

CMY Submission to the Inquiry into state education system

October 2023



Acknowledgements

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation that supports young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

CMY recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of this continent and the islands of the Torres Strait. In doing so, we acknowledge our shared history; recognise the right to self-determination and the importance of connection to and access to Country. We acknowledge and respect distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural differences, beliefs, values and languages.

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About CMY

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a not-for-profit organisation based in Victoria, Australia. CMY has specialist knowledge and support to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. CMY believes that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are connected, empowered and engaged.

CMY believes that education is an essential part of successful integration for migrant and refugee young people and is crucial for preparing young people of all backgrounds to be engaged and connected so that they can fulfil their potential and aspirations. However, young people from migrant and refugee background can find it difficult to fully engage in the Australian education system without additional support. Language barriers, social and cultural differences and disrupted education may all present barriers to a student's success.

CMY's MY Education program provides resources and support crucial to the success of primary and secondary students' learning. It builds the skills, knowledge and capability of education personnel to engage effectively for improved educational outcomes of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The two program elements are:

- Learning Beyond the Bell: support for schools and community organisations to provide high quality Out-of-School-Hours learning programs (otherwise known as Homework Clubs) for students of refugee and migrant backgrounds, and
- Refugee Education Support Program (RESP): delivers holistic and targeted support to selected schools to strengthen the connections between student achievement and wellbeing as well as student, family, school and community engagement.

In addition to these deliveries, CMY also delivers a suite of education support programs that engage directly with young people in schools to support their engagement and retention in schools. Combined with our work to build stronger capability within schools, our insights and expertise is well-informed by professionals within the education system as well as by the perspectives of young people.

This submission draws upon our expertise in this area.

About this submission

CMY welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Given CMY's wealth of knowledge and expertise in multicultural youth issues, this submission will specifically respond to the terms of reference with a focus on this cohort and their experiences.

This submission focusses on providing key insights into the learning outcomes and the state of student wellbeing in Victoria, to advance equitable education.

Executive Summary

There is an urgent need to better understand and respond to the factors impacting the learning and wellbeing outcomes of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds particularly in the context of the current teacher shortage, and other factors brought on by and exacerbated by COVID-19 and other additional stressors impacting the health and wellbeing of students and education system.

This submission recommends a range of whole-of-school strategies and approaches to social inclusion and wellbeing, as well as new measures for better understanding need and targeting funding for programs to address the learning and mental health concerns of Victorian students from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CMY recommend that the Victorian Government:

- (1) Address issues of educational inequity by implementing ABS national standards for data collection to support schools' data collection and reporting on culture, language and ethnicity to ensure:
 - Trends in refugee and migrant background student learning outcomes can be accurately identified.
 - Existing EAL Index funding categories are better targeted to capture EAL learners who may not be receiving appropriate loading because of how refugee-like background and disadvantage indicators are currently captured.
 - Additional factors, beyond EAL, that are impacting on student learning outcomes are identified and used to determine an additional category of SRP Equity funding. This would target students who don't face the EAL hurdle but experience other barriers, including multiple disadvantage where they would require additional support.

This additional funding is used to support deployment of roles, like Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) and culturally specific MEAs, to improve support to students and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are not eligible for EAL Index funding.
- (2) Improve English language learning support by:
 - Leading the development of national standards to measure, identify and report on English proficiency and progress.
 - Mandating that initial teacher education (ITE) programs include training on differentiated EAL/D instruction for migrant and refugee learners to ensure all EAL learners are adequately supported in every state schools.¹
- (3) Fund Out-of-School-Hours learning support programs (OSHLs) to provide additional support to refugee and migrant background students to bridge the learning gap. As an existing but poorly

¹ Australian Council of TESOL Associations. (2022). National Roadmap for English as an Additional Language or Dialect Education in Schools Directions for COVID-19 Recovery and Program Reform. Pp.11. <https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf>

resourced program, OSHLPs have demonstrated benefits for student learning as support students to catch up without taking teachers out of classroom

- (4) Ensure schools are providing families with relevant information about school impacts on teaching and support within the school environment so parents understand issues and challenges, and how these may impact on their children
 - Patterns and usage of CRTs must be reported on in school annual reports to ensure parents understand where consistent teaching staff are not available, the resourcing capacity of schools to address teaching shortages, and to ensure they have access to information that impacts upon the learning outcomes of their children.
- (5) Invest in improved culturally responsive practice in all government schools through:
 - Mandatory Culturally Responsive Practice CPDs, including offerings to CRTs.
 - Creating and embedding a Framework for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education and Wellbeing within government schools. This should draw on expert advice and the experiences of young people themselves, and using a strengths-based approach, it should affirm students' cultural identities and acknowledge the diversity of skills, knowledge and expertise multicultural students bring to their education experiences.
- (6) Support schools to implement anti-racism best practice by:
 - Funding and scaling up models such as Schools Standing Up to Racism that support schools to address racism and discrimination in their school environment.
 - Providing training opportunities to all school staff to adequately implement anti-racism practices in their schools.
 - Establishing compulsory anti-racism strategies at every government school that is distinct but related to a bullying policy.
 - Learning from other jurisdictions, including NSW where the NSW Government's Anti-racism Policy commits all NSW public schools to address and eradicate racism.
- (7) Better resource and support school wellbeing programs and coordinators to:
 - Establish and sustain partnerships and collaborations with community and services to connect young people to wrap-around services that they can access within and outside of school.
 - Further develop school referral systems to existing local services, in partnership with services already working in schools like Navigator, SFYS and others, to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds access appropriate, timely and relevant support.
 - Mandatory training and support for wellbeing workers and coordinators in cultural responsive practice to respond to students with diverse needs.

TOR 1: Trends in student learning outcomes from Prep including but not limited to:

a) the factors that have contributed to decline

It is difficult to identify ‘trends’ in student learning outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds as there is insufficient data collected relating to this population, or differentiation within the data collected, to adequately identify and report on “factors that have contributed to decline” for the refugee and migrant background youth cohort we work with.

Current practices of collecting empirical data on students from refugee and migrant backgrounds in NAPLAN, the key tool utilised to assess educational outcomes in Australia, are limited. Concerns have been raised by others about how language background other than English (LBOTE) data in NAPLAN is used.² These concerns relate to how this overarching category obscures the potential influence cultural and linguistic diversity can have upon learning outcomes, and how the category lumps together students with quite unique learning needs – for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with students from refugee backgrounds and children born in Australia but who mainly speak a language other than English at home.³

Current data collection practices also impact upon the identification of students for SRP funding. For students who are not eligible for EAL Index funding we believe the collection of more detailed data would allow for the assessment of other factors contributing to refugee and migrant background students learning outcomes. This could identify additional support and educational needs not tied to English acquisition for refugee and migrant background students.

Additionally, to be useful, and provide critical information about what is impacting upon education outcomes, it is necessary that LBOTE is supplemented with information about a student’s level of language and literacy. This is because the basic marker of ‘LBOTE’ effectively hides migrant and refugee students who are still developing their English skills among those who are proficient. We applaud the Government’s recent commitment to fund an additional \$37.9 million for the 2024 school year to meet EAL learners in Victoria. However, this funding must be targeted using stronger data collection that ensures that no EAL learner falls through the gaps.

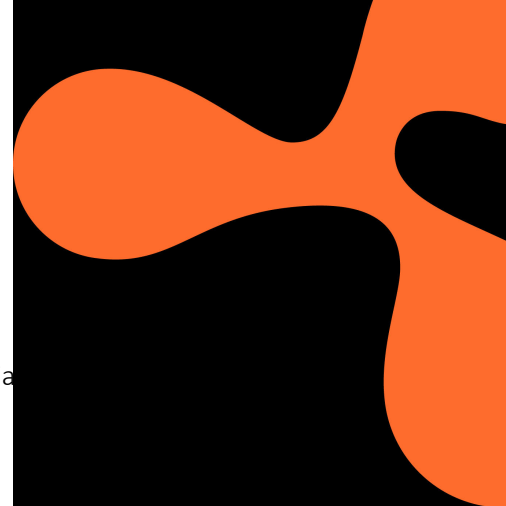
As we stated in our 2015 submission to the ‘Education State’ Inquiry, there needs to be greater detail in the data captured around refugee and migrant status including:

- country of birth,

² Parr, G, Diamond, F, Keary, A & Bradfield, K. (2022, November 07). What AERO’s report of writing development in Australia doesn’t want to talk about. Monash University. <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2022/11/07/1385245/what-aeros-report-of-writing-development-in-australia-doesnt-want-to-talk-about>

³ Parr, G, Diamond, F, Keary, A & Bradfield, K. (2022, November 07). What AERO’s report of writing development in Australia doesn’t want to talk about. Monash University. <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2022/11/07/1385245/what-aeros-report-of-writing-development-in-australia-doesnt-want-to-talk-about>

- parent’s country of birth,
- languages spoken at home,
- the number of years spent in education prior to arriving in Australia
- English language proficiency.⁴



While NAPLAN does not collect any other information (to LBOTE) on refugee or migrant students background, PISA testing attempts to calculate socio-economic status (SES) and ethnic background, and collects information such as: economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), immigration status, language spoken at home, age of arrival, and country of origin.⁵ As we stated in 2015, this additional data on student background is important for schools, and the Department of Education to have more accurate information to deliver targeted programs and services.

Concerns about the adequacy of current data also extends beyond how it is used to measure outcomes from formal assessments to data collection and school enrolment processes. We understand anecdotally that at enrolment the information collected by schools is limited, and newly settled parents do not always feel comfortable sharing information that would be useful in delivering services to students (e.g. academic history, health, family perceptions, and views regarding education) or may inadvertently provide incorrect information to schools when interpreters and other supports are not adequately utilised.

As noted in CMY’s best practice guide ‘Opening the School Gate’, migrant and refugee families may have limited time for school involvement due to many barriers including: work commitments, financial pressures, language barriers and knowledge of the school system.⁶ The ‘Opening the School Gate’ and ‘Opening the Digital School Gate’⁷ resources provide teachers and schools with tools and strategies to engage families from migrant and refugee backgrounds to fully participate in school. These guides assist schools to identify how the needs of different migrant and refugee families vary despite having some similar experiences and needs.

By facilitating an environment where parents are meaningfully engaged with the school, in a way that is not only related to disciplinary issues or crisis-focused, schools facilitate a three-way partnership between students, the school and the family.⁸ When such relationships exist, the possibility of obtaining quality empirical data drastically improves. If better empirical and qualitative data was captured, teachers would be better equipped with essential information to target their teaching to assist students based on their specific needs, and levels of language and literacy.⁹

⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2015). Submission to The Victorian Government’s Consultation regarding the Education State, Carlton, CMY.

⁵ OECD (2019). *PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b25efab8-en>

⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2016). *Opening the school gate*. Carlton: CMY. Pp.5 <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/opening-the-school-gate-engaging-multicultural-families-in-schools/>

⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2021(a)). *Opening the digital school gate: Engaging migrant and refugee families*. CMY: Carlton. https://cmy.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Opening-the-Digital-School-Gate_2021.pdf

⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2016).

⁹ Goss. P & Hunter. J. (2015). *Targeted Teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning*. [Report]. Grattan Institute. *Targetted Teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning*. [Report]. Grattan Institute. <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/827-Targetted-Teaching.pdf>

The absence of standards for schools around the collection and reporting of data on culture, language and migrant backgrounds makes it impossible to form a clear picture of trends in student learning outcomes for a significant proportion (48% of Victoria's youth population were born overseas or in 2021)¹⁰ of Victoria's student population.

CMY raised many of these concerns almost a decade ago in our submission to the 2015 State Government consultation on the 'Education State' and we again reiterate that:

*"in order for Victoria to become the Education State and to ensure equity, it is critical that educational data concerning young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is collected, analysed and made publicly available."*¹¹

RECOMMENDATION 1

Address issues of educational inequity by implementing ABS national standards for data collection to support collection and reporting on culture, language and ethnicity to ensure:

Trends in refugee and migrant background student learning outcomes can be accurately identified.

Existing EAL Index funding categories are better targeted to capture EAL learners who may not be receiving appropriate loading because of how refugee like background and disadvantage indicators are captured.

Additional factors, beyond EAL, that are impacting on student learning outcomes are identified and used to determine an additional category of SRP Equity funding. This would target students who don't face the EAL hurdle but experience other barriers, including multiple disadvantage where they would require additional support.

This additional funding is used to support deployment of roles, like Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) and culturally specific MEAs, to improve support to students and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are not eligible for EAL Index funding.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Improve English language learning support by:

Leading the development of national standards to measure, identify and report on English proficiency and progress.

*Mandating that initial teacher education (ITE) programs include training on differentiated EAL/D instruction for migrant and refugee learners to ensure all EAL learners are adequately supported in every state schools.*¹²

¹⁰ Forthcoming – Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2023). *A Young and Multicultural Victoria: The 2021, Census*, Carlton: CMY.

¹¹ CMY (2015).

¹² Australian Council of TESOL Associations. (2022). National Roadmap for English as an Additional Language or Dialect Education in Schools Directions for COVID-19 Recovery and Program Reform. Pp.11. <https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf>

b) disparities correlated with geography and socio-economic disadvantage

Disparities arising from geographical and socio-economic disadvantage have been exaggerated for students from migrant and refugee backgrounds since the COVID-19 pandemic (COVID-19).¹³ Anecdotally, students who were disengaged and falling behind at school are falling further behind their peers now. In the Grattan Institute's 2023 report 'Tackling Under-Achievement', they noted that 'disadvantaged children tend to start school well behind their advantaged peers, and the gap only gets wider with every year of schooling.'¹⁴ The transition to remote learning during COVID-19 magnified the existing inequities in education. In the MYAN National Education Roundtable Briefing Paper 'Education and Students from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds', they outlined how home-based learning exacerbated pre-existing challenges for students from this specific cohort. In particular they highlighted how the closure of educational support programs and the loss of additional support programs and services i.e. homework clubs, Multicultural Educational Aides (MEAs)/bicultural workers greatly impacted some of the most disadvantaged students.¹⁵

Many young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face unique and compounding challenges that are further driving the education gap with their peers. We also know there is a compounding effect when a young person experiences multiple factors known to negatively impact learning outcomes, and that many newly arrived students and families from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds often settle initially in areas of low socio-economic status, often due to the availability of affordable housing and services.¹⁶ We must evaluate whether existing equity measures adequately captures all young people who need support, the intersecting factors impacting upon their education outcomes, and if the resourcing provided is effective in supporting these students to mitigate barriers to learning.

We are concerned that inequities in our education system prior to COVID-19 have slowly become a chasm and additional targeted interventions are now necessary to address this. The Government must better resource and fund specific interventions to enable young people who fell further behind during COVID-19 to catch up. Evidence shows that government funding to private schools has increased almost twice as much as funding to public schools in the decade since the Gonski review recommended the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).¹⁷ In some instances, private schools are overfunded up to 20% over their SRS entitlement.¹⁸

¹³ MYAN. (2020). The National Education Roundtable: Education and students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, Briefing Paper, pp. 16. https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/education_issue_05.pdf

¹⁴ Sonnemann. J. & Hunter. J. (2023). *Tackling underachievement: Why Australia should embed high-quality small group tuition in schools* [Report]. Grattan Institute. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/tackling-under-achievement/>

¹⁵ MYAN. (2020). The National Education Roundtable: Education and students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, Briefing Paper, pp. 16. https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/education_issue_05.pdf

¹⁶ CMY. (2023 forthcoming). A young and multicultural Victoria: the 2021 Census. Available at www.cmy.net.au.

¹⁷ Cassidy. C. (2023, October 09). Almost Half of Private School Parents Would Consider Switching to a Better Funded Public System, Survey Finds. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/09/almost-half-of-private-school-parents-would-consider-switching-to-a-better-funded-public-system-survey-finds>

¹⁸ Peace. M (2023, June 29). Forget Victoria's private school tax uproar – public school students are still being shortchanged. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/29/forget-victoria-private-school-tax-uproar-public-school-students-being-shortchanged>



Students who experience disadvantage tend to start school behind their peers, and their schooling.¹⁹ Once a young person falls behind at school, they struggle to catch up. A report analysed by the Grattan Institute shows that the learning gap between disadvantaged students more than doubles in reading and numeracy between Year 3 and Year 5.

To combat existing inequity within the education system and to bridge the gap between disadvantaged students, and their more advantaged peers, the Government must increase funding to disadvantaged schools, and resource specific interventions that enable young people to catch up. The Grattan Institute reports that ‘typically about 20 per cent of students will need additional intensive learning support, on top of universal classroom instruction, to develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills’.²²

Small group tuition, (such as Out-of-school-hours learning support programs (OSHLSP)) can help close learning gaps for students who are struggling and falling behind.²³ This support should draw on existing resources, and not remove teachers from classrooms. It should also leverage existing programs that have strong relationships with communities and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who may not have other supports outside of the school environment.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Fund Out-of-School-Hours learning support programs that demonstrated their capacity to support refugee and migrant background students to bridge the learning gap. As an existing but poorly resourced program, OSHPs have not only demonstrated benefits for student learning and wellbeing, but also support for students to catch up without taking teachers out of classrooms.

CASE STUDY: OUT-OF-SCHOOL-HOURS LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMS (OSHLSP)

OSHLPS (often called homework clubs) offer young people learning assistance, outside of school. CMY provides support to over 365 programs. Many students who attend OSHLSP are newly arrived or have families who are refugees or have asylum seeker or migrant backgrounds. OSHLSP can play a key role in connecting with families who may be difficult to engage in other ways. OSHLSP provides high quality learning support to children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families. They also assist families to better support their children’s learning at home.²⁴ The projects facilitate two-way learning and engagement between schools and families, to improve students’ learning

¹⁹ Sonnemann, J. & Hunter, J. (2023). *Tackling underachievement: Why Australia should embed high-quality small group tuition in schools* [Report]. Grattan Institute. P.p7. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/tackling-under-achievement/>


²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. Pp.6.

²⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2017(b)). Submission to the Victorian Government’s Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. <https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/documents/document-file/2020-12/centre-for-multicultural-youth.pdf>



and wellbeing outcomes. They can include ongoing groups, or a series of short-term interactive workshops, and can be held before, during or after school.²⁵ By helping students develop social, communication and academic skills in an informal setting, they contribute to students' wellbeing and confidence, which can lead to greater participation in classroom settings and in education generally.

A CMY literature review of OSHLSPs identified several strong outcomes including:

- the opportunity for students to gain English language and study skills, which contribute to confidence and academic achievement
- improved school engagement, leading to better social connections and self-esteem²⁶

As discussed in detail in our forthcoming OSHLP Sector Evaluation Report, Banksia Gardens After-School Program (Banksia Gardens) has been operating for 17 years and many of the participants are from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Banksia Gardens implements a range of strategies and takes a holistic approach to support students with complex needs. It places students at the centre of the program and promotes their agency and self-determination. It employs trauma-informed approaches to engage young people, and to facilitate pathways into learning.

Student case study:²⁷

I would say confidence and feeling of belonging are the most significant benefits for students. That would vary from one student to another, depending on unmet needs. For some, it is to get education support. We have been able to provide a range of achievements. On the other end of the spectrum there are four children with difficulties who come from a traumatic migration experience and difficult home life. We assessed the unmet needs, and we focused on engagement. They have high energy. They want to be involved, but sometimes it spills over into fights. I've talked to the school's wellbeing worker to develop a range of strategies, and we are constantly looking at ways to get results. The change for them will be engagement with education.

The program also supports families, parents of students and communities more broadly. Parent support groups are run concurrently with the homework club and allows parents to support each other.

Despite the benefits of OSHLPs, and the Banksia Gardens program specifically, they are under-resourced, and the sector is forced to rely on small-scale grants. OSHLPs, and student wellbeing and learning outcomes would greatly benefit from ongoing sustainable funding.

Reliance on casual relief teachers (CRT)

We are not aware of any publicly available data which monitors the locations and frequency of CRT use across Victoria despite calls for a register of this information in 2012.²⁸ However, 90% of school principals have reported that they are experiencing teacher shortages.²⁹ Without data specifically identifying where these shortage, and use of CRTs, is most acute, it is difficult to adequately explore the impact this factor may be having on student learning outcomes. However, we do know how important building trust and rapport

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2012). *The Benefits of Homework Programs: A Summary of the Evidence*, Learning Beyond the Bell, Carlton: CMY; Further key learnings are addressed in our forthcoming report *Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2023). OSHLP Sector Evaluation Report*, CMY: Carlton.

²⁷ Forthcoming Centre for Multicultural Youth (2023), pp. 13.

²⁸ Victorian Auditor General's Office. (2012, April). *Report on Casual Relief Teacher Arrangements*. Victorian Auditor General's Office. (No. 117). <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/casual-relief-teacher-arrangements?section>

²⁹ Australian Education Union. (2023). *AEU State of our Schools Survey 2023*, cited in 'Investing in Australia's Future: For Every Child, Fully Funded Public Schools'. https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/infographic-the-growing-problem-of-teacher-shortages?utm_source=CM&utm_medium=Bulletin&utm_campaign=26Sept

with classroom teachers and educators is for student wellbeing, and the particular relationship for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.³⁰ We also understand that educational outcomes can emerge when students experience high teacher turnover, and about the impact of the over-reliance on CRTs in the current context arising out of COVID-19. Schools are plugging gaps by assigning classes to teachers which they are not qualified for. In worst cases, we have heard of some classes having a CRT for the entire schooling year. From the evidence, we understand that when CRTs take classes there is often little to no regard for the needs of students.³² While we are not aware of evidence demonstrating a direct correlation between over-reliance on CRTs and student learning outcomes (given the short-term nature of casual relief teaching), when young people feel their needs are not met, they are more likely to feel disengaged. Disengagement with school and poor wellbeing in turn impacts learning outcomes.³³

We are concerned about how socio-economic and geographic factors are likely impacting the over-reliance of CRTs. Anecdotally we are aware that schools which are not well-resourced have a greater reliance on CRTs compared to better funded schools who are able to draw on other resources within their school or community to plug teacher gaps. For example, a 2022 article into teacher shortages reported that to cover the full roster at Lyndhurst Primary School, the school was forced to combine classrooms and have an unqualified teaching student teach classes, as well as redeploying teachers from specialist tutoring programs.³⁴ Lyndhurst Primary School is in the Greater Dandenong local government area (LGA), we know from the SEIFA index that this LGA experiences relatively high socio-economic disadvantage and has one of the highest levels of migrant populations in the state.³⁵ The intersection of teacher shortages in areas of high migrant and newly arrived population settlement has the potential to result in some of our most in need students not receiving adequate support and resources to support educational success and to achieve full and equal participation in Australian society in the long-term.

We understand from our work within schools that the teacher shortage is exacerbated by the need for more classroom teachers, often those with a lot of experience and skills, being redeployed to other roles such as 'wellbeing coordinators'. We have also heard of experienced teachers taking employment opportunities in more well-resourced schools because of an opening up of opportunities in their roster by the redeployment of teaching staff into these roles. We heard about concerns that many experienced and skilled teachers from more disadvantaged schools were moving to more well-resourced schools, with the capacity to fill their rosters and offer other benefits to educators. If factual, this raises serious concerns for the potential to further entrench existing inequities between relatively advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

³⁰ Cerna, L. (2019). Refugee Education: Integration Models and Practices in OECD Countries (OECD Education Working Paper No. 203). Directorate for Education and Skills.

³¹ Deakin University. (2022, July 07). *Teacher shortage sparks fears for Aussie student's learning outcomes*. [Media Release].

<https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/news-and-media-releases/articles/teacher-shortage-sparks-fears-for-aussie-students-learning-outcomes>

³² Precel, N & Heffernan, M. (2022, August 26). Revolving door of teachers most affects students with special needs. *The Age*.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/revolving-door-of-teachers-most-affects-students-with-special-needs-20220819-p5bb5d.html>

³³ Goss, P., Sonnemann, J & Griffiths, K. (2017). *Engaging students: Creating classrooms that improve learning*. Grattan Institute (2017-01).

<https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Engaging-students-creating-classrooms-that-improve-learning.pdf>

³⁴ Precel, N (2022, May 30). Sick school reality: Half the kids are missing, principal is teaching prep. *The Age*.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/sick-school-reality-half-the-kids-are-missing-principal-is-teaching-prep-20220527-p5a0z5.html>

³⁵ Forthcoming – Centre for Multicultural Youth (2023).

While we welcome the Victorian Government's initiative to encourage more teachers and acknowledge that this is a long-term solution, there is a need to deliver interventions that need them most.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure schools are providing families with relevant information about school resourcing gaps and impacts on teaching and support within the school environment to ensure they can understand issues and challenges, and how these may impact on their children/young people.

Patterns and usage of CRTs must be reported on in school annual reports to ensure parents understand where consistent teaching staff are not available, the resourcing capacity of schools to address teaching shortages, and to ensure they have access to information that impacts upon the learning outcomes of their children.



TOR 2: the state of the teaching profession in Victoria limited to

b) training, accreditation and professional development teaching students with special needs;

Culturally responsive practice (CRP) training

There is an urgent need for more culturally responsive practice (CRP) teaching content in pre-service teaching education/initial teacher education (ITE). Through CMY's education programs, we understand that schools and teachers report feeling ill-equipped to meet the needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This cohort of young people are increasingly vulnerable to disengagement from school due to a lack of capacity to meet their specific needs.³⁶

In consultations conducted by CMY's Le Mana team, we have found that educational disengagement can be driven by a lack of cultural safety, and experiences of discouragement and exclusion in education, insufficient support for young people and their families to engage with schools, and a lack of culturally relevant curriculum.³⁷ A lack of appropriate cultural responsiveness and awareness of the impacts of refugee and migrant student experiences can mean that the behaviours of young people can be misinterpreted, and their needs are then not identified early enough. We have found that this can be more pronounced for particularly vulnerable young people whose parents/guardians may feel unable or unsupported to navigate the education system and advocate for assistance and supports.³⁸

In the recent 'Australian Teachers' Survey 2023: Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development' published by Monash University, it was found that only 68% of teachers said they had regular continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities. While we are encouraged that the Department of Education is "increasing teacher and student awareness and understanding of different cultures and the refugee experience" to create supportive school environments,³⁹ increasing student engagement and wellbeing requires a more systematic approach. We also note that while teachers should be required to complete compulsory CRP CPD, they should be adequately supported such that this professional development becomes part of their work, rather than a further demand on their already strained resources and workload.⁴⁰

³⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2017(a)). Submission to the Federal Government's Inquiry into the Settlement Outcomes of Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds. Pp.21. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=4189091b-dac6-4895-8b75-ea9f92a6ce1&subId=463724>

³⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2021). Casey Pasifika Community Youth Justice Consultations, Carlton: CMY. <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/casey-pasifika-community-youth-justice-consultations/>

³⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2017(b)).

³⁹ Department of Education and Training. (2019). Submission to the Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of CALD Communities. https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/4a4c60/contentassets/3bab387080dd40c995206a07df1e2a80/submission-documents/019_2019.10.11---department-of-education-and-training.pdf

⁴⁰ Ellis, V., Cooper, R., Jenkins, L & Blannin, J. (2023). *Australian Teachers' Survey 2023: Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development*. Monash University. Pp. 12. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-09/apo-nid324378.pdf>

RECOMMENDATION 5

Invest in improved culturally responsive practice in all government schools through:

Mandatory Culturally Responsive Practice CPDs, including offerings to CRTs and tailored offerings for Wellbeing Team members.

Creating and embedding a Framework for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education and Wellbeing within schools. This should draw on expert advice and the experiences of young people themselves, and using a strengths-based approach, it should affirm students' cultural identities and acknowledge the diversity of skills, knowledge and expertise multicultural students bring to their education experiences.

CASE STUDY: CULTURALLY SUSTAINING SCHOOLS (CSS)⁴¹

CSS is a program developed and delivered by CMY targeting school leadership, and is delivered over a three hour workshop. This program seeks to actively cultivate schools and learning spaces that helps students to bring their cultures with them as a strength, rather than only responding to problems as they arise.

The program invites participants to critically reflect on the barriers that some students face in bringing their culture and identity to school, and to assess the assumptions we bring into practice. An underpinning principle of CSS is that we learn best when values, beliefs and attitudes are recognised as strengths contributing to learning. The aim of the program is to support school staff to develop a shared vision of teaching and learning, that builds on the diverse cultures students bring to school and support students to engage with the diversity of cultures within the school. CSS works with schools to unpack the barriers that students face in bringing their cultures with them as strengths for learning (e.g. prejudice, discrimination and cultural hegemony).

For example in addressing cultural hegemony within schools, one school sought input from families about key dates for a 'celebration' calendar. By inviting collaboration with the broader school community the school leadership created a more inclusive environment by seeking to understand different students' backgrounds and cultures.

⁴¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (n.d.). Culturally Sustaining Schools. <https://www.cmy.net.au/organisations-businesses/education/support-for-schools/>



Anti-racism

There is an urgent need in schools for more anti-racism training and development affecting students in schools across Victoria, with negative impacts on student learning, health and inclusion. Since the beginning of 2020, reports of racism have increased, with 85 percent of multicultural young people reporting experiencing at least one instance of direct racism since the pandemic started, while indirect, or vicarious racism involving third-party exposure was experienced by 93 percent of young people.⁴²

Through our work in schools, staff have advised us that they have not had adequate training to possess the skills, knowledge or confidence to prevent and respond to racism in their school. Similarly, students consistently express a lack of confidence in their schools to effectively address racism. In consultations held in 2022 with over 250 students across Victoria, racism was an issue raised in every consultation session.⁴³

To address the issue, CMY have advocated for and developed tools and resources to support a whole-of-school approach, such as [Schools Standing Up to Racism \(SSUR\)](#), as schools need tailored and sustained support to effectively implement best practice strategies. These best practice strategies should be scaled across Victoria to respond to racism where it arises within schools.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Support schools to implement anti-racism best practice by:

Funding and scaling up models such as Schools Standing Up to Racism that support schools to address racism and discrimination in their school environment.

Providing training opportunities to all school staff to adequately implement anti-racism practices in their schools.

Establishing compulsory anti-racism strategies at every government school that is distinct but related to a bullying policy.

Learning from other jurisdictions, including NSW where the NSW Government's Anti-racism Policy commits all NSW public schools to address and eradicate racism

⁴² Doery, K., Guerra, G., Kenny, E., Harriott, L. & Priest, N. (2020). *Hidden Cost: Young Multicultural Victorians and COVID-19*. Melbourne, Victoria: CMY. https://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Hidden-Cost-Young-Multicultural-Victorians-and-COVID-19_FULL-REPORT-Oct2020.pdf

⁴³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2022). Consultations. (Unpublished internal document).

CASE STUDY: SCHOOLS STANDING UP TO RACISM (SSUR) www.cmy.net.au/schools-standing-up-to-racism/

CMY's SSUR program, is centred on the development of resources to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders in Victorian schools to address racism, and build a culture of belonging. SSUR promotes a whole-of-school approach which encourages and supports student voice to create meaningful and sustainable change, and recognises the need for students, school staff and leadership to be involved.⁴⁴

In creating SSUR, CMY consulted widely across the organisation and externally with young people, community workers, teachers and academic experts. A common theme arising from these consultations was the varying levels of understanding of racism and discrimination amongst teachers. We have heard of clear prejudices displayed by some school staff and the lack of/inadequate responses by schools to complaints, thus perpetuating students' experiences of racism.

CMY offers two workshops to schools, and an additional information session, targeted at school leadership and wellbeing staff who are responsible for leading anti-racism work within school communities. The objectives are for schools to:

- understand, identify and address systemic and interpersonal racism,
- build cultures of belonging and intercultural capability across the school community, and
- enable collective action of school communities to create a positive impact on their environment.

For example, one of the resources provided during the workshops is in relation to facilitating conversations about racism. The workshops provides tools and suggestions to assist school staff gain confidence in addressing racism and discrimination. It further promotes the creation of a school policy addressing racism specifically as opposed to being located within broader anti-bullying policies.⁴⁵

For example, a school in the inner north have recently created an anti-racism action group with teachers across different subject areas, and parents. The action group meet once a term and are working to create an anti-racism policy and are investigating the school's culture of diversity and belonging through the LEAD school based audit. These actions, recommended in the 'Inclusive School Action Plan' resource⁴⁶ highlight how ongoing work is required for sustainable change within school environments.

A successful example of a school participating in SSUR and subsequently embedding inclusion within their school practices is that of 'School C'. In reviewing their policies and practices, School C considered the degree to which they may be inherently inclusive or discriminatory. The school identified that their school uniform reflected the needs and requirements of a dominant culture, and whilst alternative options were available for students with different cultural requirements, they were "additions" and not part of the core uniform. The school reflected how this may inadvertently send a message that there is a "cultural norm" within the school, and that students who sit outside of this norm are different, separate or an after-thought. As a result School C incorporated what were previously "additions" into the official school uniform including hijabs, ankle length skirts, turbans and non-gendered trousers and shorts. In doing so, these items were matched to school colours, patterns and displayed the school logo. School C noted that these actions were well-received by the students and families, and contributed to a sense of cohesiveness within the school.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (n.d(c)). Schools Standing Up to Racism. <https://www.cmy.net.au/schools-standing-up-to-racism/>

⁴⁵ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2020(a)). Commit to eliminating and preventing racism and discrimination in your school: Develop a Policy to Address Racism. https://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Policy-Fact-Sheet_A4-Booklet.pdf

⁴⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2023). Creating inclusive school communities where racism and discrimination is proactively prevented and effectively addressed – Action Plan. https://cmy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Creating-Inclusive-School-Communities_Action-Plan.pdf

⁴⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2020(c)). Policies in Practice Case Studies. <http://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Policies-In-Practice-Case-Studies.pdf>

a) the adequacy of the Department of Education’s measures for teachers;

Expectation on teachers to perform many roles due to limited resources

We have observed through our work with young people, families and schools that as a result of limited resources (e.g. time and staffing constraints and additional responsibilities placed within schools), there can be an unreasonable expectation on teachers to act as mental health practitioners, youth workers and multicultural education aides for students. As addressed in CMY’s 2019 submission to the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into the ‘Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health’, a number of factors are working to place increasing pressure on teaching staff to respond to mental health and wellbeing concerns of students in education settings, despite teachers often reporting that they are time-poor and ill-equipped to handle these needs.⁴⁸ It is inappropriate to place this burden on teachers, and it can also result in negative impacts on the quality and time spent teaching and even in young people receiving inappropriate care and further deterring them from seeking help.

Classroom teachers should be supported to make culturally appropriate and responsive referrals, and not navigate welfare and mental health issues in classrooms. As we discuss further below, long waiting periods to access mental health and other wellbeing supports following referrals is resulting in teachers being forced to handle student welfare issues, which is outside the remit of their roles. We are also aware that some teachers are feeling overburdened by the additional requirements to assess and undertake administrative tasks to support student referrals. This has arisen from what we understand is a change in how some student assessments for support and referral are now being managed. While we welcome the introduction of the mental health workers in schools program, and broader mental health reform measures that aim to increase the workforce and address long wait times for youth mental health services, immediate action is required to shift some of the burden from teachers and allow them to teach.

Where this is the current state of education and welfare in Victoria, there is an urgent need to provide interim supports for teachers and schools to support and promote the wellbeing of students. This should be implemented through initiatives such as youth workers in schools, who are responsible for referral processes and follow up, taking this burden off teachers. This is especially critical for students who currently do not have continuity of educators with whom they can establish trusting relationships. As recommended above, additional funding for under-resourced schools and those with high refugee and migrant background student populations is crucial. This funding enables schools to hire essential support staff like MEAs, ensuring the wellbeing of students and educators.

⁴⁸ MYAN & CMY. (2019). Submission to the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health. <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/cmy-submission-productivity-commission-mh-inquiry.pdf>

RECOMMENDATION 7

Better resource and support for school wellbeing programs and coordinators to:

Establish and sustain partnerships and collaboration with community and services to connect young people to wrap-around services that they can access within and outside of school.

Further develop referral systems to local services, in partnership with services already working in schools like Navigator, SFYS and others, to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds access timely and relevant support that sticks.

Mandatory training and support for wellbeing workers and coordinators in cultural responsive practice to respond to students with diverse needs.

CASE STUDY: YOUTH WORKER IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMS

Latif * 17 yo male from Afghanistan. CMY Multicultural Youth Worker MJ attends Latif's school once a week. MJ facilitated an art program with the classes with an art therapist that run for 4 weeks. MJ explained that she was available on Thursday for any support the students may need. Latif approached MJ and spoke about how he had nothing to do out of school and people teased him about his weight, so he joined a gym. Latif did not understand the contract he was signing as he was very new to Australia and it was not affordable. He had been very stressed and scared to tell his parents that the gym were now sending threatening emails to pay or have debt collectors contact him, the gym said to cancel the contract would be \$300. Latif had only been in Australia for 4 months and his parents were very stressed without jobs and worried about the family. MJ had Latif forward the emails to her and with his permission contacted the gym. MJ explained that he had signed a contract that he shouldn't have been allowed to sign. The gym, after negotiation, agreed to waive the cancellation fees and Latif had to pay a \$20 late fee only.

MJ contacted another NFP who run sports activities and found a free gym and swimming program for young people aged 16-25. MJ met with Latif and the worker from the organisation and he had an induction and tour of the facilities. MJ saw Latif at school a few weeks later and he said he had been going to the gym after or before school most days and he now had some friends interested in coming along so they were signed up too.

Latif has taken ownership on collecting names of other students to pass onto MJ to get them involved and assists them in explaining which bus to catch there, the gym rules and all they need to know. There are now regularly about 15 young men and some women who go as a group to the gym thanks to Latif. Teachers at school have been very keen to tell MJ that Latif seems much happier with himself as he has become healthier and the responsibility he has taken on himself to organise other students.

*not real name

b) the impact of school leadership on student well outcomes and school culture;

Anti-racism

Further to the SSUR case study above, school leadership teams play an important role in identifying and promoting a culture where racism and discrimination is identified and effectively addressed where it arises. The SSUR program explicitly works with school leadership and wellbeing teams as they are critical in shaping school cultures.

While SSUR adopts a 'whole-of-school' approach to addressing racism and discrimination, the onus of responsibility sits with the school leadership to proactively establish a commitment to anti-racism within schools, including anti-racism education, and the implementation of policies and systems which effectively address racism and discrimination.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Support schools to implement anti-racism best practice by:

Funding and scaling up models such as Schools Standing Up to Racism that support schools to address racism and discrimination in their school environment.

Providing training opportunities to all school staff to adequately implement anti-racism practices in their schools.

Establishing compulsory anti-racism strategies at every government school that is distinct but related to a bullying policy.

Learning from other jurisdictions, such as NSW where the Anti-racism Policy applies to all NSW public school employees and students.

CASE STUDY: MOHAMED'S STORY ⁴⁹

The video of Mohamed Semra, a former Victorian secondary school student highlights the important role of school leadership in taking a stand to stamp out racism, and promote student wellbeing and inclusive school cultures.

Mohamed talks about how he faced racism inside and outside of the school. When his school's leadership was made aware of the racism Mohamed and his friends faced, his school principal approached him and commenced strategies to assist him to succeed. By creating opportunities for Mohamed, and his friends to fully participate in school through programs such as debating, the school leadership changed the school's culture to be more inclusive.

This case highlights the need for a whole-of-school approach to promote student wellbeing, and the importance of buy-in from school leadership to effectively change school cultures.

⁴⁹ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (n.d(a).) Case Study: *Mohammed's Story* (Video). Carlton: CMY. <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/mohammeds-story-schools-standing-up-to-racism/>

TOR 3: the current state of student wellbeing in Victoria is not limited to the impact of State Government interventions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to address poor student mental health, school refusal, and broader student disengagement



Mental Health

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a diverse cohort with distinct experiences and needs. For example, this cohort includes young people who are newly arrived, those who were born in Australia but who have parents born overseas, and those who have lived in Australia for three or more generations. This cohort also includes young people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, as well as those who have migrated via the family and skilled migration programs. Within this diversity many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can also share some very particular experiences. For example, the shared challenges associated with settling in and building a life in a new country, which can span decades and generations, and experiences of racism and discrimination. We know that these experiences can have very particular impacts upon the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds – for example many young people from refugee backgrounds are vulnerable to mental ill-health, and yet, are underrepresented in mental health services in Australia.⁵⁰

Most young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are incredibly resilient and generally cope well despite the challenges of the refugee and settlement experience.⁵¹ But it is important to recognise that this is a diverse cohort and to understand what it is that contributes a young person's resilience in order to inform adequate education supports and mental health strategies.⁵²

Racism and mental health

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience depression, anxiety and suicidality and this is often interconnected with experiences of discrimination and racism. Discrimination and its resulting disadvantages is one of the key drivers of mental illness in Australia.⁵³ One in four young people aged 18 to 24 from non-English speaking backgrounds report experiences of discrimination.⁵⁴

There are strong links between mental ill-health and experiences of racism and discrimination.⁵⁵ In an ANU and CMY study during COVID-19 lockdowns, 85% of participants from multicultural backgrounds reported experiencing direct racism which in turn affected their mental health and wellbeing.⁵⁶

While young people may require professional mental health intervention, access to these services can be limited due to barriers such as long waiting periods and lack of culturally appropriate services or supports.⁵⁷ CMY recognises that a lack of access to professional mental health services is part of a broader issue of

⁵⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2019). Submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Service System. <http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/CMY.pdf>.

⁵¹ Colucci, E. Szwarc, J. Minas, H. Paxton, G. & Guerra, C. (2014). The utilisation of mental health services by children and young people from a refugee background: a systematic literature review, *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health*, 7(1), 86-108 as cited in Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2019).

⁵² Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2019). Pp. 103.

⁵³ MYAN & CMY. (2019). Pp. 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid pp. 20; World Health Organization, *Social Determinants of Health*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1

⁵⁵ VicHealth. (2014). *Racism and its links to the health of children and young people*. Carlton: VicHealth

⁵⁶ Doery, K., Guerra, G., Kenny, E., Harriott, L. & Priest, N. (2020).

⁵⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2022). Pp. 4.

resourcing for youth-specific mental health services across Australia.⁵⁸ There is a significant increase in youth mental health issues following Covid-19, there has been a significant increase in the number of young people with mental health issues.⁵⁹

It is our understanding that in some schools there has been a high turnover of wellbeing workers. As a result, some students are falling through the cracks. We are concerned about the wellbeing of wellbeing workers within schools, and the resulting issues when they are unable to provide their services. It has been known where students have been referred to the Navigator program (at 70% absence from school due to disengagement) and have told youth workers that they received no support or intervention from their school prior to the referral.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Better resource and support for school wellbeing programs and coordinators to:

Establishing and sustaining partnerships and collaborations with community and services to connect young people to wrap around services that they can access within and outside of school.

Further develop school referral systems, in partnership with services already working in schools like Navigator, SFYS and others, to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds access appropriate, timely and relevant support.

Mandatory training and support for wellbeing workers and co-ordinators in cultural responsive practice to respond to students with diverse needs.

⁵⁸ MYAN & CMY. (2019).

⁵⁹ Sonnemann, J. & Hunter, J. (2021, October 05). Learning the lessons from the long school lockdowns. *Grattan Institute*.
<https://grattan.edu.au/news/learning-the-lessons-from-the-long-school-lockdowns/>

CASE STUDY: REVERB & REVERB 2.0

REVERB is a program run by CMY which addresses mental health in culturally diverse communities through workshops and consultations. It is a family focussed program and uses lived experience to address discrimination and increase confidence in seeking support among young people and their families. The program also shares knowledge with adults in migrant and refugee communities about stigma around mental health and barriers to accessing services.⁶⁰

The design of REVERB aligns with best practice principles of being co-designed, culturally appropriate and tailored to the local context.⁶¹ In a 2022 independent evaluation of the program, service providers, school staff and students all highlighted the need for programs to combine mental health, youth voices and culturally appropriate voices. There are few programs like REVERB which meet this need.⁶²

CMY are currently working alongside headspace to launch 'REVERB 2.0' in 2024, arising from the fact that multicultural young people are *still* under-represented in Australia's youth mental health services.⁶³ Through partnering together, we hope to increase the reach and impact of REVERB to increase the number of multicultural young people accessing, and benefitting from mental health services. The program aims to leverage the success and learnings of the REVERB pilot, and to serve as a best practice, evidence based model which creates increased awareness of cultural responsiveness among clinicians, health networks and community agencies. CMY along with headspace intend to leverage its connections with multicultural communities to deliver its impact. For example CMY works closely with communities from Pasifika and South Sudanese backgrounds across two flagship programs (Le Mana and Community Support Groups) enabling effective embedding of this program within key cohorts. Working with bi-cultural workers, these programs engage young people and their families with early interventions to meaningfully participate in education, employment and civic society.

REVERB 2.0 will:

- deliver broad reaching, short term interventions to establish widespread foundational knowledge within target cohorts e.g. 'workshops in schools' series reaching 1,500 young people and CRP professional development for up to 500 service providers,
- engage multicultural young people as youth advocates to collaborate on the project, and deliver project activities including the co-facilitation of workshops, and
- provide employment pathways to multicultural youth advocates and lived experience youth facilitators.

⁶⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (n.d.(d)). *Reverb – Culturally responsive mental health and wellbeing for school communities*. Carlton: CMY. <https://www.cmy.net.au/organisations-businesses/education/support-for-schools/reverb-mental-health/>; Centre for Multicultural Youth (2023) Internal document (Unpublished internal document).; For more information see: <https://www.cmy.net.au/organisations-businesses/education/support-for-schools/reverb-mental-health/>

⁶¹ ACIL ALLEN. (2022 March). *REVERB Evaluation: Amplifying the voices of young people in mental health* [Evaluation Report]. <https://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ACIL-Allen-Evaluation-of-CMYs-REVERB-Final-Report.pdf>

⁶² Ibid pp. 21.

⁶³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2019).

School Refusal

While there has been an influx in discourse around “school refusal”, this has been impacting young people from migrant and refugee background for years. ‘School refusal’ was coined to understand young people’s underlying reasoning for not attending school and poor mental health etc.⁶⁴ However, the more common phrase for students from these backgrounds who are not attending school is “truancy” or “absenteeism” as their absences are often not recognised through formal processes as ‘authorised’, often because their parents may not provide schools with information about their child’s absence. While there is little current research exploring the links between school disengagement and mental health within this particular cohort, and how this may be underrepresented as school refusal and the causes of this, we do know that students from migrant and refugee backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to mental ill health, a recognized factor in increased reporting of school refusal in Australia.⁶⁵ Additionally, there is a significant overlap between truancy and school refusal.⁶⁶ We consider some of the factors that require further exploration and response below.

The terminology of school ‘refusal’ is anecdotally used more frequently in schools from areas of high socio-economic advantage. This is potentially as parents and guardians at these schools are more likely to have the resources, including social and cultural capital, to navigate school systems and draw on the shifts in normative language and understanding of this term. As a result, these parents may be able to report student absences as ‘school refusal, rather than ‘unexplained’, resulting in an opening up of access to resources and assistance to support student mental health and wellbeing associated with this absence. Additionally, we have heard that the experience has been that teachers and school leadership at some schools have more resources to enable them to follow up with parents and students that can help in identifying mental health and wellbeing concerns linked to absences, and ‘school refusal’. As we outlined in our submission to the Senate Inquiry into the ‘National trend of school refusal and related matters’ in December 2022,⁶⁷ parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds often don’t have the same access to resources to engage with schools and reporting systems in a way that accurately captures the factors contributing to school disengagement, and that may result in earlier engagement of services and resources to support their children.

The potential differences in understanding of the reasons for school refusal among some parents and families of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and the potential for this to mean engagement of services and supports to assist these students are slower, could entrench inequities that exist within the education system.

From our work within schools delivering education programs, we know that there are numerous barriers that families from migrant and refugee backgrounds and schools with a high population of this student cohort face in relation to school refusal/absenteeism including:

- low family engagement with school due to work commitments with parents working long hours,
- lack of resources of schools to follow up with families,

⁶⁴ Department of Education, Victorian Government (n.d.). *Victorian Attendance Legislation – Parent FAQs*. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/parents/health/attendancefaqsparents.docx>

⁶⁵ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2020(d)). *Responding Together: Multicultural young people and their mental health*. CMY: Carlton. <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/responding-together/>

⁶⁶ Kearney (2018) as cited in Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2022).

⁶⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2022).

- lack of clarity in the roles of wellbeing co-ordinators regarding outreach
- linguistic and digital illiteracy of families to navigate school systems

We are also unaware of documented evidence relating to the rates and nature of disengagement of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Address issues of educational inequity by implementing ABS national standards for data collection to support collection and reporting on culture, language and ethnicity to ensure:

Additional factors, beyond EAL, that are impacting on student learning outcomes need to be understood and used to determine an additional category of SRP Equity funding. This ensures that students who don't meet the EAL hurdle but experience other barriers, and have multiple disadvantages, are adequately supported.

This additional funding could be used to support deployment of roles, similar to Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) and culturally specific MEAs, to improve support to students and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are not eligible for EAL Index funding

Student Disengagement

As we have highlighted previously, across the OECD one quarter of young people who arrive in their host country after the age of 15 are more likely to drop out of school early.⁶⁹ The factors identified then are still relevant reasons for why it is difficult for this cohort of young people to remain engaged with school. The factors leading to student disengagement also extend beyond new arrivals. The challenges students from refugee and migrant backgrounds face in accessing support and opportunities to remain engaged in school are explored extensively in the MYAN National Education Roundtable Discussion paper.⁷⁰

Since Covid-19 this cohort of young people have also been impacted by additional factors,⁷¹ including:

- barriers to digital participation,
- loss of education supports (homework clubs and MEAs),
- additional care responsibilities at home, and
- increasing reports of racism.⁷²

In our 2015 submission to the Victorian Government's consultation on the Education State,⁷³ we recommended that the Government resource programs that provide culturally relevant case management

⁶⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2016).

⁶⁹ OECD & European Union. (2015). *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In*. Paris: OECD Publishing cited in Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2017). Submission to the Federal Government's Inquiry into the Settlement Outcomes of Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=4189091b-dac6-4895-8b75-ea9f92aecce1&subId=463724>

⁷⁰ MYAN. (2020).

⁷¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2020(b)). Pp.5.

⁷² Tan. C. (2020). Racism undermines COVID-19 response, AHRC. <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/racism-undermines-covid-19-response>

⁷³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. (2015).

and support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and that risk and broker support for young people to reconnect.

This is dependent on the collection and reporting of adequate data on students' backgrounds, and access to appropriate data for teachers to be able to develop education support and access resources to adequately support their students.

In our 2017 submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence, we recommended

targeted support be provided to students and families of refugee and migrant backgrounds to increase engagement with school, including initiatives such as OSHLPS and MEAs.

Despite the calls for culturally responsive and targeted support for vulnerable young people almost a decade ago, there is still a need for greater resourcing of such interventions. As discussed below, culturally specific MEAs are providing essential support for young people from African backgrounds in schools across Melbourne. Anecdotally, they have been able to form strong connections with students in a culturally relevant way, and have successfully engaged students, resulting in increased attendance and participation at school. However, given the reports that these workers are also often overwhelmed, it is clear that there is a need for more resourcing of these types of roles.

We are also encouraged by the Government's commitment to supporting students who are disengaged from school through the funding of the Navigator Program. While this program is useful in supporting young people who are disengaged, the eligibility criterion of 70% absence from the previous school term⁷⁴ is too high a threshold to be able to meaningfully re-engage students. Evidence shows that that support should be introduced earlier at regular 10 percent absenteeism.⁷⁵ The Victorian Auditor General's review into the Navigator Program found that three-quarters of students referred in 2019 had not received individualised support prior to their referral (i.e. from social workers, psychologists and allied health professionals).⁷⁶ In our experience, even if a student had received support earlier, notes of this support were not provided to Navigator teams. There is a disconnect in the education system of supports sitting within separate silos and seemingly not communicating with one another, or there not being a central and consistent point of communication for either the young person, families or the service. This could be addressed by further developing and resourcing the role of the wellbeing co-ordinator to build partnerships and collaborations that provide appropriate referrals and one point of reference within schools.

⁷⁴ More information available at: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/navigator-program/policy>

⁷⁵ Johnsen, D, Lomholt, J, Heyne, D, Jeppesen, P, Jensen, M, Silverman, W & Thastum, M. (2022 January). *Sociodemographic and clinical characteristics of youths and parents seeking psychological treatment for school attendance problems*. Plos ONE. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261449>

⁷⁶ Victorian Auditor General's Office. (2023, March 23). *Effectiveness of the Navigator Program*. (No. 265). https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/20220323_Effectiveness-of-the-Navigator-Program_0.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 7

Better resource and support for school wellbeing programs and coordinators to:

Build partnerships and collaboration with community and services to connect young people to wrap around services that they can access within and outside of school.

Further develop referral systems, in partnership with services already working in schools like Navigator, SFYS and others, to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds access appropriate, timely and relevant support.

Mandatory training and support for wellbeing workers and coordinators in cultural responsive practice to respond to students with diverse needs.

TOR 6: school funding adequacy and its impact on student learning outcomes and wellbeing.

(Refer to response to term of reference 1(a) and refer to recommendation 1 as outlined below)

In addition to what we have said about more targeted funding for students eligible for EAL Index funding, there is also a cohort of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who face particular educational barriers who do not meet the EAL requirement but who may be experiencing social and cultural factors impacting their learning outcomes. For instance, some young people may speak English at home but their families lack English literacy, and are unfamiliar with the education system. This oversight can leave these families unsupported without culturally responsive and targeted support, and students can feel alone in navigating the education system. The needs of these students and families must be addressed to ensure equitable education.

To address this gap we propose deploying MEA-type roles within schools with high cultural diversity. This role should partner with schools and families to facilitate culturally inclusive learning environments, coordination of services to support the engagement of, and improve learning outcomes for young people who would otherwise not receive support. This would require better data about students' refugee and migrant backgrounds to identify potential students in need and target support.

RECOMMENDATION 1


Address issues of educational inequity by implementing ABS national standards for data collection to support collection and reporting on culture, language and ethnicity to ensure:

Additional factors, beyond EAL, that are impacting on student learning outcomes are identified and used to determine an additional category of SRP Equity funding. This would target students who don't meet the EAL hurdle but experience other barriers, including multiple disadvantages, that mean they require additional support.

This additional funding is used to support deployment of roles, like Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) and culturally specific MEAs, to improve support to students and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are not eligible for EAL Index funding.

CASE STUDY: MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AIDES (MEAS)

MEAs (and their equivalents) are another targeted support service for students and families of refugee and migrant backgrounds. MEAs provide an invaluable service to both families and schools. They are able to increase the engagement for English as an Additional Language families by facilitating communication in families' first languages and also offer tailored support for EAL students in the classroom.



In CMY's experience MEA's can have a powerful impact on the connections forged between schools and families and on the confidence levels of culturally and linguistically diverse students. School Community Liaison Officers operate in eight schools across Melbourne with a high proportion of students with African heritage. They influence the cultural responsiveness of schools and create greater inclusion for students and parents, and act as a conduit between schools, parents and students.⁷⁷

We understand from anecdotal evidence that these officers have been highly beneficial within schools as students are able to form a strong connection with the officers due to shared cultural backgrounds and shared perspectives. Our Navigator team have reported that these officers have increased student's wellbeing and engagement within schools as they are more encouraged to attend school when they have an ally who understands them. However, these officers have become overwhelmed, and over-stretched due to the high demand for their assistance. There is a demand for trained and qualified specialists with lived experience to support marginalised young people's wellbeing within schools.

⁷⁷ More information available at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/improving-education-outcomes-young-african-victorians>

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