

20 NATIONAL
23 VOLUNTEERING
CONFERENCE
THE FUTURE IS NOW

B5: Focus on settlement experiences

Volunteering & New Arrivals: a social cohesion opportunity

INCLUSION, DIVERSITY & INTERSECTIONALITY:
FOCUS ON SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES

Whittlesea Community Connections

Delivering programs and services to the Whittlesea community for 50 years

Established by volunteers and 200+ volunteers continue to support delivery of programs and services (60+ paid staff)

Place based approach – supporting people and communities who live, work or study in Whittlesea, an outer-growth municipality

Services developed in response to community identified need

Services include community information, financial assistance, settlement, community legal, prevention of family violence, youth work, community transport, training (Learn Local) volunteer and employment support, Wollert Farm & Food Hub

About the Project

Collaboration between WCC and the Melbourne Social Equity Institute's Community Fellows Program at The University of Melbourne.

Charlene Edwards Executive Officer Melbourne Social Equity Institute & Dr Karen Block Associate Director of the Child and Community Wellbeing Program at the Melbourne School of Population Health and Academic Convenor of the Melbourne Social Equity Institute's PhD Program in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.

Aimed to explore how people with refugee and migrant backgrounds perceived volunteering and its impacts on settlement experiences.

Designed to enable participants' lived experiences to contribute to improved understanding of settlement journeys and the way we deliver settlement and volunteer support.

Research Method

Literature review on volunteering and settlement outcomes for people with migrant and refugee backgrounds

Ethics approval through Melbourne University

Interviews with 20 people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, with experience of volunteering, connected to the City of Whittlesea

Open ended interview questions to explore if and how volunteering impacted on settlement

Feedback session to check and discuss findings with research participants

Final report produced

Project Participants

Age Range



■ 18-25 ■ 26-45 ■ 46-65

Gender



■ M ■ F

Migration Stream



■ Migrant ■ Refugee ■ Asylum Seeker

Project Participants

Country of Birth



- Algeria ■ Syria ■ Egypt
- Iraq ■ Sri Lanka ■ Iran
- Indonesia ■ Bangladesh ■ India

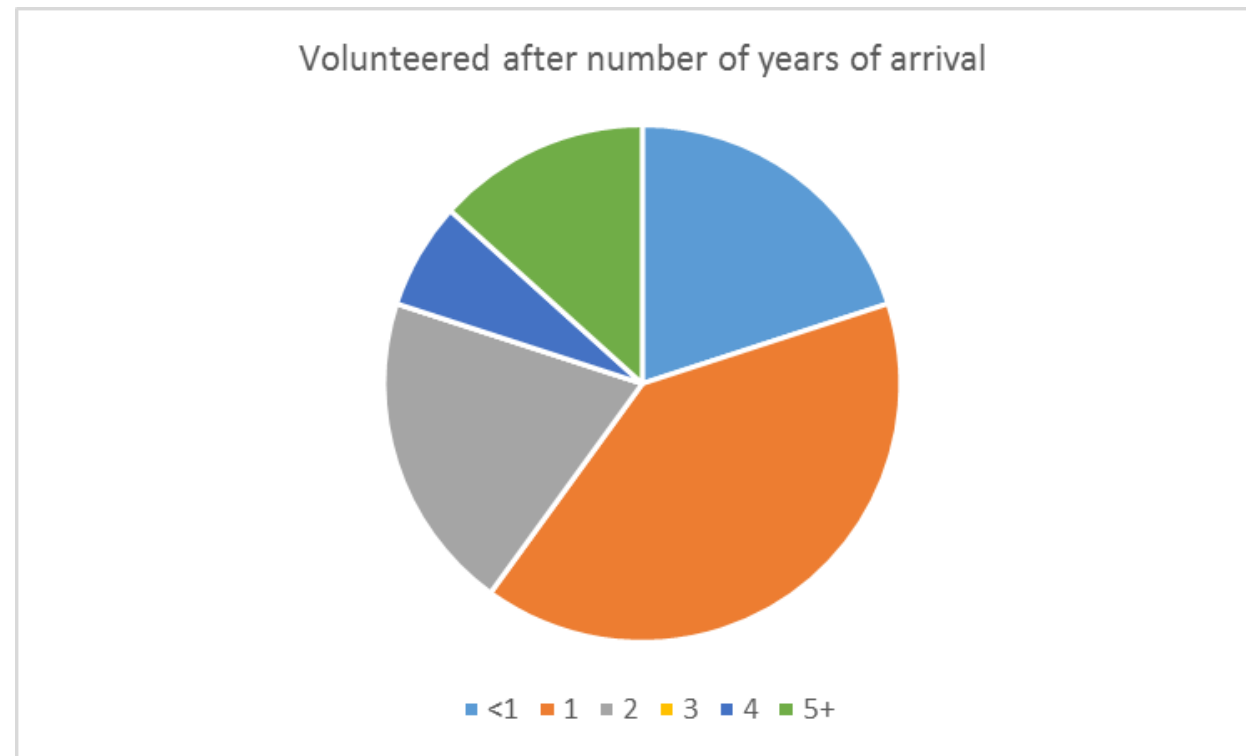
Language Spoken at Home



- French ■ Algerian
- Arabic ■ Assyrian Chaldean
- Singhalese ■ Farsi/ Persian
- Indonesian ■ English
- Bangala ■ Hindi

Project Participants

16 of 20 arrived within the last 5 years and 9 volunteered within the first year of settlement in Australia



Volunteer Roles

20 volunteers in 34 different roles. Types of roles were:

Group work/ support

Education

Health

Place of Worship

Administration

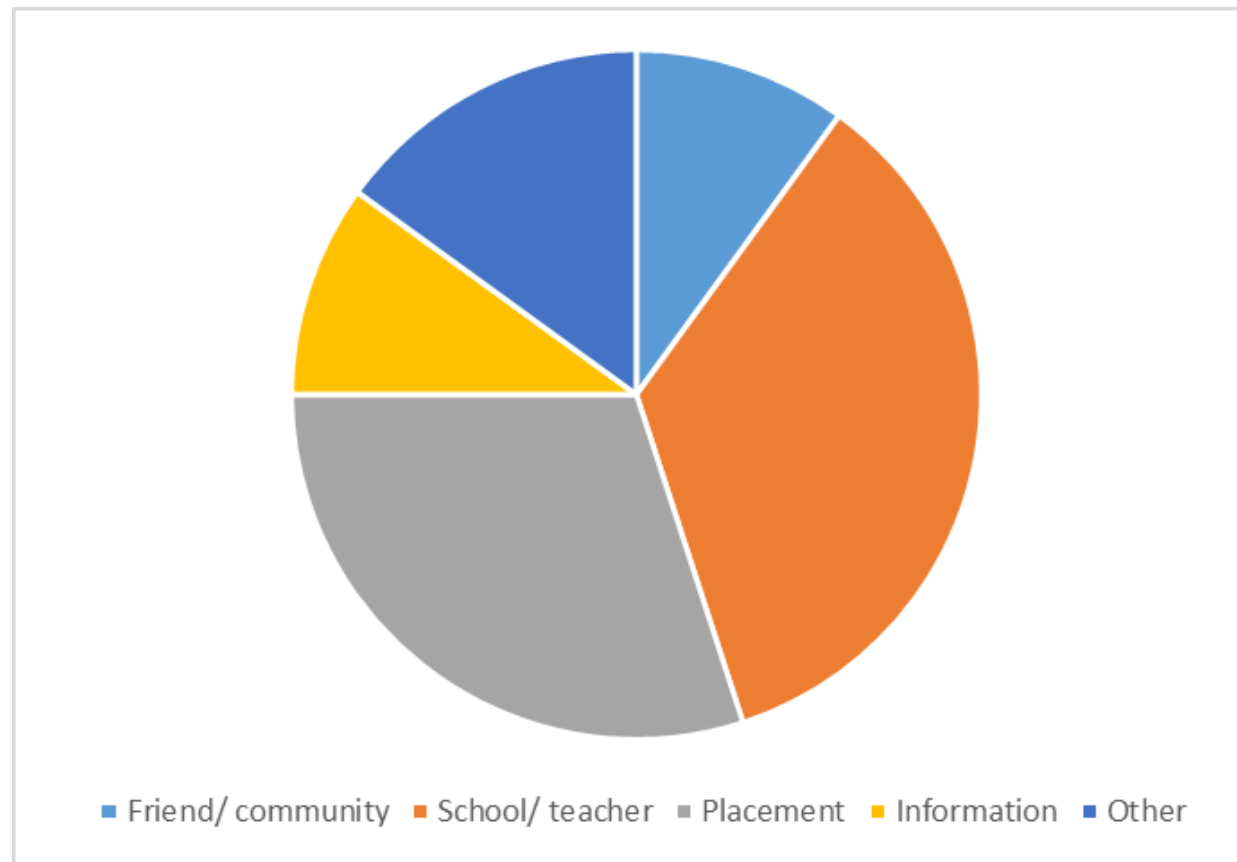
Women's Organisation

Government body

Food Relief

Others included ethnic organisation, youth, leadership, governance, sporting club, Op- shop, media/ events, IT, engineering

Pathway to Volunteering



Reasons for Volunteering

Employment/ experience

Understand culture & work rights in Australia

Improve English

Help & get to know others

No work rights

Spend more time with family

"I decided to start volunteering to give me more chance maybe to get a job to get more hands-on experience because I didn't have any local experience before in the field"

"I got bridging visa and I don't have work right here in Australia now so that's why I'm doing all the voluntary job"

"so that I can actually know the real culture on like how to treat with employee and the laws and everything"

"a volunteer helped help me and my family when I arrived to Australia....when I saw him speaking English very well and I saw him very happy I want[ed] to be as this volunteer"

Benefits & Outcomes

1. English Communication & Inter-personal Skills
2. Employment & work experience -7 gained employment from volunteer role
3. Help Community
4. Reduce Isolation
5. Happiness
6. Australian work culture
7. Identify skills & pathways
8. Cross -cultural skills
9. Help other new arrivals
10. Feel Settled
11. Build Networks
12. Improved mental health
13. Change perceptions of refugees and people seeking asylum
14. Learn about services

Benefits & Outcomes

“I started having work experience without pressure was simply enjoying, feeling more confident, more comfortable, help me get my first casual job in the same school. This is why volunteering it worked for me.”

“Australia is helping migrants a lot by welcoming people to come really open the door for refugees and we want to give Australia back what they give us and help people.”

“this family relationship I got it from volunteer workplace because in Australia we are migrants we left our family in our country it's very hard for us to actually talk because we want to talk we want to learn we want to know that are we in the right path or not”

“I felt good about myself give back I was happy I felt myself a better person”

Outcomes

“It is a journey about learning about yourself, you discover what you’re good at and what you’re not and it’s a life changing journey, learning from other people through teamwork, learning about the services and can help other people, be an ambassador in a way, know information that you can share with others”

“when I came here it helped me realize that there is so many people different people coming from everywhere like and they're still able to work together and to get on well together and it's a safe place for everybody”

“When I found someone who spoke my language it made it easy for me I know how important it is to have someone from your culture to help you.”

“People think refugees and asylum seekers are just bad people but I'm trying to change that view not everyone is bad so we can't generalize. So that's the main thing I focus on, help the community trying to change that view of us and refugees.”

Policy & Practice Implications

What worked

Flexibility

Welcoming environments

Opportunities to continue learning and build on existing skills

Knowing that you are making a difference to the community

Recognising and celebrating volunteering and the contribution of people with migrant and refugee backgrounds volunteering in the community

Opportunities for improvement around systems/ services, information & volunteer management

Systems & Services

Build and strengthen links between the volunteering and other sectors including settlement, employment and mental health.

Build and strengthen pathways from education to volunteering. For example Adult Migrant English Program and education settings that support English language and skill acquisition for people with migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Address systemic barriers such as for women with caring responsibilities, people experiencing financial difficulty, transport disadvantage or visa-related restrictions to service access and participation opportunities.

Information

Promote volunteering to people with migrant and refugee backgrounds within the settlement period using culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies.

Engage diverse communities, genders and age groups using the lived experience of volunteers with migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Promotion strategies should speak to the mutual and individual benefits of volunteering directly related to the settlement experience.

Provide information about volunteering in Australia's cultural and legal context that easily explains the 'system' and provides opportunities to explore diverse volunteer opportunities. Information should also include volunteer and employer rights and responsibilities.

Volunteer Management

Cultural orientation for volunteers with migrant and refugee backgrounds to understand the work place in the Australian context.

Recognise that people with migrant and refugee backgrounds volunteer for different reasons and under different circumstances. Tailor volunteer roles and experiences in response.

Develop youth specific strategies. These could include to working with peers, in teams or less formal volunteering to encourage participation, social connection and build confidence.

Where employment is the reason for volunteering, develop opportunities for volunteers to identify their strengths, upskill and evolve in their role.

Facilitate social/ networking opportunities for people with migrant and refugee backgrounds who have left behind family and friends.

Enhance volunteer management practices that support inclusive practices across the volunteer hosting organisation .

For more information

Whittlesea Community Connections

<https://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/community-services/volunteering/diversifying-your-volunteer-pool/>

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The University of Melbourne, Community Fellows Program

<https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/community-fellows-program>