



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	Interactive CALD Parents' Support Services
Project practice	Assisting parents and children from minority refugee and migrant backgrounds to access social, recreational, training, employment and community linkage activities
Project undertaken by	Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services, Toongabbie, NSW
Start date	November 2004
Focal areas	Supporting families and parents
Program	Local Answers
Issue	<p>Families from refugee and migrant backgrounds often face social isolation. The targeted Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities are small and emerging, so are less resourced and generally overlooked by service providers when planning for services. CALD sole parents, in particular, are socially isolated. Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders are precluded from accessing many services, particularly those that offer linguistically and culturally appropriate structured group activities. After fleeing traumatic experiences abroad, families face the stress of settling into a new community with different values, which can affect their ability to parent effectively. Service development of parenting skills and early intervention and prevention strategies to benefit children from these communities is almost non-existent.</p> <p>In 2003–04, the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship granted 11,227 offshore visas, of these 70% were from African countries, 25% Middle East & Asia and 5% from Europe. In 2004, 2,957 settled in Sydney. A large proportion of refugees settled in Central Western Sydney as there are existing networks of families and communities, and their proposers are also living in Sydney. There is also a perception of cheaper accommodation and availability of employment.</p>
Program context	<p>Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services (HPMS) is a community-based organisation funded by the Department of Community Services of NSW, with other projects funded by state, commonwealth and local governments. HPMS seeks to assist in the advancement of CALD communities through facilitating equal access and opportunity and participation for all, based on the principles of social justice, access and equity. During the past 18 years, HPMS has gained extensive experience in working with small and emerging CALD communities in the western suburbs of Sydney, NSW. The organisation has implemented many successful projects targeting CALD families. Some projects implemented in recent years are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CSSS Youth Worker Project;• NESB Family Conflict Resolution Project;• NESB Sole Parent Research Project; and• CALD Family Support.

The Interactive CALD Parents' Support Services program is one of a suite of short-term projects for parents who stay home with small children before school age. Other programs include:

- Afghan Women Sewing Project;
- Multicultural Women's Craft Group;
- Farsi Speaking Health Project;
- Sole Parents Expo Project;
- Welfare to Work Research Project;
- Friends of Refugees Project; and
- Play and Learn Supported Playgroups Project.

The main client groups for the organisation include Southern Sudanese, Somali, Afghan, Iraqi, Tamil, Congolese, Iranian and other smaller, less resourced migrant and refugee communities.

Practice description

The Interactive CALD Parents' Support Services has offered a range of opportunities and group activities to the client groups listed above. Predominantly this has been by the establishment of activities for each cultural group, facilitated by local community members from within this group. Groups established include:

- *Sudanese mothers' group*. This group involved training, employment, community information/connection sessions and social/recreational activities.
- *Tamil group*. This group involved training, employment, community information/connection sessions and social/recreational activities. In addition, the group developed a play to promote knowledge around domestic violence.
- *Iraqi/TPV group*. The focus of this group was on social and recreational activities, community information/connection sessions and English language development.
- *Melanesian group*. This group involved training, social activities and fund-raising for local and overseas community members.
- *Afghani mothers' groups* (three groups at Parramatta, Merrylands and Holroyd High School). These groups focused primarily on needs of single parent families, and involved community information/connection sessions and social/recreational activities.
- *Iranian mothers' group*. This group involved community information/connection sessions and social/recreational activities.
- *Somali mothers' group*. This group involved training, employment, community information/connection sessions and social/recreational activities.
- *Young African Sole Parents Support group*. This group has largely focused on parenting and children's issues.

Key ingredients of the practice supporting these activities are:

- provision of interpreters and child care;
 - building social connections through provision of educational and recreational activities;
 - partnering with (and providing links to) services available in the local area; and
 - building the capacity of local migrant and refugee community members by training and mentoring local leaders to facilitate support groups.
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Provision of interpreters and child care

All sessions and activities were supported with interpreters and child care. This was enabled largely through the use of facilitators drawn from the target community.

Building social connections through provision of educational and recreational activities

The aim of the program is to build social connections and increase the relationships of marginalised groups through the provision of educational, social and recreational activities.

Ninety-five educational activities were offered (some in conjunction with existing service providers) including Aged Care Certificate III, Hospitality course, How to Set up Family Day Care sessions, English language classes, Office Administration Certificate II, and computing training. In addition, the program also ran "Tips and Ideas on Parenting" workshops with trained community facilitators.

New friendships are formed between parents and children and social networks are improved through involvement in recreational activities and support groups. Thirty-one recreational activities were held for the target groups during the period the program was run. Participating in recreational activities encourages community members to interact in a more relaxed environment.

Engaging community members in planning and facilitating project activities has ensured that selected recreational and social activities are appropriate and relevant to the target groups. The parents and children are involved in the choice of the activity, such as zoo trips, aquarium visits, picnics, beach trips, tai chi, and group cooking. The activities not only build on relationships with other families but also offer an opportunity for the facilitators to discuss issues arising from participants. At the end of the recreational activities, respondents feel more relaxed and are more receptive to offers of assistance.

Linking to and partnerships with services available in the local area

The program works explicitly to build links, networks and partnerships with services available to the target groups in the local area. This is done in a range of ways. Specific activities for each cultural group are drawn from or offered in partnership with existing community agencies. For example, the many training courses were offered in partnership with the Wesley Vocational Institute or the YMCA. Groups were often supported by or linked to community organisations such as the Sudanese Women's Welfare Association and the Melanesian Lotu Australia Inc, where these already exist. All groups participated in information sessions about and visits to government and non-government services such as Centrelink, NSW Police, health services, TAFE, and neighbourhood houses. In addition, partnerships with other service organisations have led to the sharing of the cost of transport, interpreters, venues, training, and food etc.

Build the capacity of local migrant and refugee community members by training and mentoring local leaders to facilitate support groups

Rather than a top-down approach to supporting community groups, where services are provided with minimal consultation with intended recipients, this project aimed to build the capacity of community members. It is a practice principle to involve the community to support their own community. Facilitators are therefore drawn from the community they will serve. Facilitators and volunteers were trained throughout the project and community leaders were in contact with the service providers for successful service delivery. In this way, community members are trained and empowered to take leadership in addressing the needs of their communities. As the facilitators are from the community, they have a clearer understanding of the needs of that community, and plan appropriate responses to the need, rather than the traditional approach to support, where service providers assume this role. Facilitators

were offered both training and payment. Facilitators can use the skills developed both within the program as well as with other service providers who begin to orient their services to these communities and require local expertise to assist this process.

Research base

Although there is limited research available on refugees and parenting after migration, what is available highlights that parenting skills may be affected negatively; and that the traumatic experiences and stress of settling in a new country may exhaust emotional resources of refugee parents and impact on the ability to parent effectively (Bevan, 2001). Other factors that may affect settlement and parenting are: larger families, particularly with the communities from Africa; the change in the roles and responsibilities of family members, with many families having to cope with the loss of the father; and intergenerational conflict, as the new culture clashes with the values of the migrant culture (African Think Tank, 2006).

There is an emerging literature on issues facing some migrant communities re-settling in Australia. This literature highlights social alienation, family breakdown, changing family relationships and parenting issues among others. A recent major workshop of African communities held in Victoria in 2006, identified that:

Many families experience “culture shock” on their arrival in Australia and, without appropriate support, find it difficult to understand and adapt to mainstream Australian values and norms. Cultural differences increase pressures on families and communities, and have serious implications for refugees’ on-going physical and psychological wellbeing and for their engagement with other Australians and mainstream institutions. (African Think Tank, 2006, p. 3)

The Victorian experience echoed that of earlier research conducted about African communities in Tasmania (Juma, 2005). Similarly, a community forum of African communities in WA in 2005 identified the same range of issues as both the Victorian and Tasmanian experiences discussed above. As with the Victorian documentation, the WA forum report (Department of Community Development WA, 2005) identified strategies focusing on cultural education for mainstream services, involvement of African community leaders in service provision, and culturally appropriate information about available services to overcome the significant ignorance about these services among African communities. All reports commented throughout on social isolation, the need for social relationship building, and the role of migrant community members as facilitators and leaders in community service strategies targeting their own communities.

Likewise, a report by the University of Western Sydney and the New South Wales Department of Community Services, *Enhancing Partnerships and Networks with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families in Early Childhood Settings* (Hayden et al., 2003) identified a critical need to enhance social connections and community cohesion as well as a need to rebuild community structures to support family wellbeing. In particular, the report identified CALD families as at risk of isolation and other forms of social alienation, and that:

The development of positive relationships with institutional staff such as those in early childhood settings and the facilitation of networks for CALD families can have long term positive outcomes for children, families and communities. (Hayden et al., 2003, p. 6)

Over the past five years, Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services (HPMS) has focused on researching issues related to CALD families in Sydney in order to better understand the issues affecting this geographically located group. HPMS has produced five project-specific research reports regarding this particular group. In 2002, HPMS produced research into sole parents, *“We Don’t Have Sole Parents in Our Community—We Only Have Widows”: The Needs of Female Sole Parents from a Non-English Speaking Background* (Cheung, 2002). Major findings from this report highlighted social isolation, income

	<p>assistance, accommodation, parenting, childcare, and access to relevant services as the major issues facing sole parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds.</p>
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased capacity of local migrant and refugee community members • Increased social connections and decreased isolation/alienation.
Evidence of outcomes	<p>The project used an action research methodology to collect data about the impact of its activities. The project was evaluated internally by Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services Inc. in 2006 and the <i>“Interactive CALD Family Support Services Project Report 2004–06”</i> was produced. The report showed the practice to have created positive change amongst its various CALD target groups, improving social networks and links to families, improved parenting skills and promoting emerging communities to form partnerships with existing local service providers and develop their own skills for capacity building. The effectiveness of the practice is evidenced through tangible outcomes and achievements by participants as well as through participant testimonials, interviews, and pre and post surveys that were completed by program facilitators and a range of participants.</p> <p>Increased capacity of local migrant and refugee community members</p> <p>Capacity of program participants has been improved in a range of areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased knowledge and use of local services; • improved understanding of the English language; and • the development of peer leadership skills through facilitation training and experience. <p><i>Increased knowledge and use of local services</i></p> <p>Participants reported increased knowledge of local services, for example, learning housing and legal rights, and accessing a range of services. Of the 16 members of the Afghani group that agreed to be interviewed, 50% had attended information sessions on health, 75% on Centrelink, 81% on NSW Police, and 50% on domestic violence. As a result, after attending the information sessions provided by HPMS 44% have used services like Centrelink, Parramatta Community Health and Immigration on their own. Forty-four percent (44%) of the respondents are members of a local library. Fifty-six percent (56%) said that the most important benefit of the group had been the information sessions. Other respondents identified a range of benefits including knowledge of local services; improved trust in the police; and confidence in using a range of community services (such as Centrelink, real estate agencies, banks, government and non-government services, TAFEs and hospitals). Participants identified the following beneficial aspects of the program:</p> <p>“All of them [i.e., sessions] are useful because I used for my daily life and solve issues like Immigration, Centrelink. When we enter a new country with different culture, we need to learn about them. I learned many things from your sessions.”</p> <p>“Information sessions like Police, Immigration were helpful. We know now, how to contact Police and Immigration. I made new friends. All the sessions were beneficial for me.”</p> <p><i>Improved understanding of the English language</i></p> <p>In general, all project activities support English language development. One specific example is the English language program for Sudanese participants, which is very popular amongst the Sudanese mothers. The participants have been able to proceed towards their life-long goal of higher studies, employment and capacity building. Thirteen participants have enrolled in the TAFE for Higher English and Social Welfare course. Three participants are employed as sessional interpreters.</p>

Development of peer leadership/facilitation skills

As part of the Interactive CALD Parents' Support Services, 11 parenting groups have operated, each with their own facilitator. Eleven facilitators from eight different cultural backgrounds have been trained to facilitate "Tips and Ideas on Parenting" to their community in their own languages (this is in partnership with Sydney West—Area Health Parenting). Sixteen facilitators have been trained to facilitate groups. More facilitators will be trained to access other small and emerging communities in other geographical areas.

Increased social connections and decreased isolation/alienation

Sixteen current and past participants were interviewed from the Afghani group at Parramatta at the end of two years. Respondents were asked to identify the most important benefit of the group for themselves. Forty-four percent said that it helped them to socialise and they made new friends.

All participants said that the participation in the group has empowered them and it has increased their confidence. Responses included:

"It was a good opportunity for the women and me to ask and find out their issues and learn more about them."

"I learned many things from your sessions such as Australian rules, culture and it was very informative for me."

In addition to the Afghani group, 30 current and past participants were interviewed at the end of the two years from the Tamil support group. This group reported an even higher identification of benefits relating to socialisation. Seventy-seven percent identified the most important benefit of the group as helping them to socialise and make new friends.

Over 900 participants have benefited from the project in the last two years. These participants have been involved in 95 educational/recreational activities, 31 recreational activities and 10 mothers groups. Currently 15 government and 21 NGOs are involved in this project. Participants express a higher level of interconnectedness with the community, establishing and using family day care services, and engaging in a range of family friendly courses.

The evaluation has reported achieving and exceeding a diverse range of goals which is well illustrated in the case study of Mary:

CASE STUDY: "Mary"

Mary, a refugee from Sudan, came to Australia in 1999 with her husband and three children. Twelve months after arrival Mary's safety and her children's, as a result of domestic violence, was in jeopardy and she was forced to live in a refuge. After some time in the refuge Mary was referred to the service and attended a support group for Sudanese mothers as part of the Interactive CALD Parents' Support Project. While attending the workshops, Mary took up further study at TAFE. Mary showed an interest in the group and wanted to become the group facilitator. After 18 months and receiving further training in child protection, domestic violence, working with groups, and facilitator training, Mary had now become an interpreter for the NSW police, an interpreter for the NSW Health system and will shortly finish a Diploma in Community Service. Mary is now so busy with work, study and parenting her three children, of which two have a disability, that she is recommending another woman to take over the facilitating and support of the group. Recently Mary reflected on her time two years ago when she was not working or studying. She was living on her own with her young children and felt very isolated far away from her family in Sudan with no close support. Mary hoped that no other mother would have to experience the sadness and loneliness that she felt. The support, training and guidance that she has received throughout the Interactive CALD Parents' Support project has been invaluable

	<p>and has contributed to her success both as a parent and as a community member.</p>
Policy analysis	<p>The Interactive CALD Parent's Support Services project is a positive example of a project designed to combat economic and social disadvantage and build socially inclusive communities. The project contributes to an emerging evidence base that is presenting appropriate and effective ways to address the social alienation and family issues prevalent in re-settled migrant communities in Australia.</p>
Evaluation	<p>The Interactive CALD Parent's Support Services project was submitted for consideration for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) Promising Practice Profiles (PPP). The project was assessed across a range of criteria relating to how the service results in positive outcomes for children, families and communities. The submission was peer reviewed and validated as evidencing promising practice. More information on the PPP selection process may be found at http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/pppprocess.html</p> <p>The Interactive CALD Parent's Support Services project has been evaluated internally using a range of participant feedback mechanisms.</p>
Project related publications	
References	<p>African Think Tank Inc. (2006). <i>Report on African-Australian community's initiative workshop on issues affecting resettlement of African</i>. http://www.att.org.au/documents/att_report.pdf</p> <p>Department of Community Development, Government of Western Australia. (2005). <i>African Communities Forum on Domestic Violence report</i>. http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/FBB12A0E-67FD-40E2-9D53-0B502B8ABAC2/0/AfricanForumReport.pdf</p> <p>Juma, A. (2005). <i>Out of Africa: Sudanese Migrant men's experiences of living in Tasmania</i>. Hobart: University of Tasmania.</p> <p>Bevan, K. (2001). Young people, culture, migrations and mental health: A review of the literature. In M. Bashi & D. Bennett (Eds.) <i>Deeper dimensions-culture, youth and mental health</i>. Sydney: Diversity Health Institute.</p> <p>Cheung, M. (2003). <i>"We don't have sole parents in our community—Only widows": The needs of female sole parents from a non english speaking background</i>. Sydney: Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services.</p> <p>Hayden, J., Fraser, D., De Gioia, K., Hadley, F., & Cara, B. (2003). <i>Enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood setting</i>. Sydney: Healthy Childhood Research Group Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.</p>
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Website	
More information	<p>More information on the Interactive CALD Parents' Support Services and Promising Practice Profiles can be found on the Communities and Families Clearinghouse of Australia website.</p>



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