

Embracing cultural diversity: Examples of good practice in VET

This document presents examples of good practice in achieving equity and diversity objectives for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

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**Embracing cultural diversity:
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Introduction

This document presents a range of examples of good practice in achieving equity and diversity objectives for people from a non-English speaking background in the Victorian VET sector. The document presents examples from four different VET areas: ESL and access programs, vocational training programs, a TAFE run State Government funded retraining program for retrenched workers, and community partnerships and outreach.

- 1. ESL and access programs** draws on two studies that illustrate the application of good practice principles to reaching and supporting refugee and migrant learners. The first example, 'Taking learning to where it is most needed', tells the story of South West TAFE's Sudanese Mothers' Group in Warrnambool. The second, 'Holistic support for young migrants and refugees', details NMIT's Collingwood YAMEC program.
- 2. Vocational training programs** uses two examples to highlight good practice in delivering vocational training to students from non-English speaking backgrounds with language and literacy support needs. The first example, 'Increasing options for students', tells the abridged story of Box Hill TAFE's innovative ESL/children's services program which combines a vocational taster (accredited training plus work placement) with ESL support. The second brief study of the Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association illustrates elements of good practice in their aged care program design and delivery.
- 3. Retraining for retrenched workers** identifies some key principles that contribute to success in attracting and engaging retrenched workers in Victoria University's retraining program – the majority of the workers come from a non-English speaking background.
- 4. Community partnerships and outreach** draws on two examples of TAFE Institutes that have created positions for a dedicated community partnerships/development officer to illustrate the good practice underpinnings and the positive outcomes of a broader community engagement. 'Lateral thinking and locating opportunities' draws on the work of NMIT Youth Unit's community development officer to identify keys to supporting institutions to better engage people with particular learning and support needs. The second example, 'Improving access to education and training', examines the role Victoria University's community partnerships officer plays in encouraging the participation of a diverse range of communities from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The development of these short studies is the result of Equity Research Centre consultations with TAFE and ACE personnel about current initiatives in their Institutes and centres which they believe are good examples of achievements of equity and diversity goals for people from a non-English speaking background. The purposes of this document are to highlight some of these achievements and to draw out learnings and success factors in the interests of sharing ideas and promoting good practice.

1. ESL and access programs

Taking learning to where it is most needed

In August 2004, South West Institute of TAFE started the Sudanese Mothers' Group in Warrnambool to deliver English language training to an isolated set of potential learners. The recently arrived Sudanese population of Warrnambool is continuing to grow under the Warrnambool City Council's refugee resettlement project. The Sudanese Mothers' Group, reaching out to engage isolated mothers of preschool children, can be seen as an innovative response to a specific, changing local set of circumstances. However, clear principles of good practice underlie context specific program development and operation.

Addressing the barriers

South West TAFE provides English language training for people involved in the Warrnambool resettlement project. They were running bite-sized, after-work programs for Sudanese workers and day programs for unemployed Sudanese. While the programs were well attended, mothers of breast-feeding babies and preschool children were excluded due to a lack of accessible and affordable childcare. These women were also isolated, spending much of their time at home. To access the English language training they required to effectively engage with the local community, they needed accessible, flexible childcare and a convenient training location. A solution was found in the local leisure centre, Aquazone, which housed an occasional childcare facility and a room that could be hired for the training. It was also accessible by the public bus system, an important consideration for women who didn't have a car.

Developing and using networks

Program development relied on the partnership between the Warrnambool City Council and South West TAFE, effected in this case through the Migrant Liaison Officer and the TAFE's ESL Co-ordinator. Together they agreed on Aquazone as a training site, with the city council paying for the room hire and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) funding paying for the childcare and the ESL teaching. The Migrant

Liaison Officer was key to encouraging and supporting the Sudanese mothers to join the training as he knew them all personally and was also able to coach them on using the public transport system. This partnership also provided the TAFE with a clearer picture of local community needs, and program designers with a better understanding of their learners' needs.

Networks within the TAFE, particularly the relationship between the group's ESL teacher and a TAFE librarian, were key to an extension of the Sudanese Mothers' Group's program into another timeslot. The librarian suggested the Sudanese children might be able to attend a preschooler's literacy program run Tuesday mornings in the library by TAFE childcare students. This would provide another opportunity for the mothers to receive ESL training. Staff from the TAFE unit running the childcare training were particularly enthusiastic about Sudanese children joining the program as it meant that their students would gain practical experience with children from a non-English speaking background.

A safe learning environment

Recent research has concluded that 'the learning situation is more effective when learners are given a safe learning environment that overcomes their... concern that they will be embarrassed by the situation they are in' (Galade, Catts & Gerber 2003, p. 93). This program has created a safe and comfortable learning environment by teaching a small group of women who share language, cultural heritage and the experience of recent migration to Australia, and employing a skilled and committed ESL teacher who can build ongoing relationships with the students. Further, it has been suggested that refugees with experiences of trauma prefer their learning site to be located close to their children's childcare centres (personal communication Alison Coelho, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2004).

A learner-centred approach

The program's learner-centred approach is evidenced in three key ways. First, as mentioned above, during program development the emphasis is placed on meeting the different access requirements of this set of women (i.e. appropriate childcare). Second, program designers attempt to address the learners' social isolation by selecting training sites that promote their integration with

the local community. The leisure centre and the library are both public spaces where the women have the opportunity to meet other members of the community. On Fridays, the women spend an hour and a half in ESL training and then spend half an hour in the café together with their teacher. This time facilitates relationship building, mixing with locals and Aquazone staff, and an opportunity for the Migrant Liaison Officer to catch up with the women to see how they are. Finally, program staff reported that the second session on Tuesdays was offered because the women themselves were very keen for another opportunity to get together and learn more English.

Holistic support for young migrants and refugees

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE's (NMIT) Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) has been running at both the Collingwood and Preston campuses for more than ten years, and has recently been extended to the Broadmeadows campus. YAMEC is targeted at young people aged 16-26 who are recent migrants or refugees from non-English speaking countries. The YAMEC program caters for students of various language and literacy abilities by running three classes at different levels. Certificates include the ESL Frameworks, the Certificate in Spoken & Written English and the Certificate in General Education for Adults. Curriculum each year is customised by selecting modules from the certificates which will best meet the needs of the students. For example at Collingwood the lower level program is a Certificate¹ CGEA (Introduction) catering for non-literate students, who may or may not have high levels of oracy. The middle level program is a Cert II ESL Frameworks (Access), a pre-VCAL program that endeavours to improve students' language and literacy skills and their ability to work collaboratively. The higher level program teaches the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at Foundation and Intermediate level. The three different programs all follow school timetables and calendars to reduce YAMEC students' isolation from their local community by allowing them to mingle with other young people after school hours and on the holidays.

Program design is underpinned by a strong awareness of the special learning and welfare needs of new migrants and refugee young people and the specific barriers they face. In particular, program design and delivery is shaped by the recognition that effective

language learning will not occur while students are highly stressed and distracted by pressing settlement issues. Hence, YAMEC programs are designed to facilitate welfare and settlement support while concurrently delivering language and literacy training. Drawing on examples from the Collingwood program, what follows highlights key elements of good practice that support new migrant and refugee ESL students.

A learner-centred approach

To cater for the special learning and welfare needs of their students, Collingwood YAMEC teachers work to integrate welfare and settlement support into the program curriculum. Relevant youth service providers, like Foundation House (counselling and support for survivors of trauma) and health providers, come to NMIT Collingwood to deliver regular information and training sessions to students. Staff build links between students and welfare service providers because they understand that many of their students do not yet have the capacity or confidence to make these links by themselves. Having the service providers come to where the students feel comfortable gives students the opportunity to meet and get to know the providers and gain an understanding of the services they offer.

Collingwood YAMEC is located close to three large public housing estates that have significant populations of new migrants and refugees. The YAMEC program costs are kept to a minimum, and special consideration is available to students experiencing financial hardship. Cost and accessibility are two commonly recognised barriers to education and training for disadvantaged groups that Collingwood YAMEC has overcome. Further, VCAL students have the opportunity to do a work placement. Students have done work experience in a variety of areas including childcare centres, retail outlets and supermarkets. Work placements aim to support students' employment goals. They recognise that practical work experience makes people more employable and also serves as a taster for students considering a variety of future pathway options.

An NCVET report on provider equity strategies warns against the 'institutionalising' of successful programs, stressing the need to maintain innovation to avoid them becoming stale or irrelevant (McIntyre et al. 2004, p.63). While it has been operating for over ten years, Collingwood YAMEC staff have continued to

develop their programs by building new relationships with service providers and looking for new opportunities for students to engage with the local community. For example, in the last few years the students have been involved in the Moon Lantern Festival held at the housing estate. This year a group of VCAL students formed an advisory sub-committee and worked with the Moon Lantern Festival's cultural reference group

Considering community perceptions

NMIT was the lead agency in the Changing Cultures project which aimed to enhance the mental health and well being of refugee young people through appropriate education and training programs and program development (Giddens & Centre for Adolescent Health 2003). One of the outcomes of NMIT's involvement in Changing Cultures was YAMEC's piloting of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) in its higher level refugee programs. The pilot was successful and VCAL continues to be offered to YAMEC students.

VCAL offers three important benefits to YAMEC students. Firstly, it overcomes a widely recognised barrier faced by migrant and refugee young people when considering TAFE education and training options. Some newly arrived communities do not properly understand or value education and training offered by TAFE providers. Parents and community leaders often do not see the benefits TAFEs can offer their young people and they can prevent or discourage young people from attending TAFE. Because VCAL is strongly associated with high school education provision and school completion, this helps parents and communities to more readily accept TAFE education options for their young people. The other benefits are that the VCAL certificate is a widely recognised qualification that opens student access to further education and has a strong vocational focus.

Developing partnerships

As discussed above, Collingwood YAMEC staff work to actively incorporate many of their community partners into the curriculum. Collingwood students are introduced to local government's Yarra Youth Services, with teachers taking their classes down to the centre to meet the staff and become familiar with the facilities. Collingwood's partnership with Foundation House, a centre for survivors of trauma, has resulted in having Foundation House counsellors running group activities as

part of the teaching program. The counsellors are regularly available on site, giving students the opportunity to see them individually. The practice of bringing partners to the students recognises that the learning site provides an excellent opportunity to connect students with appropriate welfare, health and recreation services.

YAMEC staff also maintain relationships with other education service providers, for example, high schools, local language schools, and vocational education departments. These more traditional relationships serve to strengthen educational pathways for students. For example, YAMEC staff have a strong relationship with the Personal Services Assistant program run from the same building which has enabled supported pathways into that course.

Skilled and committed staff

Core YAMEC teacher Terri Kaufman has taught in the program for many years and is part of a close-knit and committed teaching team. Terri reports that many past students maintain contact with Collingwood staff, and attributes this to the program's supportive, family atmosphere. YAMEC staff are skilled at working with young people, have undergone cultural awareness training and have experience in cross-cultural communication. YAMEC staff see that they are well placed to pick up on student welfare needs. Consequently they recognise that, in addition to teaching, advocacy and pastoral care are important aspects of their role. Flexible timetabling has allowed teachers to attend community network meetings and maintain partnerships, allowing them to gather information relevant to program development and to advocate for their students.

Summary

Key strategies identified as contributing to the success and inclusiveness of these courses are:

- a safe learning environment;
- a learner-centred approach including addressing barriers to participation;
- an awareness and consideration of community perceptions in course development and delivery;
- selecting skilled and committed staff; and
- developing networks and partnerships.

Incorporating such strategies is likely to lead to more inclusive outcomes for a variety of VET programs.

2. Vocational training programs

Increasing options for students

In 2001, Box Hill Institute of TAFE's English Language Studies Centre approached the Health and Community Services Centre (HACS) at the TAFE about the possibility of running ESL programs with a vocational component in aged care and children's services. Drawing on their past experience running ESL training with business and IT vocational components, the English Language Studies Centre was keen to expand pathway opportunities for ESL students and respond to government priorities for industry skills development. Taking the ESL/Children's Services program as an example, this case study highlights some key elements of good practice that have shaped the program.

A learner-centred approach

The ESL/children's services program is 20 weeks of full-time study. It is designed to cater for students interested in employment in the childcare industry whose English language and literacy skills are not sufficiently developed to undertake vocational training without some ESL support. In this program, the students spend one day a week with HACS undertaking vocational training, one day a week in a work placement, and three days a week with English Language Studies teachers.

Students are taught as a small group, which promotes peer bonding and also enables ESL training to be closely linked with the vocational curriculum. Part of the ESL training is dedicated to supporting students' vocational skills and knowledge development. ESL training draws on relevant scenarios from a childcare setting to develop language skills while reinforcing vocational knowledge. ESL teachers actively seek to support students by running a regular question time to discuss any problems students are having with the training. They also incorporate homework time into the ESL training to help students draft written pieces for vocational assessments.

Learners undertake four units of competency in children's services. This is fewer than students would undertake in a mainstream program and

serves to give ESL students more time (and support) to complete each unit than they would get in a mainstream certificate or diploma course. The HACS trainer commented on the benefits of giving ESL students more time to comprehend and digest vocational course materials, saying that he gives the students materials to read at home before they discuss and work through the competencies. A teacher from the English Language Studies unit said that ESL students often achieved better outcomes with a lighter course load.

Strengthening Pathways

Students generally undertake this program with a view to improving their employment prospects. Consequently, the program has a strong employment focus. This focus is supported by its location in the English Language Studies Centre's ESL employment stream. To improve students' employment prospects, the program incorporates training in resume preparation and job interview techniques. The program also offers careers counselling and mock job interviews by Jobs Plus employment services (located on campus). The work placements are key to improving student employment outcomes because during their work placements students gain practical experience in childcare and build personal networks in the field. These contacts and experience have resulted in some students being offered part-time childcare work.

Another benefit of the program structure is its role as a children's services 'taster'. Students experience firsthand what it is like to work in the field and the coursework gives them a good understanding of the literacy levels needed and an idea of what a certificate workload would be like. 'Tasters' function to reduce the probability that students will 'jump in the deep end' and become discouraged. For one student, the work placement 'taster' helped her realise that she was not suited to childcare work for health reasons and went on to train in another field. Further, the vocational units offered in the program were chosen to facilitate educational pathways. Should the students decide to undertake further study in children's services they would receive credit for the units of competency they undertook during the program.

Some students do pursue further study in Children's Services, some at Box Hill TAFE and some with other providers. Other students gain employment.

This program also opens pathway options to students by improving their language skills and confidence.

Lateral thinking and partnerships

The program's ability to improve student pathway options has depended on combining the strengths of two relatively disparate TAFE Centres – one ESL and one vocational. HACS provided trainers and used their existing relationships in the industry to find work placement opportunities for the program's students, while the English Language Studies Centre tailored an ESL curriculum to support the vocational training and used their relationship with Jobs Plus to enhance employment outcomes for students. This program highlights the value of cross-institutional relationships in supporting students with particular learning needs.

Targeted recruitment strategies

This program is currently funded under the Language Literacy and Numeracy Programs (LLNP) scheme. This circumscribes the selection criterion to some extent as students must be permanent residents, they must have attained a certain level of literacy and they must be Centrelink registered job seekers to access the course. The Centre is pursuing funding to run this program on an ongoing basis. One benefit of the current funding arrangement is that the program is free for eligible students. Currently, the English Language Studies Centre's relationship with Centrelink's Multicultural Services Officer is key to attracting potential students.

The program also fills a gap in education provision for students from a non-English speaking background who apply to HACS mainstream courses in Children's Services but are unsuccessful because they don't meet the English language requirements. HACS links them with the ESL/children's services program by giving these students information and flyers. With such a specialised program, it is important to target program promotion carefully and reach those who are likely to be most interested.

An employment focus for disadvantaged learners

Another example of a vocational training program targeted at learners from a non-English speaking background can be found at the Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association (AVWWA) in Footscray, a small ACE provider. In the light of growing industry demand, and associated prospects for good student employment outcomes, four years ago the AVWWA decided to run a certificate in aged care. This year it was changed from a Certificate II to a Certificate III level course in line with a shift in industry requirements for practicing aged care workers.

Elements of good practice evident in AVWWA's aged care course design and delivery include:

- An employment focus: AVWWA works to build relationships with aged care providers and encourages them to come and meet current students.
- Reducing cost barriers: AVWWA focuses on delivering a low cost training program.
- Reaching its target group: AVWWA uses ethnic media to promote their programs and maintains strong relationships with Centrelink and Job Network providers to facilitate appropriate student referrals.

Summary

The good practice evident in these vocational training programs can be attributed to the following key strategies:

- a learner-centred approach;
- strengthening pathways into employment and further education;
- partnerships and lateral thinking about program design to support student outcomes; and
- targeted recruitment strategies to reach prospective students.

The same strategies can be used to underpin program development to promote cultural inclusiveness and student training and employment outcomes.

3. Retraining for retrenched factory workers

Skill Up at Victoria University

Victoria University of Technology (TAFE division) has been training and supporting retrenched workers using Skill Up Program funding since June 2004. The OTTE funded Skill Up Program retrains and supports groups of people retrenched during workplace closures or major industry downturns. Its goal is to help them re-enter the workforce or undertake further education or training.

The following is a brief overview of the Skill Up process. The Skill Up Program begins once OTTE approves an application from a workplace (or their union) that is either closing down or retrenching a significant number of workers. OTTE then contacts an education provider about running the Skill Up Program for that particular workplace or group of workers. The provider is endowed with program funding to retrain those workers. It is then up to the provider to contact the workplace and recruit the retrenched workers to the program. Depending on the timeframe of the retrenchments (some workplaces close within days of notifying OTTE, some know months in advance of the impending retrenchments), the provider may have to respond very rapidly. Because of privacy laws that stipulate that workers identities are protected after a factory closure, it is imperative that the TAFE is able to run an information session for the eligible workers at their worksite prior to factory closure. The TAFE running a Skill Up Program is given a set amount of money per retrenched worker enrolled (funded for up to 80 hours of retraining). It is then up to the individual provider to develop and deliver the Skill Up Program.

Victoria University's Skill Up Program runs out of the Program of Adult General Education within the Department of Adult Literacy and Work Education. A small team of teachers overseen by the Department Manager recruit retrenched workers from the nominated factory and deliver accredited training and one-to-one course guidance counselling. The recruitment

strategy and training program developed by Victoria University's Skill Up team demonstrates a strong learner-focused philosophy and a supporting set of best practice principles.

Reaching the target group

Victoria University employs a number of proactive recruitment strategies to catch as many of the target group (retrenched workers in a designated workplace) as possible. Victoria University's primary aim is to gain access to the group to inform and discuss with them their options for retraining. Using the support and knowledge of the factory's employer, Victoria University works to maximise the reach of their information sessions by making sure they are at a convenient time and place for the workers. The Skill Up information sessions are brought to the target group. They are run in the workplace so that workers feel comfortable and are timed for convenience – for example, at the beginning or end of a shift. By taking the information to the target group Victoria University avoids missing or losing people who are unable or unwilling to attend an information session elsewhere.

Victoria University places significant emphasis on building a productive relationship with the company/employer. As mentioned above, this relationship enables Victoria University to access the workers at the worksite, which is important to ensure the knowledge of the training opportunity reaches as many retrenched workers as possible. Victoria University also uses employer knowledge to tailor the information session to the target group demographic. Hence, Victoria University uses their relationship with the employer to strengthen the learner-focus of their program information sessions. Other connections that Victoria University builds and maintains to support their capacity to cater for the target group may include unions and employment networks.

The initial information session promotes the free retraining that the workers are eligible for and stresses that they can use their funding to develop skills in a wide variety of areas. The Skill Up program is promoted by highlighting the benefits of retraining, particularly that it improves employability and assists workers to re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible. By focusing on the potential of the retraining program to address the retrenched worker's

most pressing concern – to succeed in the job market – Victoria University's Skill Up information sessions achieve high participation rates. In the information session, the teachers try to be very clear about what workers are eligible for under the Skill Up Program with Victoria University and emphasise their desire to help workers get the training they want. At the end of the information session workers are strongly encouraged to make an appointment to meet one-to-one with a member of the teaching staff to discuss their training options and interests. These one-to-one meetings are ideally held in the workplace and are timed to fit into the worker's schedule to make it as easy as possible for the worker to attend.

Program teachers encourage all workers to attend a meeting, even those who are intending to retire or move away. This fulfils two functions. It allows Victoria University to collect information for reporting purposes on eligible workers who are choosing not to take up retraining and it gives Victoria University a chance to spark the interest of workers who may otherwise have passed up this training opportunity. For those workers considering retirement, the opportunity to extend their skill base has been a bonus to the program. Some retrenched workers have accessed training to improve their English or computer skills for personal skill development reasons. By speaking to the workers one-to-one, Victoria University is able to address people's individual concerns and encourage their engagement with education and training.

Nurturing lifelong learning

Victoria University uses Skill Up funding to deliver accredited training that aims to improve one's chances of success in employment by focusing on resumes, computer and interview skills. Language and literacy training is embedded in the program and further ESL and literacy training opportunities are frequently promoted in classes. By maintaining an overt focus on improving job-hunting skills teachers keep the learners interested as it is relevant to their immediate situation. This maintains the learner's interest while also working on a different level to improve language and literacy skills and engage them in an environment that reinforces the value of learning.

All retrenched workers enrol initially in the 'Course in Planning for Employment and Training' at Victoria University. For a minimum of 30 hours (of their 80 free training hours) participants are able to improve their job-search skills, receive basic computer training

and language and literacy support, and receive one-to-one course guidance counselling. They can then make an informed decision about how they choose to use their remaining 50 hours of free training, which is transferable to another institution or provider.

Case management

The students' course guidance counselling is delivered in a one-to-one situation by a member of the program's teaching team. The teachers have come to specialise in course guidance for different training areas (e.g. where landscape gardening courses are offered) and so students are matched to teachers according to their area of retraining interest. The teacher becomes that person's case manager. It is the case manager's job to provide the learner with course guidance counselling and to locate and assist with enrolling them in courses that match their interests, residential location and skill level. As the case manager is also the learner's teacher, they are well placed to understand the learner's language and literacy abilities. This is important in helping the learner select an appropriate training option. By identifying retraining options for the learner and helping them enrol in an appropriate training course the case manager is enabling the learner's training pathways. Enrolment processes in unfamiliar institutions can be daunting, particularly for people with poor language and literacy skills. By helping the learner take these initial steps the case manager may be helping to overcome a significant barrier to training for that individual.

Skilled and committed staff

The Department of Adult Literacy and Work Education was chosen by Victoria University to run the Skill Up Program because of its extensive experience and skills in catering for adult learners with language and literacy issues (the majority of whom come from non-English speaking backgrounds). Victoria University identified language and literacy problems as common among manufacturing and textile, clothing and footwear workers and other factory workers likely to be eligible for the Skill Up Program. The teachers selected to form the Victoria University Skill Up team all have an ESL background, industry experience and experience in adult education. The selection of a unit and teaching staff who have experience with disadvantaged learners is another example of this program's learner-focused approach to delivery.

Summary

Key strategies underpinning the success of the Skill Up program as it is delivered by Victoria University are:

- reaching and attracting the participation of the target group;
- nurturing lifelong learning;
- providing individual case management; and
- having skilled and committed staff.

Such strategies are likely to promote program inclusiveness and student outcomes.

4. Community partnerships and outreach

Lateral thinking and locating opportunities

Since its inception in 1999 the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE's (NMIT's) Youth Unit has been supported by a dedicated development officer. The development officer's tasks encompass (but are not limited to) program development and research, cross-sector relationship building, and advocacy for their students at a policy and organisational level. The role's official title has recently been expanded from Youth Unit Development Officer to Further Education Development Officer – Youth and Community reflecting a broadening of the duties associated with the position. The officer, Anne Giddens, now works with service providers and agencies in the community, including those supporting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities as well as continuing to work with the youth sector. By participating in networks across these sectors the development officer promotes the Faculty of Further Education and builds relationships that support its operational capacity. This sector embeddedness also supports the development of a sector overview, enabling the officer to recognise learning and development opportunities that may not be evident from a narrower perspective. The development and guiding principles of this position highlight key elements of good practice in supporting institutions to better engage people with particular learning and support needs.

Dynamic responses to changing contexts

The NMIT Youth Unit was set up in response to an increase in early school leavers attending the TAFE. It was intended to develop and support youth specific programs to better cater for young people. One early benefit of the creation of the Youth Unit was that it provided a clear contact point for anyone interested in connecting with youth programs at NMIT. Prior to that youth programs had been dispersed across the institution, bringing them together facilitated information sharing and learning.

The development officer became the face of the unit. This provided the officer, Anne Giddens, with a solid base from which to participate in community groups in the youth sector and build knowledge, visibility and relationships. In this case, a clear contact point at NMIT served to promote access to education services by disadvantaged individuals (in this case early school leavers). The unit and the development officer together improved access to their programs by making themselves more visible to the youth sector and hence to their potential referrals while also making it easier for early school leavers to find them.

Refugee and recent migrant young people make up a large proportion of students in the unit's ESL and learner access programs. Over time this functioned to extend the development officer's domain of interest from youth issues to include settlement issues more broadly. By improving links with the settlement service sector, the unit's development officer can resource the unit's teaching staff with key information and facilitate closer links between training programs and other youth support services. The benefits of these adaptations to local contexts is supported by recent research which stresses the importance of dynamism in equity practices (McIntyre et al. 2004, p.68).

The ANTA paper 'Achieving equitable outcomes' notes that 'mechanisms of resource allocation impact strongly on behaviour and on the outcomes achieved' in a VET context and point to the importance of resource allocation mechanisms that 'permit flexibility and responsiveness' in successfully achieving equitable outcomes (ANTA 1998, p.7). NMIT has achieved more equitable outcomes for students within current resource allocations through the creation of the youth unit. The Youth Unit demonstrates the structural flexibility possible within TAFE institutes, particularly in terms of the ability to adjust internal structures to enhance and facilitate the unit's ongoing community development vision.

Developing partnerships

One of the main roles of the development officer is to maintain close relationships with service providers and other organisations in the youth and settlement support sectors. This practice has allowed the officer to remain at the forefront of developments in the sectors. Key developments that are of interest include additional funding opportunities, new programs and services to link their students to, and

emerging opportunities for partnerships or information sharing. Research shows that local community collaboration is a key to success in widening participation of equity groups (Watson et al. 2000, p.41). By making links with the broader community, the officer facilitates local community collaboration by working to develop the capacity of the sector to support young people and migrant communities through information sharing and working partnerships. The development officer also shares information with other NMIT staff.

This practice also allows the development officer to maintain an overview of the youth and settlement support sectors. This provides an informed perspective from which to identify service gaps and community needs as well as to come up with innovative, cross-organisational solutions. Resourcing a dedicated staff member to maintain a sector overview can enable positive program development and a more strategic extension of services. For example, when development officer Anne Giddens participated in a round table with the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) the issue of a shortage of newly arrived community language interpreters was discussed. It became apparent during the discussion that people were applying for interpreter diploma courses and not being accepted because their English language skills were not sufficient. Anne Giddens suggested they address the gap in education provision by running a bridging course to engage those people being turned away from the translator course. VOMA agreed and NMIT began offering a high level ESL bridging course in 2004.

Another practical example of the potential benefit of networking with community organisations was evident when Anne solved a problem for the local Migrant Resource Centre (MRC). The MRC needed to move to a bigger location. They had found an appropriate premises but needed a co-tenant. Anne remembered one of NMIT's provider colleagues in the Northern AMEP consortium who was then housed in a quite difficult to find location. She suggested they move in together. The collocation has helped to link newly arrived refugee and migrant students with the MRC and their resources, and vice versa.

The two examples above suggest that recent research on equity in the workplace which identified 'growing new kinds of long-term links into local communities and developing working

partnerships with organisations and groups to share expertise and experience' (Lyon & Macdonald 2004, p.4) as a key to success in improving participation and outcomes for equity groups could be equally applicable to VET provision.

Support from a development minded team

The development officer, Anne Giddens identified the support of a small development minded team with which she could discuss new opportunities and program ideas as key to the success of the role. This points to the benefits derived from teamwork and the opportunity to brainstorm new ideas.

Improving access to education and training

Victoria University's Centre for Commencing Students houses their Community Partnerships Officer, Elleni Bereded-Samuel. The officer's primary goal is to make education and training at Victoria University more accessible to disadvantaged migrant and refugee communities. To achieve this, the officer develops relationships with migrant communities and relevant service providers, acts as an initial contact point for commencing migrant and refugee students (and provides them with ongoing support on a needs basis), and informs government bodies and service providers about the needs of migrant and refugee communities. This study demonstrates how the Community Partnerships Officer's methods illustrate good practice in improving access to and participation in education and training for an ethnically diverse community.

Identify community needs

A recent NCVET report stated that: 'The degree to which a provider identifies with and establishes networks across the local community will influence its capacity to effectively respond to community needs.' (McIntyre et al. 2004, p.67). Hence, the Community Partnerships Officer's dedication to developing links with the local community illustrates one way for VET providers to respond appropriately and efficiently to community education and training needs.

The Community Partnerships Officer has developed a model for their community outreach work. Building the trust of the

particular migrant community is a gradual process and this is reflected in the model. The officer makes initial contact with the community leaders and goes out to meet them. The officer makes the effort to attend the migrant community's celebrations and functions. The officer uses this time and experience to better understand the culture and practices of that community. While becoming accustomed to the different cultural context, the officer starts to talk to people about the needs of their community. The officer talks to community leaders, to parents and to young people. When the officer has identified some of the needs of the community the officer starts to discuss with community leaders what Victoria University might be able to do to help. The officer facilitates meetings between community leaders and the relevant Victoria University departments and staff to try and design and implement education and training programs to suit that particular community. Elleni Bereded-Samuel says the emphasis on respect and relationship building is key to gaining a good understanding of the community's current needs and priorities. It is particularly important that the community feels it is them telling the officer what they need and not the other way around. Without this depth of understanding attempts to design appropriate training programs are unlikely to succeed.

This method of community outreach is further supported by recent research. The research identified the failure of traditional forms of marketing in reaching a certain disadvantaged, migrant population and recommended that 'VET service providers consciously form relationships with community groups in order to access migrant communities' (Western Australian Department of Training 2002 quoted in Bean 2004, p.301). One example of a positive outcome from the Community Partnerships Officer's outreach work was a training program for Spanish speaking aged care workers – a skills gap that was identified after extensive discussions with the Spanish community about their needs.

A clear contact point for migrant and refugee students

Located in the Centre for Commencing Students, the Community Partnerships Officer spends time speaking with potential students who drop in or ring up. Some of whom are referred to the officer from community partners, service providers and government organisations. The Community Partnerships Officer also encourages students to come back

and see them if they have any problems during their training or want further course advice. The recent paper on good practice in VET identified 'a clear, single communication point' (ATEC 2003, p. 2) as a key learner support strategy. Elleni Bereded-Samuel also has counselling experience and can offer these skills to the students she speaks to. Having a dedicated, culturally sensitive person to facilitate migrant and refugee students' course decisions and enrolments, and to provide ongoing support and advocacy when necessary, improves student access to the institution and supports their ongoing participation in learning.

Advocacy and information dissemination

The Community Partnerships Officer has strong links with a variety of migrant and refugee communities as well as with service providers (e.g. AMES), government organisations, the judicial courts and the Victorian Police. The officer further embeds themselves in the local community by acting as a resource of cross-cultural information for many organisations to better inform them of the needs and status of migrant communities. By widely disseminating information about the needs of migrant and refugee communities the officer is helping to reduce community barriers to training and employment pathways, thereby facilitating good student outcomes.

One example of the positive impact of Victoria University's partnerships officer is when she was involved in setting up a homework support program for Ethiopian children and young people. By talking with the community it was determined that the program be held on the weekend in a church known and trusted in the community. Elleni Bereded-Samuel facilitated the involvement of university and TAFE students in the program. This gave Victoria University childcare, youth work, social work and education students work placement experiences in a cross-cultural context and the Ethiopian homework support program skilled tutors. This highlights the point that a dedicated Community Partnerships Officer can develop connections across the community that allow them to see service gaps and use partnership garnered resources to address those gaps.

Summary

This section has highlighted a wealth of potential benefits of engaging a dedicated community development or partnerships officer to support community access and involvement thereby increasing the inclusiveness of the training organisation. Key strategies to support the effectiveness of such an officer may include:

- allowing and encouraging dynamic responses to changing contexts;
- developing partnerships with other service providers to share knowledge and find solutions to common problems;
- accessing support from a development minded team;
- a focus on identifying community needs;
- providing a clear contact point for migrant and refugee students; and
- supporting the community through advocacy work and information dissemination.

Good Practice and Common Strategies

A learner-centred approach and community partnerships are two key principles of good practice in including people from non-English speaking backgrounds in VET that are found in the all of the brief studies highlighted above. Other examples of good practice identified in these case studies included:

- recruiting and supporting skilled and committed staff;
- ensuring a safe and welcoming learning environment; and
- strengthening learning and employment pathways for students.

A learner-centred approach

Across the three program sections – ESL, vocational, and retraining – a strong learner-focus was evident. Three complementary types of learner-centred program development and delivery should be highlighted:

- strategies to address barriers to learning (eg. cost, accessibility, or negative community perceptions);
- strategies to encourage and support learner participation by designing programs which address or cater for the learner's immediate needs, concerns or desires (eg. helping retrenched workers re-enter the labour market, or finding work in children's services); and
- strategies which embed personal development supports (eg. trauma counselling, promoting lifelong learning or reducing social isolation) into training and education programs.

When catering for people from non-English speaking backgrounds these strategies work together to remove common barriers to education and training, to hook in and engage individuals with pressing learning needs – allowing them to participate more fully in the broader community – and to expand their potential and improve their learning outcomes by encouraging and supporting personal development.

Community partnerships

Community partnerships that work to facilitate broader participation, learner pathways and program delivery are present in all the program examples presented above. In section four, Community partnerships and outreach, the potential benefits for a TAFE institute of having a dedicated community partnerships officer to develop and maintain community embeddedness are explored through the examples of the NMIT Youth Unit's development officer and Victoria University's Community Partnerships Officer. These benefits include:

- a better understanding of the needs of particular migrant or refugee communities, which allows targeted program development; and
- a cross-sectoral overview of service provision, which promotes lateral thinking and innovative solutions to difficult problems.

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