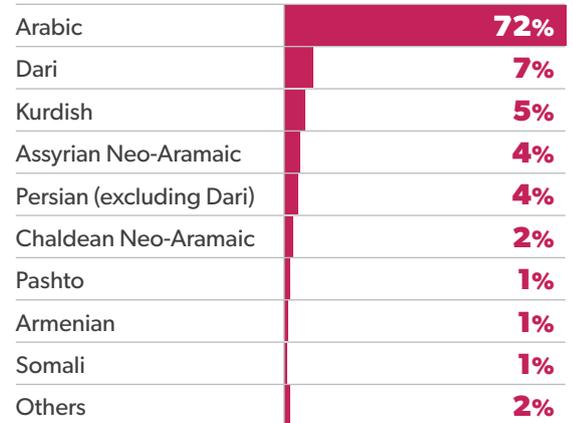
Gender



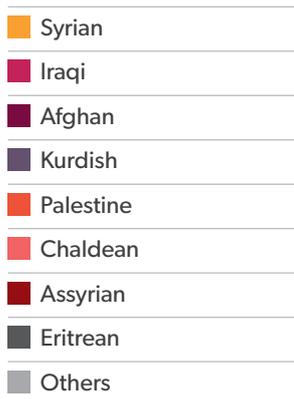
Years in Australia**



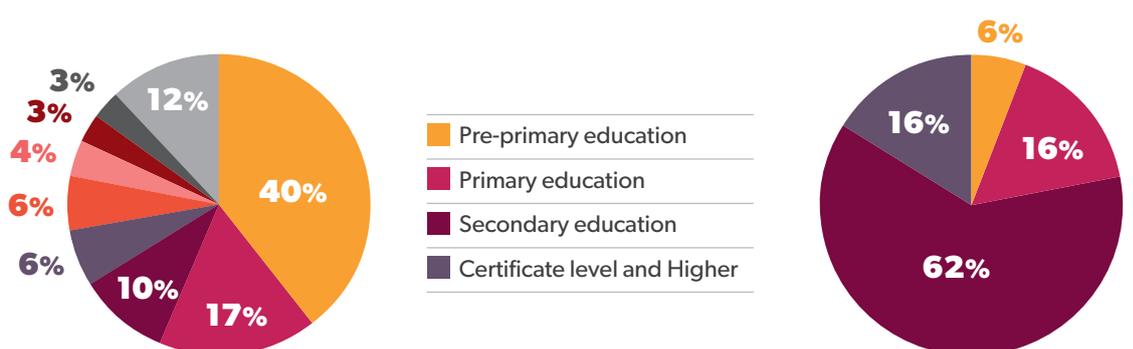
Main Language



Ancestry



Highest Level of Education



* Age represents age at session so if a client changes age group between sessions, they will appear in multiple age categories.

** Years In Australia is the difference in years between when the client migrated to Australia and their session conducted dates. Since a client can have sessions at different points in time, a single client may be counted in multiple categories of years in Australia.



Whittlesea
Community
Connections
Making a positive difference everyday

Connections



JOB
FINDER

SUCCESS



REAL LIFE
EXPIRENCE



PLACEMENT

EPRI
REAL PEOPLE
REAL STORIES

Skills Finder

SUPPORT

Local
Experience



Starting Over
again



BUILDING
SKILLS
BUILDING
HOPE

be yourself

Opportunities



Participants stories demonstrating how EPRI is creating economic pathways that align with participants skills, aspirations and motivation

Dalia

Dalia is a 37 year old refugee from Syria who was a primary teacher, but her qualification is not recognised in Australia. Dalia, widowed soon after arriving in Australia, is a single mother with two children. Participating in EPRI enabled her to understand Australian workplaces, write her CV, improve her English, and learn interview skills. As part of the EPRI program, she attended a one-day training with VicRoads to become a volunteer mentor through WCC's youth driving program. After four months of volunteering and EPRI participation, we enrolled her in a Certificate IV in the Motor Vehicle Driver Training Course. Through volunteering she had seen how her teaching skills provided a strong foundation she could build on to become a driving instructor. In December 2024, Dalia opened her own driving school business. Throughout 2025 she provided driving lessons through driverED, WCC's social enterprise and built her own client base.



Toha

Toha arrived in Australia from Syria in 2019 at the age of 55. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she pursued a Certificate III in Childcare. However, she faced challenges in finding employment in the childcare sector due to her limited English skills (Level 1). Through the EPRI program, Toha secured a placement and paid work with our WiW childcare enterprise. She was assigned shifts alongside experienced WiW workers who provided her with support and guidance, focusing on improving her English and helping her understand workplace culture. For the past two years, Toha has been one of our dedicated workers at WiW.



Kobra

Kobra is a 28-year-old female who was born in Afghanistan and fled the warzone with her family. She arrived in Australia as a refugee in September 2024. By January 2025, Kobra was connected with the WCC EPRI team for assistance in finding employment. We encouraged her to continue her English classes at Melbourne Polytechnic, an AMEP provider. Our team supported Kobra in enrolling in a "Ready for Hospitality" course offered by WCC. We helped her complete the necessary enrolment forms, including a police check and a working with children check. She successfully completed the course and starting volunteering with us. We helped with her resume and job readiness and in August 2025 Kobra began working part-time at our Food Collective café and catering business. While she works, she will continue to receive support to help her integrate into her new role and will also get assistance in finding a full-time job when she is ready.



Wisam

Wisam, a Chaldean refugee from Iraq, first connected with WCC for settlement support. Wisam faced challenges adapting to a new culture, navigating services, and learning English. Despite this, his optimism, empathy, and motivation to contribute were evident. With support from EPRI, Wisam began his pathway to employment and community participation by volunteering with WCC's Transport Team, assisting community members with barriers to essential services. Over two years, Wisam has become a valued member of the volunteer team and has done various casual roles building his skills further. His friendliness, reliability, and compassion make him a trusted presence for clients and staff... "Volunteering makes me feel part of Australia. I want to help others feel welcome and supported, just like I was."





Pre-accredited training and learning programs



Many of the pre-accredited training and learning programs that support settlement outcomes are coordinated by WCC's Learn Local program funded through the Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions. This continues to provide accessible, high-quality adult education to the refugee community. Designed for adults seeking to gain practical skills for work, study, and daily life, the program offers free pre-accredited courses in a relaxed, supportive environment delivered by qualified instructors.

Other training and placement opportunities are created by our 4 social enterprises, particularly the Food Collective Café and Catering enterprise based on Melbourne Polytechnic's Epping campus. These are supported by philanthropic organisations including the Scanlon Foundation.

Learn Local

In 2025, more than 350 participants engaged in a wide range of Learn Local courses, including:

- Ready for Hospitality
- Sewing for Employment
- Microbusiness for Makers
- Computer Basics and Digital Essentials
- Citizenship Ready
- Woodwork
- Community Services
- Job Readiness
- Workplace English and Digital skills
- Everyday English
- Driving for Women



CASE STUDY

Building Confidence and Skills Through Learn Local

Fatima, a 35-year-old newly arrived humanitarian entrant from Syria, had limited English and no prior experience with Australian workplaces. She was eager to improve her language skills, gain practical knowledge, and become more independent in daily life.

Fatima enrolled in the Everyday English course at WCC, delivered face-to-face in a small, supportive class. The course focused on practical English skills, including reading, writing, and conversation, as well as understanding basic systems such as public transport, healthcare, and government services.

The Learn Local instructors provided tailored guidance to Fatima, encouraging her participation, building her confidence, and creating a safe space to practice English without fear of making mistakes. The small class size allowed for personalised attention, ensuring Fatima could progress at her own pace.

By the end of the course, Fatima had:

- Gained confidence speaking and reading in English
- Learned to complete simple forms and communicate with service providers independently and access to interpreter
- Built social connections with other learners, reducing isolation
- Developed a foundation to enrol in further courses, including Job Readiness and digital skills training

Fatima's participation in Learn Local has significantly improved her confidence, independence, and engagement with the community. She now feels empowered to navigate daily life in Australia, access services, and explore future education and employment opportunities.

Courses are delivered face-to-face, online, or in a blended format, with small class sizes ensuring individual attention and a positive learning experience. The program is flexible, allowing participants to learn at their own capacity while gaining skills that support employment, further study, and community participation. Courses are programmed to fit around AMEP classes so people can do both. The teaching style and environments are different so it complements other learning they are doing.

Through the dedication of our instructors and the support of the community, WCC Learn Local empowers adults to take the next step in their education and employment journey. By providing inclusive, practical, and tailored learning opportunities, the

program continues to enhance the social and economic wellbeing of people, helping them achieve their personal and professional goals. Many have reported feeling more confident and independent, better equipped to engage with work, study, and community life. The small, supportive classes also foster social connection, helping learners build friendships, networks, and a sense of belonging.

Food Collective training program

We have trialled a number of variations on training and placements in the Food Collective café to establish what works most effectively for both learners and staff of a busy café and catering enterprise.



LOOKING FOR A JOB IN HOSPITALITY?



Our free 8-week training and employment program is designed for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who face barriers to employment and are seeking work in hospitality.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Two months of hands on, weekly work experience shifts in the Food Collective's busy café and catering kitchen, situated at Melbourne Polytechnic, Epping.

Tailored training from our qualified chefs and baristas to build your work ready skills in food and coffee preparation and service.

Individualised support from an employment mentor to help you develop work-ready skills to find a job.

KEY DATES

Training program: 9 Feb to 3 April, 2026

Registration cut-off: Fri 30 Jan 2026, midnight

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Essential

- People from migrant and refugee backgrounds living in the Cities of Whittlesea and Hume
- Eligible for employment in Australia
- Minimum of EAL Level 2 English
- Can commit to 2 x 1/2 day training sessions per week for duration of program
- Food handling certificate

Preferred

- Experience in the hospitality industry

HOW TO APPLY

Scan the QR code to complete an application form

Or fill in the application form: www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/food-collective-catering-cafe-epping/food-collective-training-and-employment-program-registration

For more information, contact Norma Medawar at nmedawar@whittleseacc.org.au or **0459 159 050**

The Food Collective's Training and Employment Program is made possible through support from the Scanlon Foundation.





Multicultural Women’s Driving Program

The Multicultural Women’s Driving Program is a culturally responsive initiative designed to empower women from newly arrived refugee, migrant, and multicultural backgrounds to gain independence, confidence, and meaningful participation in education, employment, and community life.

For many women, transport barriers including the lack of a driver’s licence or access to a car, limited access to public transport, financial hardship, and caring responsibilities restricting their ability to attend appointments, pursue education, or access employment. These barriers often contribute to social isolation, reduced wellbeing, and ongoing dependence on others.

The program addresses these challenges by providing culturally safe, trauma-informed, and female-led driving instruction, integrated with tailored settlement, advocacy, and employment support. By removing transport barriers, the program creates clear pathways to economic participation, social inclusion, personal safety, and long-term independence, ultimately strengthening families and communities.

The success of this program relies on strong partnerships and effective collaboration with a range of organisations, including the Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network EMPHN, City of Whittlesea, Pam Spectrum, Drummond Street Services, AMES Australia, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Berry Street, and The Orange Door, along with WCC internal programs and other community organisations.

These partnerships enable a coordinated and holistic approach to client support, including access to additional funding opportunities, ongoing incoming and outgoing referrals, and comprehensive wraparound services to meet the diverse needs of community members.

Since the program started in 2022...

Program Reach

(JUL 2022 – DEC 2025)

- Over 4,500 driving lessons delivered
- More than 920 women supported
- More than 95% report of increase in road rules knowledge and confidence

Client engaged based on Countries of Birth

- Syria
- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- India
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Pakistan
- Iran
- Sri Lanka
- Libya
- Palestine
- Nepal
- Pakistan

Languages Spoken

- Kurdish
- Arabic
- Assyrian
- Chaldean
- Urdu
- Pashto
- Persian
- Dari
- Hindi
- Sinhala

Visa Categories

- Humanitarian: 200, 201, 202, 204, 866
- Family visas: 100, 300, 309



Rebuilding Confidence and Safety – Amina’s Story

Amina, a 34-year-old mother from Syria, arrived in Australia on a Humanitarian Visa 204 (Women at Risk). Fleeing years of instability and violence, she arrived alone with her 9-year-old son, who has been diagnosed with developmental disability. With no relatives in Australia and limited English, Amina faced the enormous task of rebuilding her life from the ground up while caring full-time for her child.

During her settlement intake at WCC, Amina shared that she had never driven before and had relied entirely on extended family for transport back home. In Australia, this became one of her biggest barriers. Every therapy appointment, school meeting, NDIS assessment, and essential task required long, exhausting public transport trips that were extremely challenging with her child’s behavioural and needs. Taxi fares were unaffordable, and missing appointments was becoming common.

She told her worker:

“

I escaped danger to give my son a safe life, but I cannot take him anywhere without help. I feel stuck. I need to learn to drive so I can look after him properly.”

Recognising the safety concerns, isolation, and increased caring demands, WCC referred Amina to the Women’s Driving Program. She was paired with a trauma-informed, female Arabic-speaking instructor who understood her cultural background and the emotional challenges she carried from her past.

Over the next few months, Amina attended lessons consistently despite her demanding caring responsibilities. Her instructor scheduled flexible sessions around her son’s therapy times and provided calm, patient instruction, helping Amina gradually overcome her fear of the road and build confidence a completely new experience for her.

Alongside driving lessons, WCC supported Amina through a range of settlement services, including:

- information and referrals to disability and NDIS supports
- assistance with school communication and education planning
- food assistance and essential items
- parenting programs tailored to single mothers
- referrals to counselling to help her process past trauma
- regular check-ins to ensure she felt safe, supported, and not alone

Slowly, Amina began to feel more in control of her life. She practised driving whenever she could, determined to give her son stability and access to the services he needed.

When she passed her driving test, she cried with relief. She said:

“

This licence is my freedom. I can take my son to his appointments, to school, to the park. I feel safe, and I feel strong.”

Amina is now able to independently transport her son to school, NDIS appointments, and community activities. Her confidence has grown, and she has become more connected to her local community. The Women’s Driving Program, combined with tailored settlement support, played a vital role in helping her overcome isolation, improve her son’s access to disability supports, and rebuild her sense of safety and independence after years of hardship.





Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project



In 2018, WCC and Victoria University formed a partnership to take a stronger stand against racism.

WCC held consultation sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and with people from migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker backgrounds living in Melbourne’s growing outer north. Participants represented a range of communities, including multi-faith, new and emerging, and communities with caste systems.

Racism remains a confronting issue across Victoria, and Whittlesea is no exception. Research conducted in 2022 by Victoria University, Speaking Out Against Racism, revealed that 59% of local refugees and migrants had experienced racism in the past year—most commonly in public spaces (51%), workplaces (49%), education settings (45%), public transport (36%), and online (28%). Yet only 16% of incidents were reported.

In October 2022, WCC officially launched the Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project, led in partnership with Victoria University and supported by Bubup Wilam, Al Siraat College, Victoria Police, and VEOHRC. Despite limited funding, WCC and its partners continued their advocacy and action for change.

In 2024, with funding from the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, WCC expanded the project to establish the Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network, uniting local organisations to strengthen awareness, trust, and culturally safe reporting pathways. The strength of this initiative lies in its partnerships. The Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network is a collaborative effort led by Whittlesea Community Connections and Victoria University and support from:

- Victoria Police
- Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- DPV Health
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- Australian Muslim Women’s Centre Of Human Rights
- City of Whittlesea
- Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
- Al Siraat College
- Foundation House

Together, these partners are building a shared vision for a community where every person feels safe, heard, and respected. This work has led to:

- Increased confidence among newly arrived migrants and refugees to report racism.

- Improved coordination between community services, police, and legal pathways.
- Enhanced SETS team capability, particularly in identifying, triaging, and referring racism-related incidents.
- Broader partnerships that embed anti-racism practice across health, education, and local government sectors.
- Greater community awareness of where to go for help in person, online, and in-language.

The project was presented at Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) National Conference 2025, in Sunshine Coast and won the first place in the Peoples Choice Award.

Whittlesea Community Connections are also part of Anitracism Victoria, an alliance building place-based and community-led anti-racism support in Wyndham, Whittlesea and Melbourne’s southeast. The Victorian Government provided funding for a pilot project aimed at advancing the services of these three local anti-racism networks for those experiencing racism and/or racial or religious vilification. This project is coordinated by Victoria University in collaboration with several local community service providers.

➔ <https://antiracismvictoria.com.au/support-services/>

These projects demonstrate that place-based, culturally safe approaches work best when built on trust and partnership.



“Break the Silence” Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network: A SETS Partnership with Legal Allies

Hiyah Rahman - Manager Engagement and Multicultural Communities - Whittlesea Community Connections



OVERVIEW

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) is a place-based not-for-profit organisation that has supported the Whittlesea community for over 50 years. Community and volunteer involvement are central to our values. We believe that to feel safe, connected, and a true sense of belonging, there can be no place for racism. Yet we continue to see its impact when people are denied services, work, or inclusion.

We acknowledge there is still much to learn, but creating safe spaces and open dialogue with communities has been an important first step. Guided by lived experience, this project drives meaningful action to ensure everyone in Whittlesea can access the support and opportunities they need to live free from racism and its harmful effects.

Alex Haynes
CEO, Whittlesea Community Connections
Emma Antonetti
General Manager Equity and Impact



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

In 2018, WCC & Victoria University formed a partnership to take a stronger stand against racism.

WCC held consultation sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and with people from migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker backgrounds living in Melbourne's growing outer north. Participants represented a range of communities, including multi-faith, new and emerging, and communities with caste systems.

Racism remains a confronting issue across Victoria, and Whittlesea is no exception. Research conducted in 2022 by Victoria University, Speaking Out Against Racism, revealed that 59% of local refugees and migrants had experienced racism in the past year—most commonly in public spaces (51%), workplaces (49%), education settings (45%), public transport (36%), and online (28%). Yet only 16% of incidents were reported.

In October 2022, WCC officially launched the **Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project**, led in partnership with Victoria University and supported by Bubup Wilam, Al Siraat College, Victoria Police, and VEOHRC. **See quotes below.**

In 2025, with funding from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), WCC expanded the project into the **Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network**, uniting local organisations to strengthen awareness, trust, and culturally safe reporting pathways.



Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Ringo Terrick giving some insight to his lived experience of racism. He said he is a “strong proud black Aboriginal man”, and knows what it feels like to be different from others. He paid his respects to the different cultures, customs and spiritual beliefs, saying the multi-cultural jam has changed the flavour of Australia, in a positive way.



Mr Mohamed Elbotaty Head of Al Siraat Primary School he encouraged people to speak out against racism, and reminded us all that in Islam Allah (God) emphasises in the Quran the equality of all people regardless of race, colour, or ethnicity.



Lisa Thorpe, Gunditjmarra, Gunaai woman, and CEO of Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, described her struggles on a daily basis. While she is proud Bubup Wilam has achieved their 10-year anniversary, their staff, students and families still combat racism every day in the City of Whittlesea, as they fight for basic human rights from day to day.



The Hon. Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training of Australia, officially launched the project. He stated that everyone needs to feel safe in this country. Unfortunately, racism is increasing in Australia right now.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network aims to:

- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refugees and migrants through culturally safe, trauma-informed legal literacy and anti-racism education.
- Strengthen the capability of SETS workers through joint training, referral coordination, and partnership learning.
- Coordinate trusted pathways with Victoria Police and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC).
- Document and track racism incidents to inform local advocacy and systemic change.
- Collaborate with community partners such as Melbourne Polytechnic (MP), DPV Health, the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV), and the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR).
- Promote community-led action and accessible, in-language resources to increase confidence and trust in reporting.

OUTCOMES

This partnership has led to noticeable change across Whittlesea:

- Increased confidence among newly arrived migrants and refugees to report racism.
- Improved coordination between community services, police, and legal pathways.
- Enhanced SETS team capability, particularly in identifying, triaging, and referring racism-related incidents.
- Broader partnerships that embed anti-racism practice across health, education, and local government sectors.
- Greater community awareness of where to go for help in person, online, and in-language.

The project demonstrates that place-based, culturally safe approaches work best when built on trust and partnership.

OUR STORIES, OUR STRENGTH

Racism isn't something that happens to “other people”—it's something I've lived and felt deeply.

Growing up as a minority in my own country, I often felt the need to shrink myself to make others comfortable. Lived experience matters because these moments stay with you: comments that sting, doors that don't open, the unseen glass ceiling, and the exhaustion of justifying who you are. Anti-racism isn't only calling out what's wrong; it's also building something better. By choosing empathy, respect, and courage, we shape a kinder future. In Australia, I can feel that change growing stronger, and I'm proud to turn pain into purpose.

Haya Hassouneh



FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Looking ahead, WCC and its partners are committed to:

- Sustaining the initiative through ongoing funding.
- Embedding anti-racism practice across all community services.
- Expanding multilingual outreach to newly arrived and emerging communities.
- Strengthening partnerships with First Nations organisations to promote shared advocacy.
- Continuing to collect data and evidence to influence local and state policy reform.
- Growing the Victorian Anti-Racism Alliance and amplifying community voices in decision-making spaces.

The Whittlesea Anti-Racism Support Network is more than a project it's a movement towards justice, equity, and belonging.





Digital Inclusion

Digital Leaders in Action: Youth Mentors Championing Inclusion and Change

Digital skills are essential to everyday life and digital exclusion limits access to essential services and opportunities extends social isolation and anxiety. Digital exclusion is prevalent among older adults including refugees and newly arrived migrants. They often struggle to book medical appointments, pay bills and stay in touch with family overseas due to low digital literacy, limited English, lack of affordable devices or internet access, and fear of online scams or identity theft.

In response WCC developed the Young Digital Mentors (YDM) initiative, an intergenerational, cross-cultural program where youth train as community digital mentors to support adults aged 50 and above. The project brings together compassion, technology, and cultural understanding to foster connection, empowerment, and safety online.

WCC shared the program's success and the positive outcomes achieved at the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) National Conference 2025. The poster highlighted the program's impact in providing intergenerational connection, improving independence, safety, and access to essential services for older adults.

Digital Leaders in Action is possible through the partnership and support of: Good Things Foundation, Australian Department of Home Affairs, Victoria Department of Jobs, Skills and Industry and Regions (ACFE), Melbourne Polytechnic Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), Yarra Plenty Regional Library, Al Siraat College, Collingwood Language School and Mernda Neighbourhood House.

Together, we are shaping a more inclusive, connected, and resilient community, "One Digital Conversation at a Time".

95% reported gaining employability skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership.

9 in 10 described feeling more connected to their community and proud of contributing.

12 YDMs transitioned into further volunteering roles outside the program or further study in IT, teaching, or community services.

84% reported improved confidence with public speaking and problem-solving.

1 in 3 expressed interest in mentoring again or leading future workshops

Digital Leaders in Action:

Youth Mentors Championing Inclusion and Change

Hiba Ayass
Whittlesea Community Connections



Background & Context

Whittlesea and Hume considered to be the fastest growing and most multicultural LGAs in Victoria according to 2021 ABS Census.

- 37.6% of people were born overseas (an increase from 35.5% in 2016)
- Two thirds of Whittlesea residents have at least one parent born overseas
- Close to one in five residents (18.9%) migrated to Australia only within the previous five years (2016 – 2021)
- Just over 45% of Whittlesea's residents speak a language other than English at home.

Despite this diversity, many older CALD residents—especially refugees and new migrants face digital exclusion due to limited English, low digital literacy, and fear of online scams. This limits access to essential services and increases social isolation.

To address this, Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) launched the **Young Digital Mentors (YDM)** program, an intergenerational, cross-cultural initiative where youth mentor CALD residents aged 50+ in digital skills. The project blends compassion, technology, and cultural understanding to promote confidence and connection online.

"I used to avoid touching my phone except to call my children. Now, I can message my sister overseas and pay my bills safely. The young mentor was patient and kind."
Alia (Participant, Arabic-speaking community)

Aims & Objectives

The YDM program aims to:

- ✓ Empower youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds as digital leaders and role models.
- ✓ Bridge generations through shared learning and cultural exchange.
- ✓ Strengthen partnerships between WCC, schools, libraries, and community education providers.
- ✓ Enhance digital inclusion, resilience safety & confidence among CALD 50+ residents.
- ✓ Create pathways for volunteering, education, and employment for young people.

Funding from partners such as Good Things Foundation, Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Jobs Skills Industry and Regions Victoria (Learn Local), and collaboration with cohorts such as Melbourne Polytechnic the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), Al Siraat College, Collingwood Language School, Yarra Plenty Regional Library and Mernda Neighborhood House, WCC positioned youth as powerful resources of social change, championing digital inclusion, community leadership, and intergenerational connection.

Activities & Implementation

The program recruited 100 Young Digital Mentors (aged 16–21) from diverse cultural backgrounds, including and not limited to Arabs, Assyrian, Kurdish, Somali, and Afghan communities.

Outcome Measurement

- For Youth Mentors**
 - **95%** reported gaining employability skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership.
 - **84%** reported improved confidence with public speaking and problem-solving.
 - For CALD 50+ Participants**
 - Increased digital literacy and independence when using online services.
 - Reduced social isolation and improved confidence in connecting with family and friends online.
 - Stronger understanding of online scams, privacy, and safe browsing practices.
 - Survey shows that:
 - 92% reported feeling more confident using their devices and connected to their families.
 - 78% shared increased knowledge about scams.
 - For the community**
 - Improved intergenerational relationships and trust across diverse communities.
 - Increased access to information to make informed decision
 - For the partnerships**
 - Enhanced WCC's partnership network across education and community services.
 - Created a replicable youth-led inclusion model recognised by partner agencies and local government.
- "Before joining this project, I had never spoken in front of a group. Now I can explain things clearly and help people who remind me of my grandparents."*
Aisha, 18, Young Digital Mentor

Case Study: Building Connection Through Shared Learning

Yasmine, a 17-year-old YDM from an Iraqi background, was paired with Laila, a 63-year-old grandmother who recently arrived from Syria. Laila was anxious about using her phone and often relied on her son to handle everything online. Through one-on-one support, Yasmine patiently guided Laila through basic smartphone use showing her how to send photos, translate messages, and make WhatsApp calls to her family abroad. By the end of the program, Laila had joined a local seniors' WhatsApp group and attended her first library event.

"Yasmine reminds me of my granddaughter. We both learned from each other she taught me about phones, and I told her stories about my home. Now I feel part of something again."
Laila, Participant

Key Impact & Learnings

The Young Digital Mentors Project created a remarkable effect across communities.

For Youth:

- Developed leadership, teamwork, and teaching skills.
- Built employment pathways.
- Strengthened sense of belonging and civic engagement.
- Increased confidence in public speaking and cross-cultural communication.

For CALD 50+ Participants:

- Improved digital literacy and confidence using online services.
- Reduced isolation and increased social participation.
- Enhanced online safety awareness, reducing vulnerability to scams.

For the Community and Sector:

- Strengthened partnerships across education and community sectors.
- Increased trust and visibility of WCC's Settlement services.
- Created a model that other organisations can replicate to build inclusion.

"This project has shown that young people, when given the right support, can lead change in their communities."
Hiba Ayass, WCC Multicultural Team Leader

The Young Digital Mentor Journey



Future Opportunities

The success of the YDM initiative demonstrates the strength of youth-led, intergenerational learning models. WCC plans to expand the network of mentors and explore new areas of digital inclusion:

- Developing AI literacy and safe technology use modules in multiple languages.
- Develop a sustainable module or pathway to engage wider cohort
- Expanding partnerships with schools, libraries, and neighbourhood houses.
- Embedding YDM into ongoing community education programs for sustainability.
- Reaching younger adults (under 50) and newly arrived refugees with targeted sessions.

The future of digital inclusion lies in community-driven innovation where everyone, regardless of age or background, has the confidence and tools to thrive in a connected world.

Together, we are shaping a more inclusive, connected, and resilient community,

"One Digital Conversation at a Time."



Acknowledgements This project was made possible through the partnership and support of: Good Things Foundation | Department of Home Affairs | Learn Local | Melbourne Polytechnic Adult Migrant English Program | Yarra Plenty Regional Library | Al Siraat College | Collingwood Language School | Mernda Community House | Whittlesea Community Connections
This project is supported with funding from the Australian Government's Department of Social Services



BUILD FRIENDSHIPS WITH WOMEN IN OUR COMMUNITY

Welcome
all women!

أهلا وسهلا
بالسيدات

Women in your neighbourhood

Join art classes in Donnybrook
Share lunch in Whittlesea



Women who share your language and culture



Socialise with Spanish-speaking women
Be crafty with your Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander sisters
Get active with women of Palestine

महिलाओं
का स्वागत है

*Wominjeka
badjurr*

خواتین کو
خوش آمدید

*¡Bienvenidas
damas!*

Women who are healing

Move your body and be mindful
with mothers recovering from
challenges



Connect and join!

Find out more about all these
groups and start your
friendship journey this week!



Scan the QR code, phone 9401 6666 or visit
whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au



Supported by Whittlesea Community Connections -
Multicultural Women's Group Grants with
philanthropic funding from Sunshine and Crocodiles

Partnerships and Collaborations

Partnerships are critical to achieving long term positive settlement outcomes for people arriving as refugees.

Some partnerships build over years and some are collaborations that meet a specific need and draw on different organisations key skills. Some examples include:

Melbourne Polytechnic:

WCC provides outreach support at Melbourne Polytechnic Epping Campus three days per week, where a bicultural caseworker works directly with students and staff. This outreach service supports participants in the Youth Adult Migrant English Course (YAMEC) and the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), helping students address settlement challenges that may affect their ability to study and progress.

Through this outreach model, students receive support with system navigation, referrals, advocacy, and connection to community services, including housing, health, legal, and family support services. The presence of a bicultural worker helps bridge language and cultural barriers, ensuring students feel understood and supported.

This collaborative approach strengthens access to education, improves student engagement, and ensures learners are better supported to overcome barriers, understand their rights, and successfully participate in education and community life.

Over the last 7 years WCC and MP have worked together on a number of highly effective collaborations focused on real world learning, volunteering and work experience.

Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights:

Over the past month, in partnership with the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, our Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) program delivered four tailored sessions for newly arrived Palestinian refugees ensuring that newly arrived families can build strong, safe, and economically secure lives in Australia.

Across the four sessions, participants explored:

- Raising in family in Australia
- Culture shock and Settlement Journey
- Australian workplace culture and communication
- Employment rights and responsibilities
- Understanding taxation, superannuation, and compliance

Each workshop focused on building practical knowledge, strengthening confidence, and supporting participants to engage in the workforce feeling empowered. The discussions were thoughtful, the questions were insightful, and the commitment shown by every participant was inspiring.

Cancer Council Victoria:

For more than three years, WCC has partnered with Cancer Council Victoria to increase participation in cancer screening, with a particular focus on cervical and bowel screening among priority communities. The initiative aims to improve awareness and increase the intention to complete cervical and bowel screening tests among Arabic and Punjabi community who are often under-screened.

This has been achieved through the delivery of culturally appropriate activities, information sessions, and one-on-one support. These efforts aim to reduce barriers to screening and encourage greater participation in preventive health practices.

To date, more than 300 people have received direct support through the program. This support has included updating Medicare details, ordering or re-ordering bowel screening kits, booking GP appointments, accessing emotional support while caring for someone with cancer, and attending education sessions to learn more about cancer prevention and how to support both themselves and others in their community.

Keeping the Community Safe!

Twenty Melbourne Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) students experienced firsthand what it's like to be a volunteer firefighter during a visit to the **CFA (Country Fire Authority) Epping fire station**. The visit provided recently arrived refugees in Australia with valuable insights into the broader role of emergency management and the wide range of volunteering opportunities available within the sector.

Students were particularly surprised to learn that volunteering with CFA goes far beyond firefighting.

They discovered opportunities in:

- Road rescue
- Emergency medical response
- Fundraising
- Marketing, and
- Community education and engagement.

This highlights that there is a role for everyone, regardless of linguistic or cultural background.

It was heartening to witness the warm and lively exchange between CFA staff and the students. The students shared personal stories of resilience, including experiences of survival in their countries of origin. CFA staff, in turn, offered practical knowledge and encouragement, reinforcing that everyone has something to contribute.

Even more inspiring was the students' enthusiasm about the potential for volunteering with CFA to support not only their integration into Australian life but also their employment and skill-building goals. One student remarked:

“

“I don't feel scared to call in an emergency or walk down to my local fire station if needed. I come from a background where we are afraid of people in uniform, but this brought us closer.”



Another shared their surprise at the scope of CFA's work, and the importance of helping share vital emergency resources and information with communities who speak languages other than English.

This visit was the result of a well-established partnership between **Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC)** and the **Melbourne AMEP** at Melbourne Polytechnic in Epping. AMEP, an Australian government-funded program, supports eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to improve their English language skills and settle successfully in Australia. WCC complements this support by assisting with settlement needs and connecting individuals to essential services, including volunteering opportunities.

The visit followed two fire and bushfire safety information sessions at Melbourne Polytechnic, reflecting the CFA's commitment to engaging more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

200 students

from diverse backgrounds
gained essential safety knowledge.



A smaller group expressed interest in volunteering and taking the next step, which led to the CFA station visit.



THIS COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE:



Empowered students with life-saving knowledge and the confidence to engage with emergency services.



Advanced the CFA's diversity and inclusion strategy by fostering trust and interest among under-represented communities.



Introduced new pathways to volunteering, helping students connect with their new community while building transferable skills.



Supported the City of Whittlesea's priorities, particularly in climate resilience and emergency preparedness.



The timing was especially beneficial—just ahead of the summer fire season—allowing students to download and learn about the

VicEmergency app

and other preparedness tools.

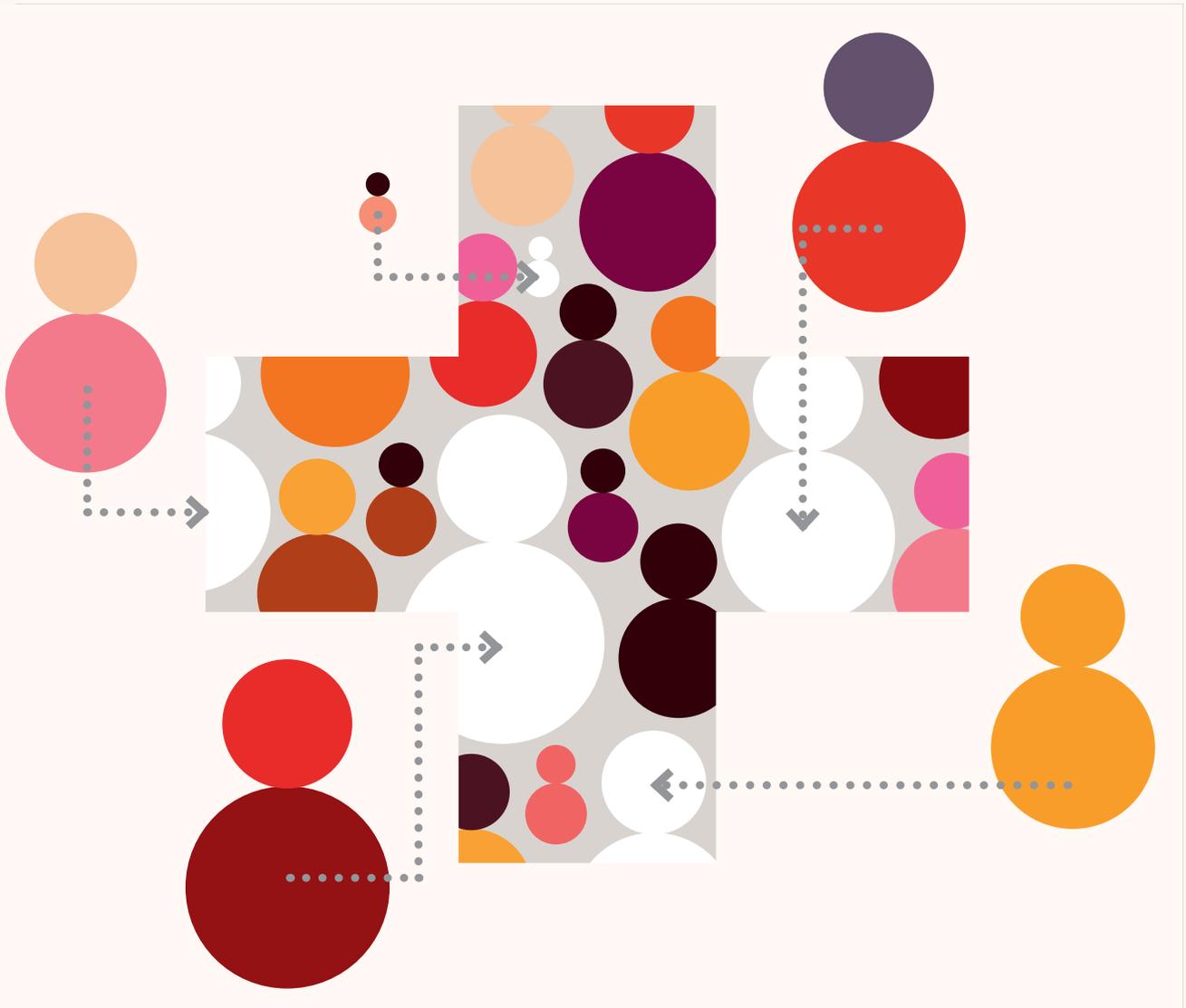
This initiative exemplifies how inclusive, community-driven collaborations can have wide-reaching impact. By meeting people where they are and inviting them into essential services like emergency management, we strengthen not only our volunteer workforce but also the resilience, confidence, and cohesion of the community as a whole.

Funded by the City of Whittlesea Council, the Whittlesea Volunteer Resource Service organised the information sessions and visit through its partnerships with Melbourne Polytechnic and the CFA.

whittleseacc.org.au



Health Sector Multicultural Employment Strategy



Background

The City of Whittlesea is one of the fastest growing and most multicultural LGAs in Victoria. According to the ABS Census 2021:

- **37.6% of people were born overseas**
- **45% speak another language than English at home**
- **Two-thirds (66.2%) of residents have at least one parent born overseas**
- **Close to one in five (19%) migrated to Australia in the last five years**

In view of this diversity, health services and health professionals face considerable challenges in delivering quality healthcare equitably. These include language, cultural beliefs, difficulties adapting to a very different health system and prior experiences of trauma, racism and discrimination.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health disparities. ABS data shows that the COVID-19 death rate was three times higher among migrants than those born in Australia with people born in the Middle East suffering the highest death rate, at ten times higher.¹ As well as social determinants, this was due to failing to engage and communicate appropriately with people with multicultural backgrounds.

Response

Culturally competent health care has enormous potential to improve patient engagement and health outcomes. When a patient cannot find providers that resemble them, their beliefs, culture or other issues of importance, they face greater risk of not being understood or not receiving the appropriate treatment.²

A multicultural workforce brings diverse skills, perspectives, and networks to the health industry. In turn, research has found that a diverse workforce enables more flexibility, responsiveness and empathy in the delivery of healthcare in Australia.³



4

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/17/covid-death-rate-three-times-higher-among-migrants-than-those-born-in-australia>
 2 <https://www.sgu.edu/blog/medical/pros-discuss-the-importance-of-diversity-in-health-care/>
 3 <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/equity-inclusion-and-diversity>
 4 <https://www.usa.edu/blog/diversity-in-healthcare/>

Partnering to improve outcomes

WCC has worked with Northern Health over many years to develop employment pathways for people with migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly those with overseas health qualifications. Through several programs, a partnership in placing, inducting and mentoring jobseekers has created a pathway into more secure, challenging work.

The Road 2 Work internship program provides an opportunity to gain Australian work experience aligned to each person's interests and previous experience. Northern Health was a key partner in this project, placing interns in research, community outreach and pharmacy roles, opportunities that led to employment in the Transcultural and Language Service (TALS), pharmacy and Virtual Emergency Department.

The Bi-Cultural Health Navigator project is a partnership between Melbourne Polytechnic, Northern Health and WCC. Following training to better understand and navigate the Australian health system, WCC provided an employment pathway for Melbourne Polytechnic students, having successfully applied for grant to engage multicultural communities in Whittlesea throughout the pandemic.

Most recently, WCC has become a Specialist Jobs Victoria Employment Service (JVES), placing jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds as non-clinical Ward Assistants, bicultural workers in Virtual ED, Hospital Concierge and PPE Safety Officers.

These initiatives have consistently opened further opportunities, demonstrating the benefit of employing people with bicultural skills and experience in health systems that our local communities are more familiar with.

WCC is now working with NH to identify opportunities in primary care settings and is contributing as a subject matter expert to development of a Certificate III in Community Services (Health Navigation).

Strategy

As a place-based organisation, WCC's vision is a health workforce that lives locally and represents Whittlesea's multicultural make-up.

We aim to do this through an integrated approach, including:

Sourcing

Building a candidate pool that reflects our community and is suited to employment in the health sector.

Pre-placement support.

Assist candidates to be recruitment and job-ready. This includes training that builds understanding about Australia's health care system, common workplace norms and employment pathways.

Post-placement support

Mentoring from bicultural workers to aid transition.

This ensures that issues such as cultural and workplace differences are identified and addressed early.

Development

Candidates say that being part of an English-speaking workplace improves fluency and literacy more quickly than any other form of learning. Sustaining employment means tackling a key barrier to success.

Advocacy

Despite the lack of health professionals with recent migration experience, retraining in a professional field beyond the financial reach of most people who arrive as refugees. We are advocating for no interest loans and other pathways to help more skilled people achieve recognition of overseas qualifications.

Alternative pathways

For jobseekers who do not have a health background, we work to identify roles that will benefit from their cultural and linguistic strengths. Bicultural and health navigation roles have considerable potential to improve the patient experience and ease pressure on our critical health worker shortages.

Building on our Northern Health partnership we see the opportunity to leverage the learning and our strong multicultural community connections to benefit any or all health providers in the region.

Increasing Multicultural Health Sector Workforce

Pre- employment Training

- Cross-cultural communication skills
- Working with clients with complex needs
- Understanding the Australian health care system and the different employment pathways within it



Placement Pathways

- Pathway for overseas qualified health professionals
- NILS program to support financial cost of overseas qualification recognition
- Pathway for jobseekers from multicultural backgrounds interested in working in health



Support, Mentoring & Further Training

- On the job supervisor (health service) and Bi-Cultural mentor (support organisation)
- Communication and support mechanisms to address work place issues if and when they occur
- Support to continue to English language proficiency
- Further training to support up-skilling and or transition to clinical roles



Northern Rainbow Collective:

rainbow group guide





what is the

Northern Rainbow Collective?

The Northern Rainbow Collective aims to connect Rainbow Group members from different schools across Melbourne's Northern suburbs. While online channels are currently being explored, the collective hopes to foster connections through events and workshops as well, providing a valuable opportunity for support, community building and shared experiences. WCC focuses the Rainbow Groups on young people from multicultural and multi faith backgrounds.



what is a

Rainbow Group?

While Rainbow Groups can take many different forms depending on the community and environment, this guide describes the approach used at Epping Secondary College.

A Rainbow Group is a student-led and staff-supported group in a secondary school that provides an affirming, inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ students and allies. It aims to promote acceptance, celebrate diversity, and support students who are questioning or affirming their gender identity or sexuality.

Rainbow Groups usually run during school hours on school grounds and are part of the broader wellbeing or inclusion programs. They can also be supported or co-facilitated by external LGBTQIA+ networks and/or organisations. They are not intended to replace individual counselling or specialist support services for students who may need them.

why start a

Rainbow Group?

Research consistently shows that LGBTQIA+ students experience higher rates of isolation, bullying, and mental health challenges in school environments compared to their peers. Having a visible, student-led group helps counter this by promoting belonging, improving student wellbeing, and showing that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Rainbow Groups also encourage students themselves to contribute to a more welcoming and inclusive school environment.



Our Rainbow Group

principles



Affirming Space:

Group members come together in an affirming space, free from judgment by staff or facilitators. It's important to remember that creating an affirming environment is not the same as guaranteeing safety. A clear understanding of what safety means for the group is essential, and a risk assessment should be completed. Safety priorities may vary depending on the needs and experiences of group members, as well as broader factors such as school environment and policies.

Privacy & Confidentiality:

Group members' identities are kept private outside of the group setting. Staff who help facilitate Rainbow Groups are expected to uphold confidentiality and work with each student to understand their preferences about who knows and how information is shared. Any disclosure of a student's participation should only happen with the student's informed consent, unless required by school policy or duty of care obligations. Sessions should be held in a private space where possible to reduce risk. It's important to review the privacy disclaimer at the start of every session, especially to support any new members joining.

Youth-Led:

Structured activities help support student engagement and achieve intended outcomes, but the group should always be student-led and guided by members' interests and needs. Regular check-ins at the start and end of each term help identify emerging needs and opportunities.

Proportion of Young People:

Partner agencies, teachers, and other school staff may want to support the group by joining sessions. It's important to maintain a clear majority of young people, as too many adults can make students feel intimidated or uncomfortable.

Value Curiosity:

Topics can be complex and challenging for young people to navigate. Understand that students may say things that are inappropriate but well-intended. Encourage curiosity and foster compassion and respect when asking questions, emphasizing that there are no "right or wrong" answers.

Trauma-Informed & Balanced:

LGBTQIA+ activities should balance both positive and challenging experiences, avoiding overemphasis on negative portrayals or trauma. For many young people, this space is where they can truly be themselves and have fun. The group should remain fun, inviting and focused on creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Child Safety Compliance:

All group facilitators, including external ones, must be aware of child safety obligations and reporting responsibilities. If group members are at risk of harming themselves or others, relevant parties must be notified. Safety protocols should be developed in collaboration with the wellbeing team and mental health practitioners.

Intersectionality:

Adopt a trauma-informed approach when delivering sessions, recognizing that each group member's experiences of gender identity and sexuality are unique. Be mindful of how overlapping identities influence experiences of inclusion and discrimination. Regularly review weekly themes and content to reflect these diverse identities and adapt content accordingly. Provide examples that represent a variety of identities aligned with members' experiences.

- **Neuro-divergence:** Research shows that neurodivergence is over-represented in LGBTQIA+ communities, especially among young people. It's important to consider this in safety assessments for physical spaces, content delivery, and risk mitigation protocols.
- **Fluid identities:** Group members should be invited their names and preferred pronouns at the start of each session, not just when they first join. Recognize that identity is fluid and dynamic but never pressure members to share what they're uncomfortable with. Ensure resources are available to explain and affirm different identities, with content guided by members' needs and preferences.
- **Allyship:** The decision to include allies (non-LGBTQIA+ individuals seeking to show support or get involved) should align with group members' preferences. Never assume anyone's identity before they share it themselves, as allies may be exploring their own identities. Regularly check in with members, such as at the start of each year, to ensure preferences are respected.



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