

CONNECT

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

EVALUATION REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2002

A project funded by VicHealth & auspiced by the
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)



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CONNECT - Connecting Communities and Schools
Evaluation Report

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Jo Kemp
Project Officer

September 2002

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|--|
| CALD | Culturally and Linguistically Diverse |
| DE&T | Department of Education and Training |
| ELS | English Language School |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| LAG | Local Action Group |
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| MHPP | Mental Health Promotion Plan |
| MIC | Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) |
| MYFS | Manningham Youth and Family Services |
| RSG | Regional Steering Group |
| SC | Secondary College |
| SFYS | School Focused Youth Service |
| SSG | Staff Support Group |
| SWC | Student Welfare Coordinator |
| VCE | Victorian Certificate of Education |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A school based pilot project called CONNECT and funded by VicHealth operated in the Eastern Region between January 2001 and July 2002. The project provided practical assistance through secondary schools to increase the social connectedness of newly arrived young people and their parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

1.1 Key Achievements

The key achievements of the pilot project were:

- Project partnerships with four secondary schools
- Participation of approximately 560 young people and their parents in project activities
- Development of the CONNECT Leader Training Manual to prepare students to provide support to newly arrived young people
- Development of a peer support model for secondary schools to assist young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Training of peer leaders and introduction of three peer support programs to assist newly arrived young people in the school environment
- Recreational programs for young people during school holidays
- Information sessions for parents from CALD backgrounds about the education system at three schools
- Development of opportunities for parents from CALD backgrounds to socialise with each other and share information and experiences, and
- Positive feedback through quantitative and qualitative evaluation techniques from young people and parents involved in project activities.

1.2 Key Learning

The key learning's from the pilot project were:

- A school-based model is an effective method to make initial contact with young people and their parents.
- CALD young people and their parents have additional needs relating to the school and local community that require the model to be further developed to link parents and young people from CALD backgrounds to their community and youth and family support services.
- The support of local youth and family support agencies and migrant community groups are critical in meeting these needs and sustaining the peer support and parent support programs in schools and the local community.
- The needs of young people and their parents relate to:
 1. Accessing local community resources and support services available outside of the school environment including youth activities and family support services, and
 2. Being involved in decision-making processes in both the school and local community.

In response to these achievements and learnings a new model for the future development and expansion of the project has been developed.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Pilot Project

CONNECT operated as a pilot project in the Eastern Region of Melbourne between January 2001 and July 2002. It was a collaborative project of agencies and schools from the Cities of Whitehorse, Manningham and Maroondah auspiced by the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne). The objective of the project was to provide support to newly arrived migrant and refugee young people attending secondary school in the Eastern Region, and to their parents, to assist them to develop a sense of belonging within the school and local community. The following two programs were developed and implemented to achieve this:

1. A peer support program in three mainstream secondary schools; and
2. A parent support program at two of the same secondary schools and at the Blackburn English Language School (ELS).¹

2.2 VicHealth and the Mental Health Promotion Plan

CONNECT was funded by VicHealth under their Mental Health Promotion Plan (MHPP) that invested approximately \$4.6 million between 1999-2002 into initiating and evaluating mental health promotion projects in Victoria. The emphasis of the MHPP has been on the prevention of mental illness. Newly arrived people to Australia, particularly those coming from areas of conflict, are one of the groups of people VicHealth chose to target in their grants program under the MHPP.

VicHealth describes 'mental health' as:²

...the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. It provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just.

CONNECT was funded as part of VicHealth's strategy to promote mental health in Victorian communities. 'Social connectedness' is identified as a primary element that determines one's mental health (VicHealth 1999: 10). The CONNECT pilot project was based on this theme and as such, aimed to assist newly arrived young people and their parents to develop a sense of belonging within the school and local community, to engage in social activities and to access social networks and supportive environments.

The total funding amount from VicHealth for the pilot phase of CONNECT was \$90 000. This funding was originally allocated for expenditure over a fifteen month period, but was extended to eighteen months due to a surplus in the budget and a recognised need that the project required more time to further develop.

¹ A parent support program was not implemented at Ringwood Secondary College because the school became involved in CONNECT late in the pilot project (February 2002).

² VicHealth (1999) Mental Health Promotion Plan Foundation Document: 1999-2002. VicHealth: Melbourne. Page 4.

2.3 Project Management Structure

2.3.1 Project Steering Group

The planning, development and implementation of CONNECT was overseen by a Project Steering Group that included representatives from a variety of agencies and schools in the Eastern Region. The Project Steering Group met on a monthly basis to review the progress of the peer support and parent support programs and to support the project officer in the planning and development of program initiatives. The members of the Project Steering Group and their respective organisations were:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Warren Anderson | City Of Whitehorse |
| Sennea Ben | Harrison Community Services |
| Robert Colla | Blackburn English Language School |
| Sue Herbst | Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) |
| George Holmes | Cities of Maroondah and Manningham School Focused Youth Service Coordinator |
| Jan Loughman | City of Manningham |
| Judy McDougall | Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) |
| Yvette Shaw | City of Whitehorse School Focused Youth Service Coordinator |
| Thanh Thach | Louise Multicultural Community Centre |

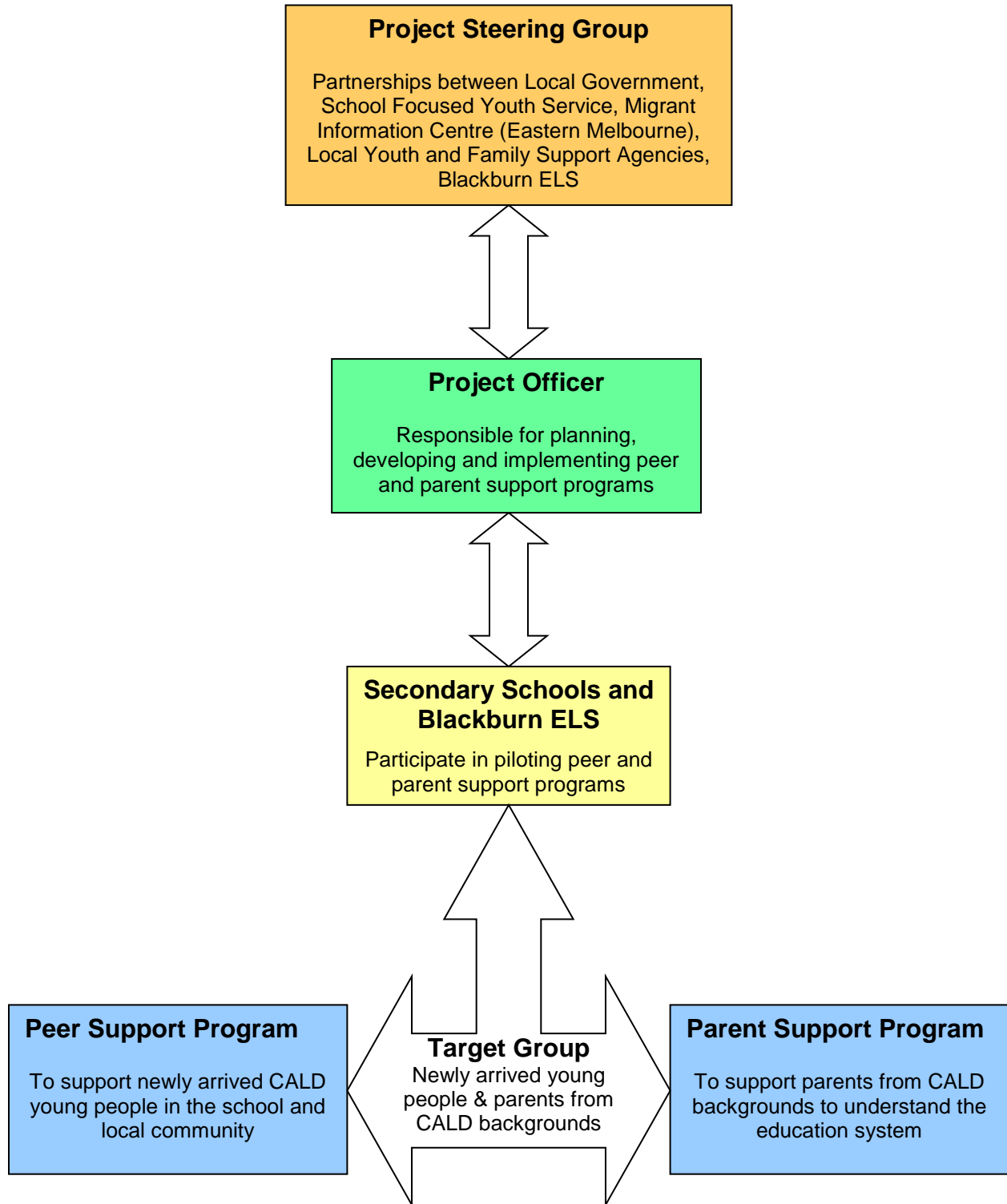
2.3.2 Project Officer

A fulltime Project Officer was employed to work with the Project Steering Group to plan, develop and implement the peer support and parent support programs. The key roles of the Project Officer were to:

- Consult and liaise with participating schools,
- Research, develop and facilitate the peer support program,
- Provide support and guidance to young people involved in the peer support programs,
- Develop and implement parent support programs for newly arrived parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to increase their knowledge and participation in the school and local community,
- Develop and maintain strong links and effective partnerships with agencies, service providers and Local Government in the Eastern Region,
- Resource the Project Steering Group and funding body, including preparing progress reports, evaluation reports, budget reviews and updates, and
- Plan and implement an ongoing evaluation strategy of the pilot project.

Figure 1 depicts a diagrammatic representation of the pilot project model in terms of project management structure, partnerships, programs and target group.

Figure 1: CONNECT Pilot Project Model



3. METHOD

3.1 Evaluation Strategy

An evaluation strategy was developed at the commencement of the project to direct and monitor the progress of the project throughout the planning and implementation process. The focus of the strategy was to initially assess the needs of the target group and later measure the satisfaction of participants and other involved parties, of the events and activities conducted throughout the project and of the program structures created. The evaluation strategy formed two parts in order to cater effectively for both the peer support and parent support programs. Appendix 1 provides detailed information about the specific project activities and the evaluation techniques that were implemented.

This report is an evaluation of the overall project and is based on those evaluation reports produced throughout the pilot stage.³

3.1.1 Evaluation Techniques

A combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques were used throughout the project to measure satisfaction, outcomes and monitor change. These included:

- Focus groups with students, staff and parents to carry out needs assessments, to monitor participant satisfaction and to guide program development,
- Feedback forms with students and parents to measure participant satisfaction,
- Telephone interviews to monitor the outcome and satisfaction of activities with school staff, and
- Attendance/participation statistics to monitor participant involvement in program activities.

3.2 Selection of Participating Schools

Statistics available from the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) detail the number, country of birth and languages spoken at home of students attending schools in each local government area (LGA). A review of these figures and consultation with School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) Coordinators and the Blackburn ELS provided the basis for inviting schools to participate in the project.

Blackburn ELS played a vital role in the project as it is the first educational institution that most newly arrived young people from CALD backgrounds attend. Usually after two terms the students then feed into the mainstream schools in the Region. Therefore, the Principal of the school was a founding member of the Project Steering Group and the school was also the site of preliminary research and the pilot for the first initiatives of the parent support program.

Mainstream secondary schools that acted as feeder schools for students from Blackburn ELS with high numbers of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the Cities of Manningham, Maroondah, Monash and Whitehorse were initially identified for

³ Evaluation reports of specific peer support and parent support activities that were conducted throughout the pilot project are available at the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) PO Box 317, Mitcham Victoria 3132 Ph: (03) 9873 1666 Email: jkemp@miceastmelb.com.au

potential inclusion. Letters detailing the objectives of the project and an expression of interest form were sent to the Principal at these schools inviting their participation.

Two of the schools that responded were chosen to participate. They were:

1. Mullauna College in the City of Whitehorse, and
2. East Doncaster Secondary College in the City of Manningham.

In 2002, Ringwood Secondary College in the City of Maroondah, who expressed interest in becoming involved, also participated in CONNECT.

3.3 Staff Support Groups

At the commencement of the project at each participating school a Staff Support Group (SSG) was established to assist the CONNECT Project Officer in the development and implementation of both the peer support and parent support programs. The staff approached to be included in the group were the Assistant Principal, Student Welfare Coordinator (SWC), English as a Second Language (ESL) Coordinator and ESL staff. These staff were selected because of their:

- Familiarity with the students at the school from CALD backgrounds,
- Ability to represent the needs of newly arrived students among other staff and students,
- Understanding of the current school procedures, and
- Ability to make decisions and advance change in the school's culture.

The role of the SSG was to:

- Oversee the development and implementation of the programs,
- Promote the program to the school community,
- Provide knowledge and expertise,
- Participate and contribute to project evaluation, and
- Identify ways the project can be sustained after completion.

During the initial development of the programs the Project Officer met with the SSG on a regular basis and also communicated via phone, fax and email. Meetings during the later stages of the peer support and parent support programs were organised on an 'as needs' basis, e.g. evaluation purposes, up coming program events.

3.4 Peer Support Program

Initial research to begin planning and developing the peer support program involved a literature review and focus groups. The information collected from the focus groups and the literature review was analysed and used to develop the peer support program. In particular the CONNECT Leadership Training Program that was designed to provide young people with the necessary skills and experience to effectively support newly arrived secondary school students from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

3.4.1 Literature Review

The literature review was comprised primarily by research of existing peer support programs that operate at mainstream secondary schools, through youth and family support agencies and others that target refugee young people specifically.

3.4.2 Focus Groups with Young People

Focus groups were held with young people from CALD backgrounds at Blackburn ELS, Mullauna College and East Doncaster Secondary College (SC) in June 2001.

3.4.2.1 Blackburn ELS

Two focus groups were conducted with students attending Blackburn ELS, one with Year 10 students and the other with students in Years 7, 8 and 9. The objectives of the focus groups were to understand the experience of the young people beginning school in Australia for the first time and their expectations and concerns about starting at a mainstream school. Twelve students participated in the groups aged between 13-16 years. The students were all recent arrivals to Australia and had attended Blackburn ELS for one or two terms. They were from the following countries: Germany, China, Brazil, Malaysia, Japan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Russia, and Indonesia.

The focus groups were structured around the following questions:

- Think back to before you started, what did you think coming to this school would be like (what did you expect)?
- Can you describe what it was *really* like?
- If you had the opportunity to sit down with a new student at the school what would you tell them/show them to make their life easier?
- When you leave the English school and go to high school/secondary college, what do you think that school will be like?
- What kind of support do you think a new student from a CALD background should have?

3.4.2.2 Mullauna College and East Doncaster SC

One focus group was held at Mullauna College and one at East Doncaster SC to gain an understanding of the students' experiences at mainstream schools, their expectations and views on how support for students from CALD backgrounds could be improved at their school. Fifteen students participated in the focus groups, ranging in age from 12-16 years. The language groups represented included Khmer, Vietnamese, Persian, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Arabic. The time they had lived in Australia varied between one to seven years.

The focus groups were structured around similar questions as those outlined above for students at Blackburn ELS, but also included:

- When a new student arrives at your school from a CALD background are they given any special information or assistance?

3.5 Parent Support Program

Planning for the parent support program was based on information collected from focus groups conducted with newly arrived parents at the Blackburn ELS.

3.5.1 Focus groups with parents

Two focus groups were conducted with the parents of students that attended Blackburn ELS in June 2001. The objective of the focus groups was to assess the support needs of newly arrived parents from CALD backgrounds particularly in relation to education. A

total of twenty-one parents attended the focus groups and the languages represented included: Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Korean, Farsi, Dari, and Swedish.

The focus groups were structured around the following questions:

- What kind of involvement do the parents have in the schooling system in your country of origin?
- What kind of involvement would you like to have with schools?
- What kind of support would you like from schools?
- What do you think is the best way to receive that support/information?
- What concerns do you have about the education of your children?

4. THE NEEDS OF PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CALD BACKGROUNDS

Discussed below are the results of the focus groups with young people and parents that guided the development of the peer support and parent support programs.

4.1 Young People at Blackburn ELS

4.1.1 The Blackburn ELS Experience

In general, the students were very positive about their experience at Blackburn ELS, with only one girl describing her discomfort during the first term saying it was '*depressing because I didn't know people*'. For the most part they discussed the relaxed atmosphere of the school and the ease of making new friends despite language difficulties, attributing this to having had similar experiences of leaving their country to settle in a different one. The younger group of students discussed the mix of different nationalities at the school and felt that this provided them with the opportunity to learn about and respect other cultures and their customs. One student said that '*Everyone is always together, there is no fighting*', and another '*It is like a big family*'.

Students described the teachers as patient, easy to communicate with, and more interesting than schools they had previously attended. While most found the level of work to be appropriate for learning English, some expressed boredom towards the end of their final term, indicating their anticipation to begin at a mainstream secondary school.

4.1.2 Student Expectations of Secondary School

Despite a readiness of some students to leave Blackburn ELS, the younger group of students in particular talked of their concerns about making new friends, being teased about their name or English ability, and having problems understanding the teacher or difficulties with homework.

The older group were wary of their studies becoming harder and teachers being stricter, and expected that it would be more difficult to make friends at their new school, anticipating other students to be less understanding of their situation and background. Nevertheless, some students felt that the transition would be better for their English and looked forward to involvement in other activities such as sport.

4.1.3 Needs of Newly Arrived CALD Students

When asked what kinds of support would make the transition from Blackburn ELS to mainstream secondary schools easier for them, the students drew on their experiences of being a new student at Blackburn ELS and identified the need to be:

- Welcomed and introduced to other students and teachers,
- Given information about the new school prior to starting,
- Introduced to other students who speak their first language,
- Informed about the way the school operates including timetables, rules, activities, canteen,
- Told where to go for assistance,
- Given support with homework, and
- Able to share their background and traditions with others.

4.2 Young People at Mainstream Schools

4.2.1 Student Expectations Prior to Commencing at a Mainstream School

Most students painted a positive picture of their expectations before commencing at Mullauna College or East Doncaster SC. Aside from being nervous and a little apprehensive about the big size of the school and finding their way around, participants anticipated friendly staff and students, lower work loads, more interesting texts, less pressure (exams and tests) than they had experienced overseas or at Blackburn ELS and a variety of subjects. Longer holidays, lunch and recess breaks were predicted to be filled with fun activities.

Some students described themselves as being worried about the prospect of being teased or bullied about their English language difficulties. Other areas of concern included their studies and the expectations of teachers about homework, having no friends, and finding their way around the school grounds.

4.2.2 The Real Experience

In reality, as expected the school grounds were initially confusing with some students describing their first few days as 'scary' as they had difficulty finding their way around, the timetable was confusing and the library difficult to use. Other practical issues that confronted the students were costs at the canteen and types of food available (particularly for Muslim students), public transport, the presence of students smoking and the availability of drugs.

Communication and language difficulties emerged as a barrier, with students reporting having trouble keeping up with the teacher in class and finding that the teachers' expectations of homework were unclear. The workload was big and they had to learn quickly to manage their time. On a more personal note, some students felt that their classmates did not understand their culture or share their traditions which impacted on them missing family and friends that live overseas.

Whilst in general, school was reported to be fun and easier than overseas experiences, the anticipated long recess and lunch breaks proved to be boring, with nothing to do. For the most part, other students were perceived as being kind, with racism and discrimination present but only considered a small problem. Developing friendships did not represent an issue, however, they had observed that quiet students with less outgoing personalities sometimes struggled to develop a friendship group.

Aside from school, students discussed aspects of life before living in Australia that they missed, for example the freedom to wander the streets at night with friends. In Australia their parents no longer allowed them to go out in the evening for fear of their safety. Therefore they must spend more time at home and appeared to be unaware of organised activities that are available to them outside of school.

4.2.3 Existing Support for CALD Students

Responses from students at Mullauna College and East Doncaster SC indicated that support mechanisms for new students from migrant and refugee backgrounds were inconsistent. Teachers were reported to be nice, very considerate and helpful to new students from CALD backgrounds during their first term. After this period some participants felt that they were treated like all of the other students when they still

needed some extra support and assistance, especially with issues related to ongoing language difficulties. Some students said that they were assigned another student from their class to show them around for their first week, but this procedure did not occur across the board with one boy saying that *'I had to find the front office to ask for help'*.

4.2.4 Needs of Newly Arrived CALD Students

The kinds of support that students felt were appropriate to assist a new student at the school included practical issues such as introducing them to other students and teachers, showing them around the school grounds, the canteen, the library and internet, explaining the school timetable, the bulletin, extra-curricular activities available, school rules and public transport. Also considered important was assistance with projects and assignments, translating and interpreting and advice about easy books to read and TV programs to watch to help improve their English.

On a more emotional level students agreed that it would be good to reassure new students, for example tell them *'don't worry, it will be alright after awhile'*. Other suggestions included advice such as being *'patient and open-minded'* and *'don't judge too quickly'*. By showing an interest, talking to them and getting to know them and understand their background, they believed new students would be much more at ease. Other advice included helping them to find someone who speaks their language if they are having difficulty speaking or understanding English.

4.3 Summary of Responses by Young People

Discussions with students about their expectations prior to beginning school in Australia, and of their actual experiences of school life in their respective schools, provided an understanding of the support needs of new students from CALD backgrounds. This information, combined with the responses from students about the kinds of assistance they felt would be beneficial for newly-arrived students to assist them in their transition into mainstream secondary schools, fell into three broad categories:

- **Practical aspects of school life**, e.g. showing new students around the school grounds, canteen, library and internet, class timetable, extra-curricular activities, introductions to teachers, public transport, local shops, school rules, where to go for help;
- **Communication and language skills**, e.g. introduction to students who speak the same language, assistance with translating and interpreting English, advice about ways to improve their English, assistance with homework and an understanding of teacher expectations; and
- **Social and emotional wellbeing**, e.g. introduction to other students, reassurance from students, eg. *'Don't worry, it will be alright after awhile'*, peer advice such as being *'patient'* and *'open-minded'*, and *'Don't judge too quickly'*.

4.4 Parents at Blackburn ELS

4.4.1 Transition: Language School to Secondary School

The parents raised many concerns about the transition of their children from Blackburn ELS to mainstream secondary schools and in doing so demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the Victorian education system. Primary concerns were in relation to:

- VCE (what is it and how does it work),
- English language support for students,
- Differences between public and private schools,
- Zoning (eligibility for schools),
- Homework (student commitment and school expectations), and
- Issues faced by CALD students at mainstream schools.

Other issues that emerged as topics that the parents would like further information and advice included:

- Particular schools in the region,
- Curriculum and assessment system for Years 7-10, and
- Books and uniforms (including availability of second hand items).

4.4.2 Parental Support for Children

Aside from information requirements about the schooling system, parents expressed that they were unsure about how to provide support to their children and in what ways. This was particularly pertinent regarding homework, with parents unsure of how they could assist their children and questioning what resources were available to them for this purpose. Limited English language skills among parents was a major concern and some felt they were losing control of their children's behaviour due to a lack of understanding of the schooling system and the role of teachers. For example, one Chinese couple expressed concern that their children talk at home about boyfriend/girlfriend relationships at school, in contrast to their own country where teachers do not let such relationships occur.

To address such concerns and support needs, the parents indicated that the opportunity to socialise and communicate with other parents and families would be beneficial, allowing them to share their knowledge and experience with each other in their own language.

4.4.3 Parent Involvement in Schools

While many parents expressed their willingness to become involved in activities at their child's school they related their uncertainty of communicating with schools, again due to concern about their language skills. Afghan parents said that they do not become involved in schools in their country, they just pay the money. However, they indicated they would be happy to be a part of the school community in Australia.

4.4.4 Information Delivery

Parents indicated that they felt small group sessions were the most appropriate way to receive information and highlighted the importance of being able to ask questions and have interpreters available.

5. PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

5.1 Why Peer Support?

A peer support model was chosen on the basis that young people can be invaluable in assisting other young people overcome situations or problems simply through their understanding and earlier experience of a similar circumstance. Young people trained in communication skills, leadership, and armed with specific local knowledge and the benefit of their own experiences, can play a major role helping others to make a smooth transition into a new environment (e.g. school or the local community).

Students attending secondary school in Australia for the first time often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness and have difficulty adjusting to the school environment and the local community. Life and decisions can become very confusing.

This is where trained young people can offer assistance to newly arrived students to Australia from migrant and refugee backgrounds by providing them with friendly support during their transition into a new school, new community and new country. At the same time, the peer leaders have the opportunity to develop and improve their own skills and knowledge. Working with this philosophy the following peer support program was developed.

5.2 CONNECT Leaders

CONNECT Leaders are students interested in providing friendly support to newly arrived young people from CALD backgrounds at their school. Students in Years 8-11 have been trained as CONNECT Leaders (see 5.4.2 below). Unlike other peer support programs that tend to operate at secondary schools for defined periods of time (e.g. 4 weeks with Year 7 students), the CONNECT peer program is designed to be ongoing. This is to ensure that support is always available to newly arrived young people and to establish a culture and acceptance of multiculturalism in the school.

5.3 CONNECT Participants

The target group for the CONNECT project are newly arrived young people who are permanent residents and are from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Participants in the peer support program are primarily students involved in ESL classes. However, the program is not exclusive and other students from CALD backgrounds who can benefit from the program were welcome to participate.

5.4 CONNECT Leader Training

5.4.1 CONNECT Leader Training Manual

The CONNECT Leader Training Manual outlines a two day program that was developed in response to the needs identified by newly arrived young people. The program was designed to equip students with the skills to provide support and information to newly arrived young people from CALD backgrounds. The training program covers the following topics:

- Culture
- Communication
- Settlement Issues
- Creating Networks
- Negotiation and Decision Making
- Coping Skills
- Leadership
- Activity Development.

The training focuses on interactive and practical workshops that engage the students to think about the experiences of migrants and refugees and develop an understanding of the settlement process in a new country.⁴

5.4.2 Training Courses

The CONNECT Leader Training Course has been conducted four times with a total of seventy students. The course was facilitated by the CONNECT Project Officer assisted by either:

- Iman Rimam, Migrant Youth Support Worker (Eastern Region), or
- Michelle Hickingbotham, Youth Worker, Manningham Youth and Family Services (MYFS).

Ideally the course is conducted at each school once a year and those Leaders then remain involved with the program for the remainder of the year. Students that would like to continue their involvement beyond that year are encouraged to do so.

The training was conducted at a local venue away from the school environment to give the students a sense of importance about their involvement in the program. Students participating in the training in each case were transported to and from the venue or made arrangements to meet on site. The following venues were used:

- Schramms Reserve, Doncaster
- Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), Mitcham
- Federation Estate, Ringwood.

Use of the venues was provided free of charge through in kind support from the relevant project partners.

All students were required to complete permission forms signed by a parent or guardian to participate in the training program.

Table 1 outlines the details of when and where the training sessions were held, the students that participated and the training facilitators.

⁴ Copies of the CONNECT Leader Training Manual are available from the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)

Table 1: Details of CONNECT Leader Training Courses 2001-2002

| Month | Year | School | No. of students | Year Level of students | Trainers | Venue |
|----------|------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| July | 2001 | Mullauna College | 16 | Years 8-10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CONNECT Project Officer• Migrant Youth Support Worker (Eastern Region)• Youth Worker, MYFS | Migrant Information Centre |
| July | 2001 | East Doncaster SC | 26 | Years 10-11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CONNECT Project Officer• Youth Worker, MYFS | Schramms Reserve |
| February | 2002 | Ringwood SC | 14 | Years 9-11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CONNECT Project Officer• Migrant Youth Support Worker (Eastern Region) | Federation Estate |
| May | 2002 | Mullauna College | 14 | Year 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CONNECT Project Officer | Migrant Information Centre |

5.4.3 Participant Feedback

Feedback sheets were developed and distributed to all students at the end of the training program to assess participant satisfaction regarding the topics, facilitators, and length of the course.

The results of the feedback forms were very positive with the vast majority of students reporting that they were pleased with the training as a way of preparing to become a CONNECT Leader. Positive feedback was also received about the facilitators. Most students felt that the length of the course was *'just right'*, however some indicated that it was *'too short'* and a very small percentage that it was *'too long'*. All of the students that participated in the course said that they would recommend it to others.

Students were also asked to provide suggestions for improvements that were taken into account at future training sessions. The most common suggestions for improvement were:

- More games and practical activities,
- More discussion/less discussion,
- More topics,
- Smaller training groups, and
- A greater understanding of the program prior to commencing the course.

In response to the participant feedback, the course continues to evolve and the workshops, activities and discussion topics are adapted to the needs of the students. As a result, the CONNECT Leader Training Manual provides a template for the training program and contains many activity and workshop ideas. However, other activities can be included or substituted in the two day program. The main point to consider is that there is a balance of practical activities and discussion time to maintain interest and allow the students to develop a solid understanding of the topic areas explored in the manual.

Some general comments about the training sessions have included:

- *'I learnt things that can't be learnt by reading text books',*
- *'I have really enjoyed myself throughout this program, it has made me more confident in all I do! So thanks for this opportunity',*
- *'I learnt a lot of things and I am glad I participated in this program',*
- *'The course was well organised and had good trainers. I learnt a lot and feel more confident about becoming a Leader',*
- *'There was a wide variety of practical activities along with talking, discussion and games',*
- *'I really enjoyed the course, you don't realise how "culturally blind" you are until you begin to learn',* and
- *'I learnt heaps from these two training days and I'm excited about applying them soon'.*

5.5 Training Implementation Model

Through the feedback from the students, trainers and teachers involved with the peer support program a model for the recruitment of new Leaders and the implementation of the training program has been developed. Table 2 outlines this model and the details are discussed below.

Table 2: Ideal Model of Implementation for the CONNECT Leader Training Program

| Activity | Details |
|--|--|
| Peer support program introduced/advertised to students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target Year 10 students • Posters, lunchtime meeting • Project Officer to attend Form Group meetings and distribute expression of interest form |
| Leader Recruitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students submit expression of interest form • Students interviewed by Project Officer and teacher from SSG • Approximately 15 students selected for training course • Students and parents receive acceptance letter and permission form |
| CONNECT Leader Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 days run consecutively or split over two weeks • training conducted twice a year at each school to prepare new students as Leaders, particularly participants in the program that would like to undertake the training • training to be conducted by youth and family support agency and Project Officer |
| Presentation of CONNECT Leader badges and certificates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders presented certificates and badges at school assembly |

5.5.1 Identification of Target Group

Year 10 students are identified as the most appropriate year level to target as the students have an increased level of maturity and confidence and are not yet involved in the heavy workload of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). This means that they have more time and energy to devote to the program.

Students in Year 10 have also developed a level of respect within the school enabling them to perform an effective leadership role among other students.

5.5.2 Number of Leaders

Approximately 15 students is a suitable number of Leaders to train in terms of being able to effectively engage and support all participants and Leaders in the subsequent peer support activities. This number also allows for a small drop out rate among the Leaders without affecting the implementation of the program. As described above, 26 students at East Doncaster SC were trained as Leaders in what was a very successful and interactive training course. However, positively involving and supporting this many students in peer support activities after the completion of the training proved difficult and resulted in students not feeling valued in their leadership role.⁵

5.5.3 Application and Recruitment Process

The Project Officer/training facilitator needs to take a role in advertising the peer support program in order to begin establishing familiarity with the students. Advertising for Leader recruitment should take multiple forms, including posters, school bulletin notices, and presentation at form group or year level assembly. All interested students then complete an Expression of Interest form detailing their personal details, skills and reasons for applying to become a CONNECT Leader. Applicants should then be invited to participate in an interview with the training facilitator and ESL staff member or SWC.

The process of completing an Expression of Interest form and undergoing an interview works to achieve several things:

1. A level of respect among the prospective Leaders for the program,
2. Experience among the students in applying for a role and interacting in an interview situation, and
3. Ensure that the students understood the objectives of the program and the ongoing commitment they would be required to make to program activities.

School staff have a tendency to 'hand pick' or encourage students that are already regarded as leaders by the teachers and students, to do the training rather than opening the opportunity to all students within the target group to nominate themselves. This tends to prevent students with less confidence from applying. However, in the experience of the Project Officer across several schools, it is the less confident students at the commencement of the training course that noticeably expand their skills, increase their confidence, are reliable and are able to devote more time to the program as they are not also committed to a range of other activities. This results in a higher level of support for the newly arrived students and a greater number of peer activities conducted. The dedication of these students is reflected in the following comments that were collected through a feedback form assessing the experience of the Leaders at the end of the 2001 school year:

- *'I think it is great taking on a new responsibility, and it was a great opportunity to work with the ESL students'*

⁵ Refer to 5.6.2 for other factors that affected the peer program at East Doncaster SC.

- *'I think CONNECT has made me more aware of other ESL students, it was nice to be thought of as a Leader',*
- *'A proud achievement',*
- *'It gave me a new responsibility to help other people at the school', and*
- *'It is a really great program, I look forward to contributing to the school and students who need my help'.*

The responses by these students confirms the importance of making the application for CONNECT Leader an open process available to all students in the target group.

When the students have been finalised for participation in the training program a letter of congratulations and acceptance and a permission form should be sent to each student inviting their participation in the training course.

5.5.4 Leader Recognition

The final stage indicated in Table 2 is the presentation of CONNECT Leader badges and Certificates of Achievement at school assembly. This is an important process as it develops understanding of the program among the general student body and identifies the new Leaders as playing a significant role within the school community. This is particularly important for a newly participating school to the project as the show of achievement works to establish a culture of acceptance and understanding around the program and its objectives among staff and students.

5.5.5 Leader Commitment

The enthusiasm of the Leaders after completing the training program is evident in their high attendance at planning meetings and performance during the peer sessions. As expected, some students are more committed to the program and taking responsibility for organising activities than others.

Due to the ongoing nature of the program, a flexible approach towards planning and conducting activities is necessary to allow the students to handle other responsibilities and commitments. For example, during exam periods or school theatre productions students have other pressures demanding their time. Encouraging a variety of activities and events, and ensuring the Leaders are rewarded for their efforts are crucial in maintaining enthusiasm and commitment.

5.6 Peer Support Activities

The Leaders at each participating school have facilitated peer support activities on a regular basis during class time or at lunchtime. Prior to the sessions the Leaders met with the Project Officer during lunchtime to plan and prepare activities. The Leaders were encouraged to develop their own ideas for the sessions and collect feedback and suggestions from the participating students in order for them to develop a sense of ownership around the program.

Students that attend ESL classes were targeted to be involved in CONNECT activities at each of the schools participating in the pilot program. The range of peer activities that were conducted included introductory ice-breaking activities, group games, trivia quiz's, lunchtime sport competitions, multicultural lunches, and goal setting workshops.

5.6.1 Timing of Peer Activities

At East Doncaster SC and Ringwood SC activity sessions were held during lunchtime while at Mullauna College most activities were conducted at regular intervals during ESL classes.

At Mullauna College due to allocated class time for activity sessions, the participation rate of students from CALD backgrounds was high, and the teachers commented on the changing dynamics between the students and the Leaders. Due to curriculum pressures it is not realistic to continue peer activity sessions for an extended period during class time. However, initiating the program in this manner allows both the Leaders and the students to develop a familiarity with each other and with the program so that they are then in the position to make an informed decision about whether they would like to be further involved in subsequent activities conducted in their own time outside of class.

5.6.2 East Doncaster Secondary College Experience

East Doncaster SC has a highly academic focus and at the commencement of the program at the school, staff felt that dedicating class time to CONNECT would be too disruptive to the curriculum. Therefore, lunchtimes were allocated to conduct both Leader preparation and activity sessions for CONNECT. The activity sessions were held on a fortnightly basis during Term 3, 2001. Only a small number of the target group attended the sessions because they had no previous experience with the program and were unsure what to expect. Feedback from students suggested that they would rather spend their lunchtime talking with friends than participating in more structured activities. In response to this an end of term Trivia Quiz was held, advertising prizes for the winners. ESL students were invited to enter in teams of three to compete for the prizes. It was a successful event with 24 students attending. A basketball competition followed which again attracted high numbers of both participants and bystanders.

It became evident at East Doncaster SC that it was possible to entice CALD students to participate in activities conducted by the Leaders at lunchtime, however the effort involved in organising the activities without support from staff members was increased and resulted in some delays or misunderstandings during peer activities. For example, the school hall was booked by the Project Officer to conduct a lunchtime basketball competition, the hall was then double booked with an activity that was considered a higher priority and the Project Officer was not notified of the change.

Some of the Leaders also began to feel that the program was not being very well accepted among students and teachers and that their skills were not being effectively utilised, and began to drop out of the program.

At the end of Term 4, 2001, the Leaders were asked to complete a feedback form about some of the issues surrounding the program that had been raised. Most of the Leaders felt that the program had been reasonably well accepted by students at the school, but less well accepted by teachers. Suggestions as to how the program could be improved within the school included more extensive advertising, increasing the time available to organise activities and hold some activities during class time.

5.6.3 Ringwood Secondary College Experience

At Ringwood Secondary College, aside from the first introductory peer activity during class that was followed by a BBQ lunch, program activities were confined to lunchtime. This has resulted in a more positive outcome than at East Doncaster SC due largely to the support of the SWC and ESL staff. Commitment and assistance from staff in organising activities has resulted in relatively high participation rates by CALD students. Assistance from staff included attendance at Leader meetings, attendance and supervision at lunchtime activities, advertising activities during class and at form group assembly and placing notices in the school bulletin to organise meetings and remind students of activities. The Assistant Principal offered support through her presence at the Leader training course and subsequent peer activities.

As at other participating schools, the first peer activities targeted ESL students only. However, it soon became apparent that this group of students were already quite well integrated into the school and did not want to attend activities that were 'ESL only' as this meant that they could not spend lunchtime with their other friends. This may be a result of the relatively small number of ESL students at Ringwood SC, as compared to Mullauna College and East Doncaster SC, resulting in newly arrived students having little choice but to mix more widely. As soon as the invitation to CONNECT activities were extended to 'ESL students and friends' participation increased. An example of this was a soccer competition that invited ESL students to put together a team of their friends to play in a friendly competition at lunchtime. The competition ran over two weeks with approximately 30 students participating. By the third week the students were turning up asking why the competition was not running that week.

5.6.4 Student Feedback

Information received from feedback sheets and focus groups with ESL students that participated in the peer activities indicated that the sessions were most useful and enjoyable to the recently arrived students than the students that had been living in Australia for a longer period of time (e.g. two years or more). The students also felt that the sessions were good for the newer students because they feel more comfortable working in smaller groups and it gives them the opportunity to meet other students more easily.

Students that were in the same grade as the Leaders (i.e. Year 10) and had been living in Australia for some time reported that they found it difficult to respect the Leaders in their role as facilitators and at times felt that they were disorganised. They also emphasised the importance of the Leaders explaining the activities clearly so that they ran smoothly.

These responses indicated that formal peer activity sessions are more appropriate to be held by the Leaders with younger students, such as Years 7 and 8. While the older CALD students enjoy being involved in less formal activities such as lunchtime sport competitions. In Terms 2 and 3, 2002, at Mullauna College peer activities were conducted by the Year 10 Leaders with Year 7 and 8 ESL students during class time. After several sessions the students were asking their teacher in anticipation when they would have another session with the Leaders.

5.6.4 Holiday Program

In response to feedback from students about boredom and loneliness during the school holidays and having '*nothing to do*', a supervised holiday excursion was planned for each term break. The activities were largely organised in partnership with the Migrant Youth Support Program for the Eastern Region based at Whitehorse City Council and were advertised to students at each participating school in the CONNECT project, including Blackburn ELS and various other schools in the region. Both CONNECT Leaders and students from CALD backgrounds were invited to attend. The excursions were planned to introduce students to new activities and places that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in or go to. The excursions were subsidised so that cost was not a factor in students being able to attend. Other factors were also considered such as providing halal food at picnics and BBQ's, and travelling on public transport when possible to develop a familiarity among students with the system. Table 3 details the excursion that were conducted.

The students were asked to complete feedback forms after each excursion and the results were very positive with the majority of students (>90%) indicating that they enjoyed the activities and would recommend their friends to attend next time.

The activities were also important in that they provided an opportunity for the Project Officer to develop a more personal and familiar relationship with the students and encourage their involvement in future CONNECT activities.

Table 3: CONNECT Holiday Excursions

| Date | Destination | Details |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| September 2001 | Sherbrooke Forest, Dandenong Ranges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bushwalking, picnic and games• 20 participants |
| December 2001 | Anglesea | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surfing lesson• 10 participants |
| April 2002 | Hanging Rock | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bushwalking, BBQ and games• 12 participants |
| July 2002 | Melbourne City | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galactic Circus and Aquarium• 42 participants |

5.7 The Role of Staff Support Groups in the Peer Support Program

In each case one member of the SSG emerged as the primary contact within the school for the CONNECT Project Officer. The details are outlined below.

5.7.1 Mullauna College

At Mullauna College the primary support person continues to be the ESL Coordinator who is able to offer ongoing support to the peer support and parent support programs and updates to parents and students about upcoming activities and events. Her dedication to this role and presence among the students on a daily basis is a primary reason that there have been high participation rates of students from CALD backgrounds

at the school in the peer activities, including holiday excursions. Through her observation of the students that have participated in the peer support program she has noted the changing dynamics between the ESL students and Leaders.

5.7.2 East Doncaster Secondary College

At East Doncaster SC the primary support person emerged as the SWC. She provided support and advice on the planning and implementation of the peer support program. However, the SWC is not a constant face or presence among the ESL students and therefore is unable to fulfil the same role in terms of program delivery and student encouragement as a member of the ESL staff. In this instance, unless there is strong support from the ESL staff it is difficult to create momentum for the project within the school.

5.7.3 Ringwood Secondary College

At Ringwood SC the SWC also became the primary contact person within the school. In this case, the ESL staff were also very supportive of the CONNECT project and have played a key role in the classroom, advertising peer activities and encouraging student involvement.

5.7.4 Summary

Newly arrived students from CALD backgrounds are generally enrolled in an ESL course to provide them with language support. Therefore it is this group of students at the school that the peer support program has targeted. As the project commenced at different schools it became increasingly evident how important it was to have strong support from the staff in the ESL Department at the school as they play a vital role in encouraging student participation and involvement in the program on a day to day basis and for creating momentum and acceptance of the project within the school culture.

5.8 International and Fee-Paying Students

The funding from VicHealth was to specifically support newly arrived young people and their parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds that are permanent residents of Australia. This excludes fee-paying international students that are attending school in Australia for a fixed period of time under a student visa. These students generally live with a host family or with relatives in Australia. The exclusion of this group of students and their guardians in project activities first arose as an issue at East Doncaster SC, which has a high number of fee-paying international students, and during the organisation of the initial Parent Information Evening at Blackburn ELS.⁶ It meant that this group of students and their guardians were not eligible and not invited to be involved in project activities.

At East Doncaster SC it quickly became apparent that some fee-paying students were facing similar issues as migrant and refugee young people, such as social isolation, communication difficulties, lack of familiarity with school and local community services in Australia. The SWC at the school identified a number of fee-paying students that were experiencing difficulties in settling into the school, forming friendships and meeting study requirements that she felt would benefit from involvement in the CONNECT peer support program.

⁶ For more information refer to 6.1.5

To avoid discrimination, fee-paying students were not excluded from participating in peer support activities, but they were not targeted for the program.

6. PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAM

In response to the results of the focus groups with parents at Blackburn ELS two events were planned to be held at the school to address the needs they identified. These needs were broadly grouped as:

- Information about the Victorian education system; and
- Social opportunities to meet other parents from CALD backgrounds to discuss experiences of life in Australia and share information.

Education for their children is often a high priority for migrant and refugee parents on arrival in Australia, ensuring that their children are settled, safe and supported at school is very important. This was reflected in the focus groups with the parents as questions and concerns for the future schooling of their children dominated the discussion.

In response to this, the first event was a Parent Information Evening about the Victorian secondary school system, and the second was Family Picnic Day to give parents the opportunity to meet other parents in an informal environment. Both events are detailed below.

6.1 Parent Information Evening at the Blackburn ELS

Blackburn ELS and CONNECT jointly organised a Parent Information Evening about the Victorian secondary school system that was held at the school on 30th August, 2001. The parents of students expecting to exit Blackburn ELS at the completion of the current school term, or the following one, were invited to attend as well as the parents of students that attend the Saturday Homework Group held at AMES Box Hill. The invitations were translated into the first language of the parents and interpreters for the evening were offered to everyone.

6.1.1 Resources

The CONNECT Project Officer worked together with the Principal and Assistant Principal at Blackburn ELS to plan and conduct the Parent Information Evening.

The financial costs for the evening are outlined in Table 4. Other potential costs such as venue, seating and presentation materials are readily available in the school environment.

Table 4: Financial Costs of the Parent Information Evening, August 2001

| Item | Cost (\$) |
|--|---------------|
| Translation of the invitation to parents (5 languages) | 480 |
| Translation of the feedback forms (4 languages) | 540 |
| Photocopying of the handouts for parents | 100 |
| Administration (phone calls, mail outs) | 15 |
| Gift for the speakers | 45 |
| Supper | 180 |
| TOTAL | \$1360 |

NB: Interpreters are available free of charge to schools through All Graduates Interpreting and Translating, through funding by the Department of Education and Training (DE&T). Both financial and organisational costs will be less for future information sessions as some of the resources created will be able to be reused again (e.g. feedback forms and administrative tasks such as preparation of documents for distribution).

6.1.2 Topics

Three speakers from DE&T presented on the evening. The information presented was designed to be generic about the education system in order to give parents an overview of the Victorian system. Therefore, representatives from DE&T were invited to present as neutral speakers for the education system, to avoid representing specific schools in the region prior to parents having made a decision about which mainstream school their children will attend. They covered the following topics:

- The structure of secondary schools and how they operate
- The role of parents and guardians as members of the school community
- How families can support their children with their study
- The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF)
- Assessment and reporting procedures in Years 7 to 10
- The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Assessment and reporting procedures in Years 11 and 12.

6.1.3 Information Packages

On arrival each parent was given an information package that contained documents relating to the Victorian secondary school system. The packages were designed to compliment the information presented by the speakers on the night. Where possible the publications were provided in the first language of the parents and are available for download from the DE&T website: www.sofweb.vic.gov.au

6.1.4 Attendance

Twenty-five parents attended the evening, representing six language groups and approximately two-thirds of the families who have children in the secondary program at BELS. The language groups were: Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Cantonese, and Russian.

6.1.5 International and Fee-Paying Students

Blackburn ELS has a large number of fee-paying students, who as discussed in 5.8, are not eligible to be involved in the CONNECT Project. In accordance with the funding guidelines of VicHealth these parents/guardians were not invited to attend the information session.

6.1.6 Parent Feedback

At the end of the evening all parents were asked to complete a feedback form about the topics, presenters and structure of the evening. Apart from English, the forms were available in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Farsi, which catered for the language groups that were to be represented by the greatest numbers. It was felt to be important to allow the parents the opportunity to express themselves in their first language in order to receive accurate feedback about the event. Interpreters were asked to assist parents

in the completion of the feedback form if it was unavailable in their first language (i.e. Russian and Polish). Of the twenty-five parents in attendance, twenty-one completed a feedback form.

All of the parents felt that the information presented on the evening was useful and indicated that it was important to them to have pamphlets and leaflets about the education system in their own language.

There was a high level of satisfaction with the presenters and the topics covered by them. Table 5 identifies how important the topics covered on the evening were to the parents. The '*Structure of secondary schools and how they operate*' and '*The CSF*' rated the highest with 52% of parents highlighting their importance. Followed by '*The VCE*' (48%), '*How to support students in their studies*' and '*Assessment and reporting procedures*' at 43% and '*The role of parents and guardians in the school community*' ranked the lowest with 19% parents indicating its usefulness. The parents also responded positively to the opportunity to ask questions.

Table 5: The Topics Most Useful to Parents at the Information Evening, August 2001

| The topics indicated most useful by parents: | Number | % |
|---|---------------|----------|
| Structure of secondary schools/ how they operate | 11 | 52 |
| The CSF | 11 | 52 |
| The VCE | 10 | 48 |
| Assessment and reporting procedures | 9 | 43 |
| How to support students in their studies | 9 | 43 |
| Role of parents/guardians in the school community | 4 | 19 |

Table 6 identifies the factors that made parents want to attend the Information Evening. The most significant reason, indicated by 71% of parents, was '*The topics covered*' on the evening, followed by '*The opportunity to ask questions*' (57%). Six parents (29%) indicated '*The availability of interpreters*' as important, and 14% identified '*The time (6:30-9:30pm)*' and '*The opportunity to meet other parents*'. No parents felt that the particular speakers presenting on the night was a factor in their decision to attend the evening.

Table 6: The Reasons Parents Attended the Information Evening, August 2001

| The factors that made parents want to attend: | Number | % |
|--|---------------|----------|
| The topics covered | 15 | 71 |
| The opportunity to ask questions | 12 | 57 |
| The availability of interpreters | 6 | 29 |
| The opportunity to meet other parents | 3 | 14 |
| The time (6:30-9:30pm) | 3 | 14 |
| The venue (BELS) | 1 | 5 |
| The speakers presenting | 0 | 0 |

6.1.7 Summary

The Parent Information Evening about the Victorian Secondary School System at Blackburn ELS was an important event for the parents of students that attended the secondary program at the school. It provided newly arrived parents from CALD backgrounds with the opportunity to learn about the Victorian education system and the transition that will be required of the students when they enter mainstream secondary schools. This can be a difficult time for young people as they adjust to a new environment and an isolating and confusing experience for parents if they do not understand the school system and are unsure about how to obtain information and support from the school.

The information session addressed these issues as a means to minimise the barriers that parents face during this time. Feedback from the parents at the end of the evening was positive with the parents indicating that the information presented and the topics covered were appropriate to their needs. They were pleased with the presenters and the majority felt that the length of the evening and the time allowed for questions was suitable.

Mainstream schools often report poor involvement of parents from CALD backgrounds at school functions and at events such as parent-teacher nights. This may be because parents are reluctant to participate because they have not previously been involved at schools in their country of origin and feel that their English language skills are too limited. These barriers may be overcome if parents are formally welcomed to the school community and given the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the school system in Victoria.

The results of the Parent Information Evening at Blackburn ELS indicated that information provided in the first language of parents is appreciated and valued. Importantly, it allows them to realise the supports the school offers, such as interpreters and translated information, which may result in their further involvement in the school in the future.

6.2 Subsequent Sessions at Blackburn ELS

Due to the success of the first Parent Information Evening about the Victorian education system, Blackburn ELS will schedule the event to be held twice a year (in Terms 2 and 4). As most children spend two terms at the school before entering a mainstream school, the majority of parents will have the opportunity to attend the session once. Unlike the first session, the parents and guardians of fee-paying students will also be invited to attend. School staff consider it important for this group to be included and that they have access to the information sessions as they often face similar difficulties in understanding the education system and their role in the school community.

In Term 2, 2002, the second Parent Information Evening was held on the 6th June, targeting parents whose children entered the mainstream school system in Term 3 of this year or Term 1, 2003.

The content and structure of the evening remained the same with information presented to the parents using interpreters and where possible each parent was given a package of translated information to take away with them about the education system.

6.2.1 Attendance

Thirty-two parents attended the evening, which included eight parents from AMES Box Hill. This was an increase of seven from the previous year. Twelve parents elected to remain in an English-speaking group and the following interpreters were required to translate for the other parents:

- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- Indonesian
- Japanese
- Farsi.

6.2.2 Parent Feedback

At the end of the evening the parents completed the same evaluation form as the previous year. Apart from English, the forms were available in Chinese, Japanese, and Farsi. Interpreters were asked to assist parents in the completion of the feedback form if it was unavailable in their first language (i.e. Indonesian). Of the thirty-two parents in attendance, fourteen completed a feedback form, with couples completing one between two.

There were some interesting feedback responses from the parents that differed to the previous year particularly in terms of the topics they found to be the most useful (see Table 7). For example, parents indicated that they found the information about ways to support students in their studies (71%), assessment and reporting procedures (64%), and the role of parents and guardians in the school community (57%) to be the most useful, in contrast to last year when the structure of secondary schools and how they operate (52%), the CSF (52%) and the VCE (48%) were ranked the most useful.

Table 7: The Topics Most Useful to Parents at the Information Evening, June 2002

| The topics indicated most useful by parents: | Number | % |
|---|---------------|----------|
| How to support students in their studies | 10 | 71 |
| Assessment and reporting procedures | 9 | 64 |
| Role of parents/guardians in the school community | 8 | 57 |
| Structure of secondary schools/ how they operate | 7 | 50 |
| The CSF | 6 | 43 |
| The VCE | 5 | 36 |

The factor that most influenced attendance, as it was the previous year, were the topics to be covered (79%) indicating that there is still high need for this information. The particular speakers presenting were ranked second in importance by parents (71%), where last year no parents felt that this was an influencing factor in their attendance on the night. Fewer parents than last year indicated that the availability of interpreters was important (21% as compared to 29%). 14% identified '*The time (6:30-9:30pm)*', '*The opportunity to meet other parents*' and '*The opportunity to ask questions*' as important. No parents felt that the particular venue was a factor in their decision to attend the evening.

Table 8: The Reasons Parents Attended the Information Evening, June 2002

| The factors that made parents want to attend | Number | % |
|---|---------------|----------|
| The topics covered | 11 | 79 |
| The speakers presenting | 10 | 71 |
| The availability of interpreters | 3 | 21 |
| The opportunity to ask questions | 2 | 14 |
| The opportunity to meet other parents | 2 | 14 |
| The time (6:30-9:30pm) | 2 | 14 |
| The venue (BELS) | 0 | 0 |

Again all of the parents felt that the information presented on the evening was useful, and the majority of parents indicated that it was important to them to have pamphlets and leaflets about the education system in their own language (93%). There was also positive feedback about the three presenters and a high level of satisfaction with the topics covered. The parents responded favourably to the time allowed for questions and most parents (71%) felt the length of the evening was '*just right*', and the remainder indicated it was a little short.

6.2.3 Resources

The total financial costs were \$600 less than the previous year as the feedback forms were reused, which saved on translation costs, and the cost of the supper was less as only cold foods were served (see Table 9). The organisational time required was reduced as some of the resources from the previous year were reused, such as the feedback forms and handouts for the information packages.

Table 9: Financial Costs of the Parent Information Evening, June 2002

| Item | Cost (\$) |
|--|------------------|
| Translation of the invitation to parents | 500 |
| Photocopying of handouts for parents | 100 |
| Administration (phonecalls, mailouts) | 15 |
| Gift for speakers | 45 |
| Supper | 100 |
| TOTAL | \$760 |

6.2.3 Summary

In conclusion, the model as described here that has now been implemented on two occasions (September 2001 and June 2002) at Blackburn ELS is an effective and manageable way to meet the information needs of newly arrived parents regarding the Victorian education system. Feedback from parents indicates that the evening is informative, useful and appropriate to their needs.

The success of the information evening suggests that a process of community education targeting specific language groups through the use of translated invitations, brochures, and flyers and by offering the assistance of interpreters creates an approachable and welcoming environment for parents from CALD backgrounds.

6.3 Information Sessions for Parents at Mainstream Schools

The lessons learnt and the model created for the Parent Information Evening at Blackburn ELS provided a foundation to begin working with mainstream schools to assist them to better meet the needs of parents from CALD backgrounds in their school community.

East Doncaster SC and Mullauna College, both participating schools in the peer support component of CONNECT, indicated that they would like to increase the involvement of CALD parents in school activities and events, including parent committees. The experience of both schools is that the participation rates of parents from CALD backgrounds is low in school activities and events such as parent-teacher interviews, which impacts on the ability of teachers and parents to communicate about the progress of students.

While the information sessions at Blackburn ELS covered generic information about the secondary school system in Victoria, such as the structure of secondary schools and how they operate, the VCE and CSF, assessment and reporting procedures and the role of parents and guardians in the school community, at mainstream schools it is more appropriate to include specific information about the school, such as:

- How to arrange an appointment with a teacher,
- Notifying the school if their child is sick,
- Specific school events and activities,
- Subjects offered, including electives,
- Extracurricular activities, and
- A tour of the school grounds.

Information sessions need to take into account the nature of the Victorian secondary school system that is divided into two parts:

1. Years 7-10 Curriculum and Standards Framework, and
2. Years 11-12 Victorian Certificate of Education.

Sessions should target parents to suit their information needs as related to their child's schooling level.

6.4 Mullauna College

Mullauna College has a growing number of students from CALD backgrounds attending the school, with approximately 150 students who speak a language other than English at home. CONNECT and Mullauna College worked together on two events held at the College to engage parents at the school and assist them to better understand the schools procedures and the education system in general. The first event was Orientation Day in December 2001 and the second was an information evening for CALD parents called 'Education and Student Wellbeing' held in June 2002.

6.4.1 Orientation Day

The first occasion was Orientation Day in December 2001. Orientation Day is held annually at the school to welcome and provide introductory information about the school to Year 7 students commencing in the New Year and their parents. The day generally

consists of a main assembly welcoming the students and the parents to the school and introducing relevant staff. At the completion of the assembly the students leave in peer support groups with older students and the parents are invited to complete enrolment procedures, pay fees, fill in booklists and teachers are available for questions. Until CONNECT, there had not been extra support or assistance available to parents from CALD backgrounds during the assembly or to complete enrolment procedures.

The CONNECT Project Officer and the Staff Support Group at the school planned together to offer parents from CALD backgrounds assistance through translated documents and interpreters. After the main assembly interpreters were available to assist parents with any questions and the completion of forms. Translated information packages were also available.

6.4.1.1 Translated Letters and Attendance

As with the parents at Blackburn ELS, translated letters were sent to parents outlining to them the purpose of the day and the availability of interpreters. Fifteen letters were sent to parents in the following languages: Khmer, Serbian, Vietnamese and Chinese. The CONNECT project covered the cost of the translations.

Five parents of the fifteen that were sent letters replied and indicated that they would like to attend and use an interpreter. The parents only had five days to reply and they may have needed more time to allow them to make arrangements to attend the session, e.g. organise time away from work. The Cambodian Multicultural Aide advised that many of the Cambodian parents work long hours or are away from home during the fruit picking season preventing them from going to school functions. She also suggested that many Cambodian parents did not choose to access interpreters on the Orientation Day because they have other children already attending the school and have become familiar with the procedures.

6.4.1.2 Interpreters and Information Packages

After the main group assembly it was agreed by the SSG that CALD parents that would like an interpreter would be directed to a nearby room. Unfortunately there was some confusion about this on the day and the MC did not make the announcement. This meant that parents needed to be approached in the crowd and asked if they would like an interpreter, which probably contributed to the low number of parents that did use an interpreter. In the future at the end of the assembly the interpreters should announce that they are available to the parents and direct them to the appropriate room.

Four interpreters were arranged for the parents in Cantonese, Khmer, Serbian and Vietnamese through 'All Graduates'. Despite only five parents (out of a possible fifteen) utilising interpreters on the day, the four languages were necessary. All of the parents helped by the interpreters were happy and benefited from their assistance in each case, assisting them to complete forms and ask questions. There was also one Thai parent who would have liked an interpreter, but was not identified through the enrolment lists as requiring language assistance.

Packages with translated information about the education system were distributed to each parent that accessed an interpreter. They contained the same documents as those prepared for parents at the Blackburn ELS information evenings.

6.4.1.3 Budget

Table 10 outlines the budget for the provision of support to parents from CALD backgrounds at the Orientation Day.

Table 10: Budget for Provision of Support to CALD Parents at Orientation Day, 2001

| Budget Item | Cost (\$) |
|---|------------------|
| Translation of letter (5 languages) | 577.50 |
| Information packages (including photocopying) | 20.00 |
| Interpreters (paid by DE&T) | 0.00 |
| TOTAL | \$597.50 |

6.4.1.4 Summary

While the number of CALD parents reached at the Orientation Day was small, the outcome was positive with the parents that did access the interpreters benefiting by being able to ask questions in their own language and gain assistance in completing enrolment procedures. At future events it is important that all staff involved in the organisation of an event are aware of any special arrangements for CALD parents to ensure that interpreting services or other resources are accessed and made available to everyone. Parents also need to have sufficient notice to make arrangements to attend and request an interpreter if necessary.

Implementing a support system at one school event for families from CALD backgrounds will ideally instigate a change in the planning within the school for future functions to cater to the needs of parents from CALD backgrounds as a standard procedure in event organisation. Parents assisted in this way will be more likely to become involved in other school activities in the future leading to a more active role in the school community.

6.4.2 Education and Student Wellbeing Information Evening

To better meet the information needs of CALD parents at Mullauna College an information session was organised specifically for this group. It was the first time that such a session had been held at the school. A similar model to that implemented at the Blackburn ELS was used to structure the organisation of the evening. Unlike at Blackburn ELS, the information delivered was largely specific about the school and how it operates as opposed to generic information about the Victorian education system. Therefore it was appropriate for college staff to present the information rather than organising neutral speakers from organisations such as the regional DE&T.

6.4.2.1 Translated Letters and Attendance

As previously, translated letters of invitation were sent to 62 families. The letters were translated into Chinese, Vietnamese, Persian, Serbian, Khmer and Tongan. Ten families responded indicating that they would attend and interpreters were arranged in Persian, Serbian, Vietnamese, Thai and Khmer. Due to previously low attendance by CALD parents at school events reminder notices were sent home with the students for their parents the day prior to the event and many parents were contacted by telephone to personally invite them to attend.

Ten parents came on the night, five Cambodian, four Vietnamese, and one Thai.

6.4.2.2 Presenters and Topics

Four staff members presented to the parents, they were the Principal, Assistant Principal, VCE Coordinator and ESL Coordinator. They covered the following topics:

- School procedures
- Communication between parents and the school
- Role of parents in the school community
- Student welfare
- Expectation of students
- Homework study habits
- Extra curricular activities
- Curriculum and assessment (including the VCE)
- ESL.

6.4.2.3 Feedback

All of the parents were asked to complete a feedback form at the end of the session. All parents indicated that they found the information that was presented to be useful and responded that it was very important for them to have pamphlets and leaflets about the education system in their own language and to have access to an interpreter. All parents said that the length of the evening was *'just right'* and ranked the topics covered, the availability of interpreters and the opportunity to ask questions as the main factors that made them want to attend the session.

Four of the Vietnamese parents and three of the Cambodian parents indicated that they would like to meet regularly with other parents from their community on a regular basis.

6.4.2.4 School Response

School staff felt the evening was a positive initiative and that the response from parents was good given that this was the first attempt at such an event. The ESL Coordinator was very happy to have met some parents for the first time, despite their children having attended the school for several years. One mother said that it was the first time that she had been inside the school.

Given these positive outcomes the Assistant Principal indicated that the school was interested in further pursuing the needs of CALD parents and to look at addressing the Vietnamese and Cambodian parents desire to meet on a more regular basis.

6.4.2.5 Budget

Table 11 outlines the budget for the Education and Student Wellbeing information evening for parents from CALD backgrounds.

Table 11: Budget for Education and Student Wellbeing Information Evening, 2002

| Budget Item | Cost (\$) |
|---|------------------|
| Translation of letter (5 languages) | 599.50 |
| Information packages (including photocopying) | 20.00 |
| Interpreters (paid by DE&T) | 0.00 |
| Refreshments | 50.00 |
| TOTAL | \$669.50 |

6.5 East Doncaster Secondary College

East Doncaster SC has a large population of students from CALD backgrounds attending the school – approximately 31% of students were born overseas. Despite this high number, staff reported low involvement of CALD parents in school functions and activities.

Therefore, school staff and CONNECT planned two parent information sessions to target CALD parents. The development of the two sessions was guided by the experience of the sessions held at Blackburn ELS. The sessions were a VCE Parent Information Evening and a Years 8-10 Parent Information Evening.

6.5.1 VCE Parent Information Evening

The VCE Parent Information evening was held on the 19th February, 2002. The session built on an already existing event that is held annually at the school for the parents of students beginning Year 12. In previous years few parents from CALD backgrounds have attended. To encourage their participation invitations were translated into five languages which outlined the content of the evening and offered parents the use of an interpreter. The languages were Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Japanese and Serbian which represented the highest proportion of parents from non-English speaking backgrounds of Year 12 students.

The translated invitations were sent to approximately 35 families and of these three parents requested interpreters in Cantonese, Mandarin and Farsi. These parents were also given translated documents about the Victorian education system.

Despite the low response those parents that did utilise the interpreters were very happy to have been able to participate in the session. The feedback forms that they completed indicated that it is very important for them to have information about the school system in their own language and to have the use of an interpreter. They also said that they were pleased with the speakers and found the information presented to be useful. The factors that made them want to attend the session were the topics covered, availability of interpreters, time, venue and opportunity to ask questions.

There was some frustration from other parents about the interpreters speaking too loudly in the audience and detracting attention away from the speakers. In the future it would be more appropriate to place parents using interpreters to one side of the main group. This may also be attributed to other parents not being used to the school catering to the needs of CALD parents, nor understanding the support required by parents from language backgrounds other than English. To minimise these responses the school needs to strengthen their overt support of CALD young people and their parents and more widely promote services and assistance available to this group.

6.5.2 Years 8-10 Parent Information Evening

The Years 8-10 Parent Information Evening has held on the 14th March, 2002. It was a new initiative for the school targeting newly arrived parents from CALD backgrounds and interstate to provide them with general information about school procedures, policy and curriculum. Again parents were sent invitations, which in this instance were translated into Persian, Chinese, Korean and Arabic. Approximately 40 families were sent invitations and three couples requested interpreters in Cantonese, Mandarin and

Korean. Fourteen parents attended the session which was conducted by the Assistant Principal in a round table situation.

6.5.3 Resources

The financial cost for both of the sessions conducted at East Doncaster SC are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12: Budget for Two Parent Information Sessions at East Doncaster SC

| Budget Item | Cost (\$) |
|---|------------------|
| Translation of letter (4 languages) Years 8-10 Information Evening | 385.00 |
| Translation of letter (5 languages) VCE Information Evening | 599.50 |
| Information packages (including photocopying) | 20.00 |
| Interpreters (paid by DE&T) | 0.00 |
| TOTAL | \$1004.50 |

6.5.4 Staff Response

Feedback from the Assistant Principal indicated that the parents using the interpreters were very positive and grateful for the opportunity to receive information in their first language. They also asked a number of questions about issues that were concerning them that were able to be resolved. She did express concern that when interpreters are used with English speaking parents present they can be distracting to the flow of the session. In general she commented that other parents were understanding and good humored about this. She would like to see the situation when sessions could be run solely for parents from CALD backgrounds requiring interpreters with reasonable attendance rates. However, commitment to pursuing the development of such sessions was uncertain as the staff involved in the organisation of the sessions were discouraged by the low numbers of CALD parents that responded to the sessions.

6.6 Guidelines for Organising Information Sessions for CALD Parents

The parent information sessions that were conducted at Blackburn ELS and two mainstream secondary schools were valuable learning experiences from which emerged a range of good practices to be pursued in the planning, organisation and implementation of information sessions at schools for parents from CALD backgrounds.

The information sessions that were conducted for parents during the pilot project were approached in one of two ways:

1. Sessions specifically for parents from CALD backgrounds, and
2. Mainstream sessions for all parents that aimed to also address the needs of parents from CALD backgrounds.

In retrospect, the sessions that were organised solely for parents from CALD backgrounds were more successful and ran more smoothly than those targeting mainstream and CALD parents as they were not trying to juggle information to different

audiences with different needs. However, the time and resources required to hold sessions for CALD parents only are high given the relatively few number of parents that attend which make it unrealistic for these sessions to be held at a school more than once or twice a year.

Therefore, to enable parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds to access all information sessions and other relevant activities held by the school it is important that schools take some small steps to make this possible. Table 13 provides guidelines for schools to assist them to plan, organise and conduct information sessions that address the needs of parents from CALD backgrounds. These guidelines are applicable whether planning a session for CALD parents only or making provisions for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds to attend a mainstream session.

Table 13: Guidelines for Schools to Plan, Organise and Conduct Information Sessions for CALD Parents

| Action | Details |
|--|---|
| Prepare letters of invitation to parents four weeks prior to event to allow for translations to be completed | All government schools are eligible for free translating and interpreting services for school related activities and information dissemination through 'All Graduates'. This service is paid by DE&T. Information about this service is available at: www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/einter.htm |
| Where possible leave blank spaces for the date and venue of sessions so that invitations can be reused in the future | The more generic the invitation is, the more likely it will be able to be reused in the future for other events, reducing the expensive costs of translations. To support communication between the school and families from language backgrounds other than English DE&T has made available 23 school notices commonly requested for translation available in 22 languages including English. |
| Distribute invitations to parents 8-10 days prior to information session | This allows parents enough time to make arrangements to attend (e.g. change shifts at work, organise children), and not too much time that they will forget the date. It also provides enough time for reply slips to be returned to assist with the organisation of refreshments and interpreters. |
| Book interpreters a minimum of one week in advance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure availability of interpreters • Book through All Graduates (see above) |
| Telephone parents or send reminder notices home with students one to three days prior to event | This provides the opportunity to personally invite parents to attend and reinstates the importance that parents attend |
| Provide refreshments and a break in the middle of the session | Encourages parents to socialise and meet other parents |

6.7 Creating Change

Experiences gained through piloting the parent support programs at Blackburn ELS and mainstream secondary schools strongly indicates the need for a cultural shift in the way school communities view the needs of CALD parents and identify ways to support them. For this change to occur successfully a commitment needs to be made by school staff that is supported by the Principal and Assistant Principal.

In order to advance and maintain change in the way parents from CALD backgrounds are included and supported by schools, a community development approach needs to be employed that both promotes school activities to CALD parents in ways that are appropriate to their needs and welcomes their participation and involvement. For example, East Doncaster SC has significant numbers of parents from CALD backgrounds in the school community, but received a relatively low response from them to the sessions that were planned to support their language and information needs. In response to this the school now needs to explore why only a small number of parents responded to the planned activities and look into implementing other ways of engaging the parents at school events, e.g. contacting parents personally via the telephone, sending reminder notices, and giving parents more time to plan.⁷

Schools tend to rate the success of an event by the number of people that attended. This can present a barrier when working with parents from CALD backgrounds as historically their involvement in the school has been very low and it appears that it will be a gradual process to actively engage them in the school community on a regular basis and in a variety of capacities (e.g. at information sessions, parent-teacher interviews and in school council). However, initiatives that have formed part of the CONNECT project indicate that change will happen such as at Mullauna College where several Cambodian parents entered the school for the first time to attend an information session for CALD parents after having had children at the school for several years.

To increase the involvement of CALD parents at schools and assist this cultural change at secondary school level it is proposed that the parent support program also be introduced to primary schools to engage parents with schools at an early stage in their settlement in Australia. It is envisaged that this will establish an expectation of involvement by parents in Australian schools that will extend from primary into secondary school.

Some of the concerns that were initially raised by parents during the focus groups at Blackburn ELS about the integration of their children into Australian schools and local community and the parenting concerns that this raised became a theme in the feedback and questions by parents during the information sessions. There was also strong feedback that parents would like to be able to meet regularly with other parents from their own communities to share information and experiences. To address these issues it is proposed that schools, in collaboration with youth and family support agencies, conduct parenting workshops for CALD community groups that allows them discuss their parenting needs and provides an avenue for understanding the culture of the school and the broader community.

⁷ Refer to Table 13 for more discussion about ways to engage CALD parents at school activities.

By implementing a community development approach to addressing the initiatives discussed above schools will be working towards engaging parents from CALD backgrounds at a variety of levels at the school, including representation in school council and committees. Involvement at this level of management will further contribute to an active and diverse multicultural school community.

7. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

7.1 Peer Support Program

In review of the learnings and achievements that were gained through the pilot activities of the peer support program, the future of the program, supported by the MIC, will incorporate the following key considerations in the planning and implementation:

- **Participating schools appoint a Staff Support Group to develop a support structure for the program and the Leaders, and identify teachers to be responsible for the promotion of program activities.**
- **Year 9 students are targeted to be trained as CONNECT Leaders at the end of Term 4 in preparation for the following year allowing the peer program to commence at the beginning of the school year.**
- **The peer support program is planned to operate for a minimum of three sessions during class time as a means of developing program familiarity and understanding among the target group.**
- **Students in ESL classes are targeted for peer activities as well as other interested mainstream students to ensure the integration of newly arrived students into the general school community.**
- **Local youth and family support agencies and migrant community groups are involved in the planning and implementation of the peer support program at each participating school.**

7.2 Parent Support Program

Evaluation of the parent support program activities that were conducted during the pilot project highlighted a number of areas in which the program should expand to meet the identified needs of parents in the school and local community. Therefore, future parent support program initiatives supported by the MIC will incorporate the following considerations:

- **Extend the program to primary schools.**
- **Schools conduct information sessions for parents from CALD backgrounds about the education system that cover topics including curriculum, school procedures, homework and student welfare.**
- **Schools, in collaboration with youth and family support agencies, conduct parenting skills workshops for CALD community groups.**
- **Schools provide opportunities for CALD parents to socialise and share information with each other.**
- **Interpreting and translating services are widely used to support the involvement of CALD parents in the school community.**

- **Translated materials about the education system are available to CALD parents in their first language.**
- **Schools make a commitment to involve CALD parents in school council and committees.**

7.3 Project Management

On a more general note, and to support the development of the initiatives discussed above for the peer support and parent support programs, the MIC will:

- **Establish Local Action Groups that engage schools, youth and family support agencies and migrant community groups to guide the planning and implementation of the peer support and parent support programs at the local level.⁸**

⁸ For further details about the development of Local Action Groups refer to 8.1

8. CONCLUSION

The pilot project funded by VicHealth has allowed a range of activities to be trialed in the development and implementation of peer support and parent support programs for young people and their parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds in a number of schools in the Eastern Region. The learning's from these activities have contributed to the development of a new model for the future development and expansion of the CONNECT project.

The MIC received additional funding from VicHealth to build on the pilot which will extend the project until July 2003. During this new funding period the following project structure will be implemented. Further funding has also been sought from the Community Support Fund, which if successful will allow the project to continue for a further three years and expand to more schools in more LGA's following the structure of the model proposed below.

8.1 Future Project Structure

Figure 2 depicts a new model that is proposed as a more sustainable approach to the further development of the peer support and parent support programs and the expansion of the project to more schools in more LGA's. As discussed throughout this report, the Project Officer has been key in the implementation of the programs and the associated activities at each school. This model is designed to engage the support of local youth and family support agencies, migrant community groups, parents and young people in the planning development and facilitation of program activities and ultimately reduce the involvement of the Project Officer.

The model emphasises the strengthening of partnerships between local government, youth and family support agencies, migrant community groups and schools in order to develop a collaborative approach to community building for migrant and refugee young people and their parents.

The primary management structures are a Regional Steering Group (RSG) and Local Action Groups (LAG's). The purpose and role of each of these groups are outlined below.

8.1.1 Regional Steering Group

The project will be managed through a partnership of agencies represented on the RSG. This group will take responsibility for the overall development and implementation of the project. The RSG will also be key in maintaining commitment and support for the participation of local agencies in the LAG's (discussed below). Representation from the following agencies and organisations are necessary on the RSG:

- Department of Human Services
- Local Council in each LGA
- School Focused Youth Service
- Blackburn English Language School
- Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)
- Department of Education and Training.

8.1.2 Local Action Groups

LAG's will be established to support each participating school or pair of schools (e.g. primary school that feeds into a secondary school). The LAG's will report to the RSG and provide advice and expertise about the school and local community. The LAG's have three key purposes:

1. To guide the planning and implementation of the peer support and parent support programs at the local level,
2. To establish partnerships that are sustainable into the future, and
3. Identify other areas of need that are relevant to CALD communities and be a focus for conceptualising, developing and leading the implementation of future initiatives.

As the implementation of the peer support and parent support programs progress and the LAG's identify ways of engaging young people and their parents in the community, the scope of the project will broaden from the school based model to encompass a stronger community focus. This will open avenues to involve not only members of the community that are connected to schools, but also other adults and young people.

Members of the LAG's will include representatives from:

- Schools
- Local youth and family support agencies
- Migrant community groups
- Parents
- Young people.

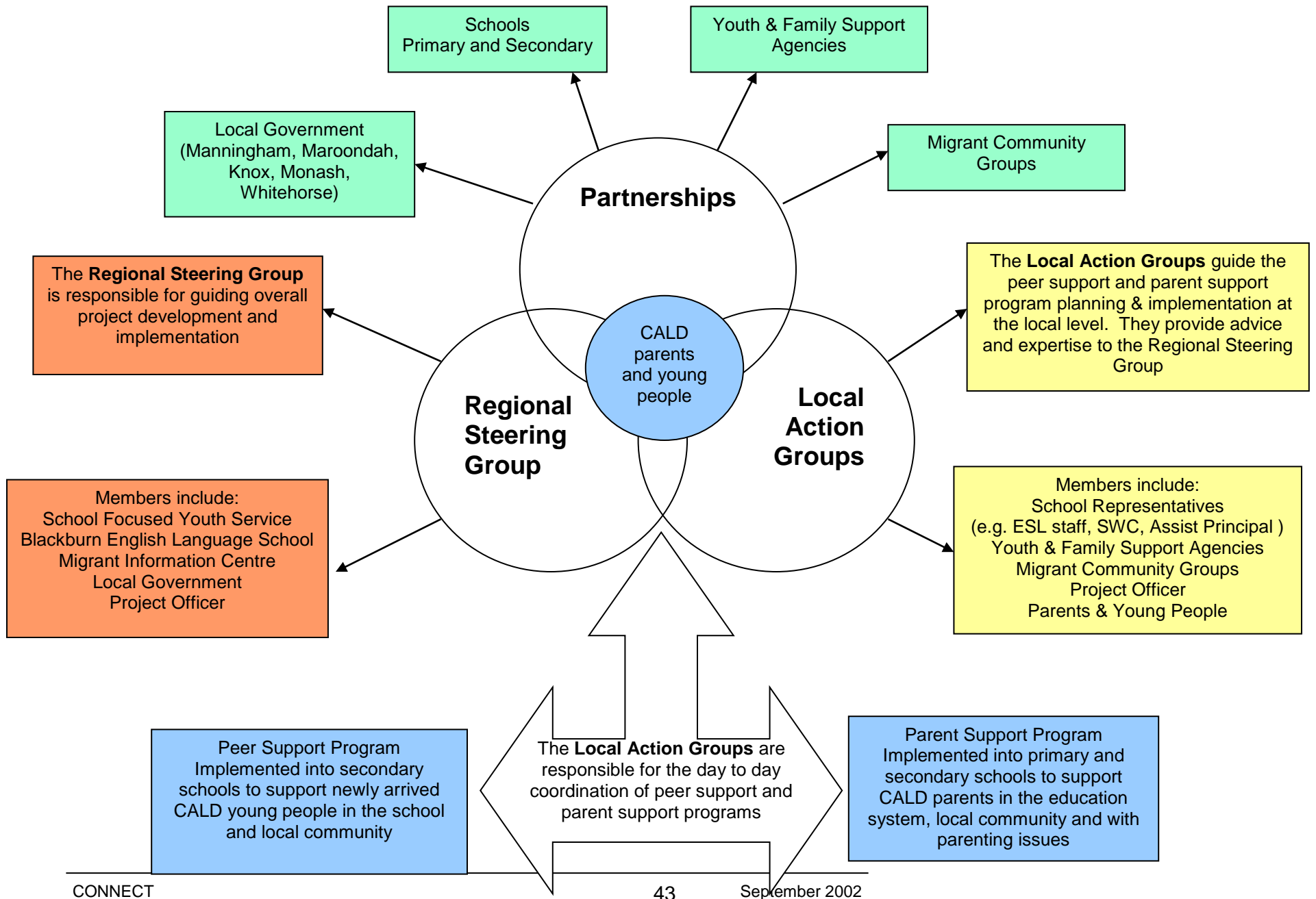
8.1.3 Peer Support Program

The model proposes that the peer support program continue to be implemented at a secondary school level to support newly arrived CALD young people. The focus of the program needs to extend beyond the school environment and introduce and engage young people in the local community through the involvement of youth and family support agencies.

8.1.4 Parent Support Program

The positive feedback from parents that attended information sessions and events as part of the CONNECT program has indicated that the program should not be exclusive to secondary schools. The model proposes that primary schools are involved in the parent support program and that information extend beyond the education system to include parenting skills workshops and more opportunities for social interaction.

Figure 2: Future Model for the Implementation of the CONNECT Project



9. APPENDIX

9.1 Evaluation Strategy: CONNECT Peer Support and Parent Support Programs

| PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| TIMEFRAME | METHOD | PURPOSE |
| June 2001 | Focus groups with ESL students at Mullauna and East Doncaster SC and BELS | Needs assessment |
| July 2001 | Feedback forms for Leaders | Evaluate two day training program |
| Ongoing | Attendance | Monitor Participant and Leader commitment |
| Ongoing | Participant and Leader suggestion/feedback forms | To provide an avenue for Participants and Leaders to make suggestions or raise concerns regarding sessions |
| As Necessary | Activity feedback forms for Leaders and Participants | To measure satisfaction of other activities (eg. Excursions) conducted as part of the peer support program. |
| End Term 3, 2001 | Focus group with Participants after four peer sessions | Feedback on success/improvements of peer sessions |
| End Term 3, 2001 | Survey by Leaders after four peer sessions | Identify issues faced by Leaders and areas requiring additional support |
| End Term 3, 2001 | Focus group with staff after four peer sessions | Monitor any observable changes in student behaviour and student/teacher communication |
| End Term 4, 2001 | Feedback form completed by all Participants | Evaluate Participant attitude to the program |
| End Term 4, 2001 | Focus group with Participants after ten peer sessions | Monitor progress of Participants and identify other areas requiring additional support |
| End Term 4, 2001 | Focus group with Leaders after ten peer sessions | Identify issues faced by Leaders, areas requiring support and feedback on Participant progress |
| End Term 4, 2001 | Focus group with Project Support Staff at school (i.e. SWC, ESL Coordinator) | Monitor any observable changes in student behaviour and student/teacher communication |
| End Term 4, 2001 | Focus group with other staff after ten peer sessions | Monitor any observable changes in student behaviour and student/teacher communication |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| February 2002 | Feedback forms for Leaders at Ringwood SC | Evaluate two day training program |
| May 2002 | Feedback forms for Leaders at Mullauna College | Evaluate two day training program |
| July 2002 | Focus group with Staff at Ringwood SC | Monitor satisfaction of staff with peer support program |
| July 2002 | Focus group with staff at Mullauna College | Monitor satisfaction of staff with peer support program |
| PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAM | | |
| TIMEFRAME | METHOD | PURPOSE |
| June 2001 | Two focus groups at Blackburn ELS | Needs assessment |
| August 2001 | Feedback form for parents that attend the information evening at Blackburn ELS | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| November 2001 | Feedback form for CALD parents that attend the Orientation Day | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| February 2002 | Feedback form for parents that attend the VCE information evening at East Doncaster SC | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| March 2002 | Feedback form for parents that attend the information evening for newly arrived parents at East Doncaster SC | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| March 2002 | Telephone interview with Assistant Principal at East Doncaster SC | Monitor outcome and satisfaction with staff |
| March 2002 | Feedback from parents and staff that attend the Family Day at Blackburn ELS | Monitor success of Family Day and benefit gained by parents through interaction with others |
| June 2002 | Feedback form for parents that attend the information evening at Blackburn ELS | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| June 2002 | Feedback form for parents that attend the 'Education and Student Wellbeing' information evening at Mullauna College | Monitor the satisfaction of parents regarding information presented/distributed at session |
| June 2002 | Focus group with staff at Mullauna College | Monitor outcome and satisfaction with staff |
| July 2002 | Focus group with staff at Blackburn ELS | Monitor outcome and satisfaction with staff |