

Evaluation of the Refugee Action Program (RAP)

For distribution to stakeholders
Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship
March 2012

BLANK PAGE

Contact details

To get more copies of this report, or to inquire about the work of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship please contact:

Meg Johnston

Policy Officer
Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship
Level 3, 3 Treasury Place, Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4698
Melbourne VIC 3001

(P) (03) 9651 0441
meg.johnston@dpc.vic.gov.au

For inquires about this evaluation or the report please contact:

Tracey Delaney

Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant
Mornington, Victoria
Australia

(P) +61 (0)401288067
tadelaney@bigpond.com

Disclaimer

This report has been produced solely upon information supplied to the consultant by OMAC and Lead Agencies involved in the evaluation or collected during interviews and group discussions with selected informants. While I make every effort to ensure the accuracy of this report, any judgments as to the suitability of information for the client's purposes are the client's responsibility.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend thanks to the RAP team at OMAC for their on-going support during the evaluation which ensured that the evaluation was conducted in a participatory and meaningful way. This has meant that the evaluation report is based on the knowledge and values of those most close to the program. Particularly I would also like to thank the main partnerships involved in the case studies: Springvale Community Aid & Advice Bureau (SCAAB) and the South East Region Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, the Ethnic Council of Shepparton & District, and the Latrobe City Council who were able to provide valuable input, coordinate interviews and facilitate engagement with the refugee community within short timelines; and finally I would like to acknowledge those members of the refugee community who gave up their time to provide feedback on what the program had meant to them, after all it is their opinions that ultimately provide insight into the overall value of the program.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND SELECTED SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES	I
1. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION	1
The Refugee Action Program (RAP).....	1
Evaluation focus	2
2. EVALUATION APPROACH.....	2
Design considerations	2
Overview of steps	2
Who was consulted.....	3
3. THE EVALUATION FINDINGS.....	4
3.1 The response – Initiatives under the RAP	4
Role of RAP Coordinator	4
Engagement and planning	5
Mentoring, support and linking	5
Responding to training needs	6
Responding to information needs	6
Use of ‘enabling funds’ by refugee communities	6
Snapshot of activities funded by enabling funds.....	7
Social activities/integration	7
Cultural celebrations.....	7
Provision of resources and equipment	8
3.2 What difference has it made?	8
Enhanced knowledge and skills of refugees for life in Australia	8
Increased access to information and advice.....	8
Increased understanding of Australia.....	9
Increased skills and knowledge.....	9
Strengthened leadership capacity	10
Strengthened refugee community.....	11
New networks and partnerships formed.....	11
Improved understanding of how systems and processes work in Australia	11
Improved capacity to implement activities	12
Increased participation in and engagement within their local communities	12
Improved settlement outcomes	13
Reduced sense of isolation	13
Access to employment and training	13
Enhanced integration into Australian society.....	14
New and on-going opportunities created.....	14
Enhanced awareness and understanding of refugee community	15
Better cohesion and coordination of services for refugees.....	15
Enabling service providers better access to refugee communities	16
4. UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN CONTEXT – EXPERIENCES OF THE DIFFERENT PARTNER AGENCIES.....	17

Case Study One: Southern Metropolitan Partnership	17
Case Study Two: North West 2 Metropolitan Partnership.....	18
Case Study Three: Hume Partnership.....	19
Case Study Four: Gippsland Partnership	20
5. UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS ENABLING OR HINDERING BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES.....	21
5.1 Enabling factors.....	21
Flexibility of the program.....	21
Building trust.....	22
Community driven	22
Community ownership.....	22
Appropriate and relevant training.....	22
Cross- community interaction and learning.....	22
The role of the RAP Coordinator as focal point and enabler	23
Lead agency partnerships	23
5.2 Hindering factors.....	23
Time frame of funding cycle	24
Dependence on key community representatives	24
Changes in staff.....	24
Focus on gender specific activities can create inequalities	24
Shifting priorities of communities.....	24
RAP coordinator as gate keeper	24
Managing mixed expectations	24
Limitations of reach	25
6. KEY LESSONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT.....	25
Value in having a dedicated resource person to provide on-going support to community groups ..	25
Recognition of time required for a community development approach	25
Importance of flexibility of RAP to be responsive to community.....	25
Importance of information sharing among stakeholders regarding community plans.....	25
Recognition of importance of relationships and networks.....	25
Need for move away from dependence from individual community resource people	25
Importance of effective data collection and reporting.....	26
APPENDICES	Error! Bookmark not defined.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND SELECTED SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

The Refugee Action Program (RAP) is a Victorian Government initiative that works to strengthen and empower communities from a refugee background to achieve sustainable settlement outcomes in local communities. The RAP empowers communities from a refugee and humanitarian background to:

- more fully participate in and engage with their local communities;
- access existing services;
- identify local issues and concerns;
- plan tailored, community-owned responses; and
- enhance local capacity and improve settlement outcomes.

The RAP also provides a point of coordination for service providers as it enables them to better understand and address local needs of communities from a refugee background through direct collaboration with the communities.

The stated objectives of this evaluation were to identify and analyse the outcomes of the RAP against its objectives; analyse the effectiveness of processes used and initiatives undertaken in the implementation of the Program; and identify the value that the RAP's community development approach is creating for the refugee communities, service providers and the government. It is anticipated that this report will enable the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC) to incorporate specific and/or personal feedback from refugee communities and service providers into the Program in the future.

While the study offers a descriptive analysis of the RAP, it is not intended to be used to for generalisations for the how the RAP has been experienced across all partnerships. Only four (4) out of eight (8) of the RAP partnerships were included in this evaluation. The study did not capture a full understanding of the breadth of impact across the refugee community; only those who were available within the short time frame of the evaluation were interviewed and as such interviews with refugee communities were limited.

Overall, the evaluation found that the Program is highly valued by Agency staff and refugee communities. It was felt that the flexible approach accommodates changing community needs and allows for unique ways of working depending on the community context. This flexibility also allowed RAP to fill a niche or funding gap not filled by other types of funding/service providers. The role of the RAP Coordinator was also considered key to the success of the Program with the position being described as providing the 'glue in the network', a 'bridge to community, a 'sounding board for communities', and someone to 'walk by community's side'.

What difference has RAP made? Outcomes associated with the Program

Based on the data available, the RAP appears to have empowered communities from a refugee and humanitarian background by:

Enhancing knowledge and skills of refugees for life in Australia

This has been achieved by increasing refugee communities' access to information and advice which has enabled them to enhance their understanding of Australia, including the different services and opportunities available to them. This has been complemented by providing tailored training to address specific needs of sub-groups within communities such as citizenship training, driving program and swimming programs. Building the capacity of community leaders has also been key in the community strengthening approach at the heart of the RAP model.

Strengthened refugee community

A core part of the support provided by the RAP Coordinator has been linking communities with local agencies and other stakeholders in response to particular needs or interests. Being connected via networks and forming partnerships is an important aspect in the success and sustainability of refugee community groups. Furthermore, the ability to navigate the often complex systems and processes which exist in Australia is an important aspect to the longer term success of community groups and the availability of a dedicated resource person such as the RAP Coordinator appears to have been instrumental in assisting communities to better understand how to operate effectively.

The support and encouragement offered through the RAP has been attributed to improving the capacity of refugee communities to implement their own activities. The skills and knowledge acquired, particularly by community leaders, together with the availability of enabling funds for activities and the use of networks, has meant that communities have been able to take the lead in running, and also funding their own community based programs.

Improved settlement outcomes

For many newly arrived refugees, finding themselves in an alien culture and not speaking the language results in a sense of isolation. Women, in particular can end up spending long periods of time in the home, disconnected from the world around them. It is not surprising then that many of the activities undertaken by community groups aim to address this issue. Many of the activities initiated by communities aim to serve a dual purpose, such as teaching sewing and bringing people together. Such activities help people to feel connected and also given them a sense of purpose.

In some cases, the RAP has facilitated access to employment and training opportunities. These have tended to emerge as a result of connection made through RAP partnerships and networks, or in some cases as a result of activities supported through the RAP.

Many of the outcomes discussed above contribute to improving integration by refugee communities into Australian society and created a launching pad for further activities and participation by community members.

In addition, RAP has resulted in outcomes beyond the refugee community

Enhanced awareness and understanding of refugee community

The RAP has enhanced awareness and understanding of the refugee community among staff of other agencies and service providers who sometimes lack specific knowledge of cultural issues. This has occurred either by organised awareness-raising sessions or more informally via stakeholder meetings.

In addition, some of the community-based activities have also focused on engaging and informing the wider population. These have included inviting the general public to specific cultural events or holding organised information sessions, such as the screening of *'Lost Boys of Sudan'*, a feature-length documentary that follows two Sudanese refugees on an extraordinary journey from Africa to America.

Better cohesion and coordination of services for refugees

The RAP model has taken a partnership approach by working with targeted refugee communities, Local Councils and related agencies and organisations. Such collaborations have provided a bridge and opportunity for a range of stakeholders to meet and develop project opportunities. The RAP coordinator has been instrumental in allowing a direct line through which to establish and build

those relationships. This has facilitated a more strategic approach so that agencies are not operating in isolation and not duplicating what is already happening but instead sharing resources and collaborating on activities. In these instances, improved coordination of services has led to better service provision for refugee communities.

Enabling service providers better access to refugee communities

By providing a central contact point, the RAP has granted service providers better access to refugee communities. Often services want their programs to target community groups or specific communities but don't have the necessary relationships or points of entry. Participating in RAP networks and structures has enabled them to directly engage with whom might be otherwise hard-to-reach communities.

What are the factors driving or hindering the success of the Program?

During the interviews and subsequent analysis a number of factors were identified that appear to have supported the success of the RAP. These enabling factors broadly fall into eight categories:

- ❖ Flexibility of the program
- ❖ Building trust
- ❖ Community driven
- ❖ Community ownership
- ❖ Appropriate and relevant training
- ❖ Cross-community interaction and learning
- ❖ The role of the RAP Coordinator as focal point and enabler; and
- ❖ Lead agency partnerships.

During the interviews and subsequent analysis a number of factors were also identified that appear to have hindered the success of the RAP. These were broadly reported as issues and challenges associated with the program. These factors broadly fall into eight categories:

- ❖ Time frame of funding cycle
- ❖ Dependence of key community representatives
- ❖ Changes in staff
- ❖ Focus on gender specific activities can create inequalities
- ❖ Shifting priorities of communities
- ❖ RAP Coordinator as gate keeper
- ❖ Managing mixed expectations; and
- ❖ Limitations of reach.

KEY LESSONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The value in having a dedicated resource person to provide on-going support to community groups

Having a person available to really work alongside communities and help them to plan and to look at their group, to look at what their current needs are, as well as respond to needs as and when they emerge has proved to be invaluable and played a key part in community capacity building and strengthening.

Recognition of time required for a community development approach

Realistic expectations need to be established in terms of what can be achieved within a specific timeframe when adopting a community development approach. Development of a sound theory of change that identifies intermediate outcomes and time specific progress markers is one way that this can be achieved and effectively communicated to stakeholders.

Importance of flexibility of RAP to be responsive to community

The flexibility of the RAP model is what sets it apart from many other initiatives and should be maintained in any future iterations of the program. Focusing on a broad outcomes framework allows communities to respond to specific needs while at the same time contributing to improved settlement outcomes.

Importance of information sharing among stakeholders regarding community plans

In order for the Program to continue to contribute to improved service provision for refugees opportunities for information sharing and collaboration need to be maintained and/ or developed. Coordination across multiple stakeholders is a valuable means of adding value and avoiding duplication of effort.

Recognition of importance of relationships and networks

Programs and activities cannot operate successfully in isolation and it is important not to underestimate the significance of relationships and networks. The RAP has highlighted the value in investing time in ensuring strong relationships which will ultimately determine the overall sustainability of the Program.

Need for move away from dependence from individual community resource people

As we have seen, over dependence on individuals as community resource people and key contacts for specific community groups can be problematic when those individuals are no longer available. Agencies should ensure adequate succession planning and that information doesn't rest with one key person.

Importance of effective data collection and reporting

In undertaking this evaluation weaknesses in the current monitoring and reporting mechanisms have become apparent. Reporting templates were considered by some agencies to be onerous to complete and in reviewing them it was problematic to collate any of the data due to inconsistencies in reporting. While it is commendable to include a focus on qualitative reporting, this has been at the expense of quantitative data and capturing useful information on reach and participation in the Program.

Significant change stories

During a participatory story analysis and selection process, key stakeholders involved in the Refugee Action Program reviewed 18 stories of significant change in small groups. The following five (5) stories were selected as being the *most significant*. The reasons for selection are included below the each story. While the selected stories are being highlighted here, secondary analysis of all stories collected informed the main findings of this study.

Story ①

One of our biggest successes has been to develop the relationships with the Muslim women in these communities to the point that they would trust us to run health sessions here on a range of very personal health issues. If you'd have said to me two years ago we could do that I would have laughed and said no way we'd get the Iraqi women to come in here and get a presentation from a health professional about their sexual health! And we've run a number of those sessions now!

We did it by finding some champions in the community and our community worker and on-going volunteer, she's a little dynamo; she organises the women. We sat down with her to flesh out the Iraqi community plan and ask 'what are the things that the women are looking for?' and women's, particularly was what they were looking for. My first thought was that the men will go berserk if we have the women in here talking about reproductive health. But we got a small group of women including some English speakers and said to them if this is what you want to do, tell us whether it's feasible and if you were going to do this, how would you arrange it? And their advice was sound, which we followed; to sneak up on it slowly, to get the women in for other sessions, like I think the first session here for the Iraqi women was about 15 or 20 came in and had a cup of tea and the first few times it was very much just a social thing. Then we said to one of the women who does a bit of catering, 'we're going to run a lunch for the women, so you cater and we'll pay you' and that attracted a few more and it was all very social and friendly. So in the midst of all of that we got our female RAP worker to go in and just ask them, just to throw it out there about what are your information needs. A few of them tossed a few things on the table. So the first session we ran for them was around the value of regular PAP smear.

So once we knew what the women wanted we got a few of the men in here and said this is what we want to do, we're not necessarily asking for your approval, but we need to you to go back and let your men know what we're planning on doing and we'd like you to tell them that you're supporting it. So after that, we had a couple of visits from some of the men. They came and inspected the building and wanted to know if there would be any men in the building while this was going on. So we got past that and we did the PAP smear stuff, we did a session on mammograms, we did, and there was about 50 women in the place and it was talking about women's health post child birth. In actual fact they were quite comfortable.

Why do you think this is significant?

It wouldn't have happened if those relationships weren't in place and there was a high level of trust and that's one of the advantages of having a community worker acting as a bridge between you and the community. Also it was about getting important information, and difficult information out to a quite hard to reach group. And that's about understanding cultures and how best to engage with specific communities and that again comes from having some inside information and listening to the community. So, for me that was very significant and something that I wouldn't have thought possible a couple of years ago.

Story ②

The Eritrean girls held their mother daughter night, which was 'Be Proud of Me Mum'. And that was a number of months preparation; we helped them apply for some extra funds, they have been very savvy these girls with using their RAP funds to leverage other funding as well. So we applied through Youth Foundations - Bendigo Bank and Moonee Valley Council, and we linked them into a theatre volunteer, a woman who has a theatre performing arts background.

They workshopped all over summer having these weekly to twice weekly get togethers with a lot of the young women, and they workshopped pieces of theatre, of common interactions between mothers and daughters and common areas of conflict. They wrote songs in different languages, a mix of rap and more traditional sorts of stuff, and they taught their brothers and sisters songs and formed a little children's choir. So they basically developed a whole evening of song, and theatre performance. They had a poetry competition to write a poem about their mothers, and they gave the winning poem as a gift to all their mothers. Basically it was a night where they invited all the women from their community to come along to the community centre, and have a free dinner and a night of entertainment.

It was basically about saying we know that our mothers have done so much for us, and we know that sometimes there is this big communication gap, and we don't take the time to thank you and acknowledge the we appreciate what you are doing. And it was very funny, the performances. The people playing the daughter would always speak in English and the girl that would play the mother would always in Tigrinya or Arabic or Somali, and the women were killing themselves laughing throughout the whole thing. I was in the kitchen watching that, and you could see that it was touching and everyone understood, and everyone could also laugh about it; this isn't just our family, obviously this is what is happening with all these families, it is common, just cultural, girls on face book, girls wanting to eat pizza and McDonalds when their mothers want them to eat homemade food all the time. And then I think I mentioned to you, I think the girls saw how powerful it was. The fathers were saying, when is our night? When do we get the dad's night? But this event led into the girls into saying, we do need to connect a bit more with the older generation, and hear their stories a bit more, and try and bridge the cultural gap that can be there a little bit. And they started visiting the older Eritrean women's group, and having some shared lunches with them, and just starting to talk I think, showing some interest. And I think the older women were also really impressed that these 20 year old girls would be choosing to do this in their spare time and getting funding to create projects with them.

Why do you think this is significant?

I think it is really that resourcing communities - that there is a point of contact, and someone that is there to support them. So when the young women say we have got this idea, or we want to do this event, I feel through RAP there has been a point of contact and resourcing - they have already got some allocated funding - and we can also help them to see where else they can get funding from, and to support them through the whole process really. So from the start of an idea to helping them plan, 'What do you need to pull off a mother daughter night?', 'Who else can we get involved to help you? We can get in volunteers, we can pull in other people, and I think that coordination as well is key - involving youth services and Neighbourhood Renewal, and the Community Centre - there are lots of people out there who can help. Being able to help them develop all those contacts and relationships. A lot of those girls these connections now; two of them are working casually at the Community Centre now, some of them have volunteered with Neighbourhood Renewal or have ended up running stalls for community events. RAP has just provided that resource and momentum and support. There has been a sort of platform - now they can spring into a whole bunch of things out of the relationships, and the funding I think.

Story ③

I think it allows better coordination. We have had someone who can actually coordinate programs, coordinate, as I say individual issues that need to be able to be addressed. And the community feels comfortable coming here; So to have a dedicated officer that they know, who they come and speak to, has certainly helped them.

So to be able to I suppose have support for our newest arrivals, I think has been a really important thing for the Council to be able to provide, through the RAP program. Certainly, the coordination is a lot better now, and I think the networking between agencies, is much stronger, and I think the sharing of resources, is certainly much better. Whereas we [Council] might not be able to provide a program, Latrobe Community Health might have some money that collectively; we can do some things together. So I think the level of service is much greater than it has been in the past. Things, the sessions we have provided, sessions around housing, and tenancy agreements, and all that sort of information that we have been able to provide, would have just simply not happened because it doesn't fit into anybody's particular program. So I think we have been able to be a little bit more flexible than some of the other agencies, and to respond more so to probably identify needs to have a set program that we need to work with. And if you don't fit within those guidelines, well it doesn't happen, Where the RAP program has given them the flexibility to be able to I suppose find those things that have fallen between the cracks or haven't been offered by other agencies.

I suppose I am also involved in the global studio, and I think, that doesn't fit into anybody's particular program, but that has been a great thing, certainly for the women and we are now just working towards getting the men involved in a program, similar program. So I think that is an example where it probably wouldn't have happened, and RAP has been able to support that by providing some funding for sewing machines and things like that. I see the swimming programs as one of the ones that Latrobe Community Health have been involved in too. So Latrobe Community Health and the RAP Coordinator have coordinated the swimming lessons both here in Moe and in Morwell for community members. We have promoted it and provided the facilities and Latrobe Community Health has been able to provide some of the funding, so that has been a really successful program.

Why do you think this is significant?

Well I think, without RAP, these communities would still be floundering and I think the coordination of services would still be a little bit haphazard. I think we have been able to build really strong relationships with the community, that has been really important, to get their trust and to then be able to engage them, and if we hadn't had the RAP program, there would be no one who could do that. So I think that is really important and I think that has helped the Settlement committee, to understand better some of the issues. Because we have got those strong links to the community now, so I think while the Police can provide a perspective around policing and education can provide a perspective around education, I think we are able to provide more of a community and holistic view about how the community is travelling as a whole, because we have the RAP Coordinator who is working with them day in day out.

Story ④

The other thing that has come out of the Settlement Committee and is strongly supported by the RAP, is a subcommittee that I am most involved with, the Education, Employment and Training Committee. It is really fair to say that RAP has brought a whole lot of groups together, and we have piloted some projects, that have come out of that, and again, it is about partnerships, and seeing a common need, who has got the skills and interest, so we work really strongly with a range of organisations. One program we ran that responded to an identified need was the Journey to Work Program. A teacher who is on that group, sort of was saying, there is an issue here in terms of these migrant kids having unreal expectations, and that group of people from that subcommittee included the LLEN (Local Learning and Employment Network).

The Journey to work is operated in Navarla College, which is a Catholic College in Traralgon, and Moe, it is operated at Kernig College, so Kernig College is a government school that operates in Churchill and Morwell, it has three campuses, and it has just concluded at Warana College, which is the secondary college in Moe, and the Newborough area. So how the Journey to Work operates, they had 12 students, year 7 through to 12, I think, and again I think the numbers go like 8 Sudanese kids, and then 4 Chinese kids, and the purpose is to give them a better understanding of the world of work. But the great thing about that program is that it involves the families, so that a lot of our refugee families and ESL families come in and they want their kids to be doctors, vets and dentists right. And so they come in with unrealistic expectations, and they come in also in a situation, whereas they really don't understand how the system operates.

So I think that the Journey to Work program what it does, these kids visit, a motor car dealership, they went to an Aged Care Centre, they went to a catering organisation, they went to the local Coles, and the idea is, that it is trying to give them an understanding of what qualifications are needed; there is a lot of prep work done before it; and that is at the start of the program with their parents. Because the idea is what you want is also for the parents to learn from what the kids are learning as well. So they go out, they went to the local Police Station, they local, there is a company that manufactures light aircraft in the middle of the Latrobe Valley, near the Latrobe Valley airport. So they go out there, and they are trying to find out, okay what are the ranges of jobs here, how would you actually get into those positions, what education would you need; what training would you need. But to also understand that if that is where you want to get, there are multiple pathways to get there. So it is probably a program that runs over, and it varies from school to school a bit, but generally 6 – 8 weeks, a really good partnership with a local learning network, the LLENs, but a really good whole group partnership. So the school working with the LLENs, so in a sense bringing those people together at that subcommittee has generated this program, and it has huge benefits state wide.

Why do you think this is significant?

The good thing that has come out of it, is that it has built that understanding in terms of the employers have all welcomed the kids back, right, so they learnt about the cultures, found out where the kids are from, and had contacts that probably wouldn't have happened otherwise necessarily. And there has been a number, over the three school programs, there has been a number of apprenticeships that have come out of that for the kids. And a number of them, because of the skill sets that they have developed, have actually picked up part time work; so a real community building exercise; really positive. So that is an example and for us it is that coordination and coherence, as I said if there is one thing it is that. And instead of us all sort of swimming across pools in different directions, we are all swimming in the one direction and I think that has been the really important thing.

Story ⑤

So this month we started our men's group if you like, the Men's Shed, and we have got 6 Sudanese men who are coming along, actually there are 8 now, but we have got the 6 Sudanese fellows coming along, and they are working on developing a small woodworking business. One of the gentleman who is coming along is an accomplished upholster and furniture builder, and he was trying to run his business from home, so we have suggested that he uses the Global Studio as his base now, and we have got jobs coming in and we can give him that business skill and mentoring in business. So he is now teaching these other men how to make furniture, so it is really coming together nicely. We have enrolled them all in the certificate of General Education for Adults, and for their white card.

The white card is the construction induction card, it is an accredited course, and you need that to go on site to work in any building, any construction, anywhere, it is a white card in Victoria, it is a blue card in Queensland, so it is for the state. So that is normally a six hour course, but there is no way we would get these gentlemen through that, with their English language skills. One they don't even have the concept of OH&S let alone the words and be able to sit a test, so we are doing this over a 12 week period, and they will leave with their white card; we have got them all overalls, we got them work boots, we have got them hearing protection, dust masks, all that sort of stuff and we have got the equipment, so they are learning. They come to you and they say 'oh yes, I can use this, and I can do that'. So we have run them through a skills audit, and really they have no idea about power saws, thicknesses and lathes, and things, so step by step, a couple of them have done a little bit of work with real hand tools, a chisel and a hammer, and they are quite good at that, but to be able to go and work for say; Benson Timber and Hardware, or anywhere on site at Loy Yang, or Mecca Homes. They really need to get these skills under their belt.

I recently sent a letter to the RAP Coordinator for some money because we are going to build a range of chook houses, dog kennels, rabbit hutches; we have already got an outlet for the bird houses, she will take as many as we can make. Do you know they sell a bird house for \$100? So, the local nursery will take as many as we can make, because they were importing them from Thailand, and of course Thailand lost all their manufacturing at the moment, and they can't get them for Christmas, so we are down there knocking up bird houses at the moment. So that is an industry, and so we have got a couple of young Sudanese involved in that as well, a couple of young boys, and I have got a volunteer ESL teacher who is coming in now every Monday afternoon for 2 hours, and he delivers English to them. So this is sort of a package deal if you like, and they are making our chairs, they are volunteering for Tri Youth Property Service Division, so they come in and anything that comes in through our door, whether it be fixing a door or we have an order for chairs and tables, these men are working on it. And the difference I have seen, just in a couple of weeks, they turn up now with the overalls, their name tags, and their lunch, and you know, it is really given them a sense of place and purpose.

Why do you think this is significant?

The men, they were suffering more so from the social isolation than the women. The women tended to meet a lot in groups, and take the kids to school, and they had those social connections in the community already, but the men were just sitting at home and weren't doing anything. All of these men are 50 plus, so the long-term prospect of a job in Australia, and in fact some of them are 60 plus with disability. So one man has been shot, and you know, they are never going to get what we call full time meaningful work. So the Global Studio's aim is to help them develop their own long-term meaningful work. They might never become rich through this, but spiritually they have now got a place to call their own, and they are loving it. They have the kitchen and they have their own lockers, and their own workbooks and everything, so they are really enjoying that.

1. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION

The Refugee Action Program

The Refugee Action Program (RAP) is a Victorian Government initiative that works to strengthen and empower communities from a refugee background to achieve sustainable settlement outcomes in local communities. The RAP evolved from the Refugee Brokerage Program (RBP), which operated from 2005-06 to 2008-09. The RAP maintains and builds upon the proven strengths of the RBP and incorporates several of the recommended improvements identified in Victoria University's 2008 evaluation of the RBP. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) managed the RBP from May 2007 until its completion in June 2009. The RBP is the predecessor of the RAP, and is the model for the approaches currently employed by the RAP.

How the RAP operates

- The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC) contracts partner organisations around Victoria to deliver the RAP. These organisations directly engage with and support local communities from a refugee background to determine the best means for responding to community-identified needs and concerns.
- A significant portion of all RAP funding (at least 25%) is ear-marked as community 'enabling funding'. These funds – which can be used for a wide range of capacity-building activities and projects that are community-identified and driven – enable communities to collaboratively determine the means and methods by which they are supported and empowered.
- The RAP places explicit emphasis on the importance of collaboration and coordination between funded agencies and other local service providers and stakeholders. In this way, the RAP, where possible, is able to coordinate and leverage external resources to better address community needs and concerns.
- The issues to be addressed through the RAP are determined in direct consultation with communities. The RAP gradually takes shape through community discussions and culminates in the development of General and Individual Community Work plans, which are specific to the stated needs and concerns of communities. Moreover, these work plans change as community priorities and needs evolve over time.
- The community consultation and planning that occurs within the RAP provides a comprehensive mapping of local priorities, needs, concerns, stakeholders and potential responses. This information is effectively a blue print for action and partnerships, not only through the RAP but across all local organisations working with communities from a refugee background in a given area. This in turn facilitates points of connection and collaboration and enables local organisations to build on other investments. In sharing this information with local organisations and partners the RAP also reduces the need for redundant over-consultation of communities.
- The RAP works to gradually build the capacity – as defined by a communities' ability to access mainstream services and plan and implement community-identified initiatives – of vulnerable communities from a refugee background to a point of sustainability. Once a community is relatively sustainable, it is transitioned out of the program (or receives less intensive support), and other, perhaps somewhat more vulnerable, newly arrived communities are engaged. This generates a cycle of more established communities transitioning out of the intensive support of the RAP and more vulnerable communities receiving direct support.

Evaluation focus

Measuring change associated with a diverse, community driven program such as this is challenging but necessary in order for learnings to be captured and applied for better program outcomes in the future. Thus, the stated objectives of this evaluation project are:

- identify and analyse the outcomes of the RAP against its objectives;
- analyse the effectiveness of processes used and initiatives undertaken in the implementation of the Program;
- identify the value that the RAP's community development approach is creating for the refugee communities, service providers and the government;
- provide recommendations on the need for future delivery of the Program and ongoing evaluation processes; and
- enable OMAC to incorporate specific and/or personal feedback from refugee communities and service providers into the Program in the future.

2. EVALUATION APPROACH

Design considerations

Capture the 'lived experiences' of the refugee communities

The main technique used for qualitative data collection will be the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique. MSC uses an inductive approach, through participants making sense of events after they have happened. With MSC, participants are actively encouraged to exercise their own judgment in identifying stories of change. The use of MSC allowed for behavioural and cultural changes brought about by the RAP to emerge as understood and experienced from the perspectives of those involved in the process.

Deal with complexity and context

Due to the flexible approach taken in rolling out the RAP across the different lead agencies there will inevitably be variation between locations based on the context in which they operate and the particular needs of the population that they are working with. By seeking to understand how changes have occurred 'in context' we can learn *what works in what situations and why*. For this reason of case studies were undertaken of participating organisations, including a sample from metropolitan and regional locations. Looking at a small number of community-based partnerships as discrete 'cases', allows for a more detailed understanding of the experience of refugee communities and service agencies in the context in which that particular partnership operates and the role of the RAP Coordinator in each case.

Participatory synthesis and learning

In order to harness the knowledge and values of those most closely involved in an initiative, a process was included which provided a collective forum to make sense of the evaluation findings. In this way, knowledge products are directly relevant to the project context while ownership is fostered amongst stakeholders in relation to existing and successive projects. Key stakeholders were invited to participate in an 'Evaluation Summit' to analyse the data, identify key learnings and develop recommendations for future direction. The outputs of this process have informed the findings of this report.

Overview of steps

The table and information provided below provides an overview of the evaluation process.

Step	Activity	Output
Step 1: Design Purpose: to develop an evaluation framework based on a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of the RAP	1.1 Planning meeting A planning meeting was held on 13 th October 2011 with the consultant and key program staff to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain a broader understanding of the evaluation Determine key evaluation questions Identify which partnerships to use as case studies Agree on timelines for the evaluation; and Source relevant existing background and program documentation. 	Evaluation plan
Step 2: Discover Purpose: To build a picture of the lived experience of participants and staff involved in the RAP	2.1 Documentation review 2.2 Case studies of specific RAP partnerships (x4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi structured interviews with staff and refugee community, incorporating MSC 	Overview of 4 case studies – approach to implementing the RAP 18 x MSC stories 8 x Issues/challenges
Step 3: Reflect and learn Purpose: To analyse and validate the findings through participatory methods, extract key learnings and develop recommendations	3.1 Lessons Learned Evaluation summit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of preliminary observations Identifying and discussing what is significant Examining issues and challenges Surfacing lessons and recommendations 	Outcomes themes produced during story analysis 3 x Selected MSCs Issues with ranking on importance Draft recommendations
Step 4: Report Purpose: to document the findings of the evaluation for dissemination and action planning	4.1 Documentation and discussion of evaluation data including key outcomes themes, lessons and recommendations	Draft Report Final Report

Who was consulted

Visits were made to four (4) RAP partnerships during the data collection stage of the evaluation. The table below summarizes who was consulted during each visit. Other key stakeholders tended to be staff from organisations or government departments (i.e. DEECD) working closely with the RAP.

Partnership	Group discussion with representatives of refugee community	Individual refugee interviews	Individual lead agency staff Interviews	Individual interviews with other key stakeholders
Gippsland	1 (3)	0	3	4
Hume	0	2	2	0
NW2	1 (9)	4	2	
Southern	1 (3)	3	2	3
		9	9	7

Transcription, analysis and coding

- All interviews were recorded and were transcribed either in part or in full. Transcriptions were also cross referenced with interview notes.
- Quotes which highlight key outcome themes and factors have been extracted and included in the final report and identified by code:

AS = Lead agency staff
 KS = key stakeholder
 CR = Refugee community representative
 DR= Document review

Names and locations have not been included in order to ensure that anonymity is preserved where possible.

3. THE EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 The response – Initiatives under the RAP

I felt that the concept of the program, the idea, and the way everything was set up was absolutely great and fantastic. What I liked was having the particular resource to work with emerging communities, on a participatory model, where they are involved throughout the process; they are involved, consulted, and they take on ownership and decision making for funding and project direction and everything. I think the fact that it had a focus on the emerging communities because they are the most vulnerable, because the most in need of the extra support in development. Their focus was not on individuals, because you do have the settlement and all the other services provided, but it was focusing on the community as a whole, AS07

The RAP aims to empower communities from a refugee and humanitarian background to plan tailored, community owned responses based on locally identified issues. As such it focuses on ‘the community’ as opposed to engaging on an individual basis. The exception has been building the capacity of community leaders so that they are in a better position to work with and support their particular communities. The RAP model provided for a dedicated resource person, namely a RAP Coordinator to work with communities to assist them in realising their full potential. Enabling funds are available for communities to implement their own activities.

In many partnerships, the RAP offers two levels of support where communities are designated as either ‘Tier 1’ or ‘Tier 2’. Tier 1 communities require intensive, targeted support and empowerment to plan expenditure of their funds and implement project activities. Tier 2 communities receive project-based group support to a collective of refugee community groups and this support is generally less intensive¹.

Role of RAP Coordinator

The RAP Coordinator (sometimes referred to as RAP Project Worker) has been a key mechanism in the successful implementation of the RAP.

Really [the role of the RAP coordinator] is engaging initially with those communities, developing those relationships with key people from those communities. And then supporting them to identify what are the

¹ In some cases, Tier 2 communities were previously receiving support as Tier 1 under the Refugee Brokerage program.

key priorities, what is happening, what is not happening, what should be happening, and resourcing. I guess I see our role as really as facilitating, resourcing supporting communities to take their own action, and tap into the resources and the networks and the services that are around, on a broad level. AS02

Having a dedicated resource person to support communities has proved extremely valuable and was highlighted by those consulted for this evaluation. The RAP coordinator was referred to in terms of a 'bridge to community, 'sounding board for communities', and someone to 'walk by community's side'

If you give a grant for us it helps us but we really need to appreciate RAP that we have someone who is listening, who is helping us, who is besides us so that is the difference that RAP make for us. We have a lot of confidence now that someone is besides us. CRO7

Below is a snapshot of the types of activities undertaken by the RAP Coordinator. Detailed data on the exact number of activities and participation was not available, nevertheless the list below provides for an appreciation of the breadth of work carried out in support of their refugee communities under the RAP.

Engagement and planning

- Focus groups with community
- Meetings with community members/representatives/leaders

The first Program Management meeting was held to engage new stakeholders and set clear expectations of RAP. Time was taken to explain to service providers their role to support communities and for communities to take the lead in determining how RAP is run. DR

- Engagement of community spokesperson
- Working group meetings (i.e. sports and recreation)
- Priority setting activities with communities
- Development of community workplans

A small group of representatives from the Ogden community were trained on how to consult and document specific needs of the community. The community conducted one of many wider consultations documenting each individual's needs. Following this, working groups were established to assist the community to plan and implement future activities. DR

- RAP Steering Committee meetings
- On-going review and consultation re priority areas and activities
- On-going coordination and facilitation of meetings

Mentoring, support and linking

- Mentoring and supporting Community Liaison Officers (CLOs)/Community Workers positions from target refugee communities

Community Project Workers are participating in fortnightly staff meetings where they report on their individual work plans. They build skills and confidence, share information and develop team skills. The workers learn about meeting procedures, preparation of agenda, taking of minutes and rotation of the chair. They received regular feedback on their progress. DR

- Informal mentoring to groups around project activities
- Support with grant applications

Supported tier 1 and Tier 2 communities to seek alternative funding to top up activities. DR

- Support in establishment of groups and associations

- Assistance with providing/identifying venues
- Linking Community with
 - Sporting venues and associations
 - Rotary Club
 - Local Councils
 - Local associations
 - Other refugee communities

The programs have introduced the community leadership to workers from different local agencies and relationships have been established that will support the community development activities. Examples include Valley Sport, Great Shepparton Council, Goulburn Valley Health, Centrelink, Goulburn Valley Community Health, Primary Care Partnership, Victoria Police. DR

Responding to training needs

Coordinating/sourcing training form refugee communities such as:

- Citizenship training sessions
- Leadership training sessions including:
 - Legal obligations of boards and committees
 - Communication and conflict resolution
 - Developing policies and procedures
 - Project management
 - Human rights and equal opportunities
 - Overseas qualification recognition
 - Grant seminars
 - Event planning
 - Financing for community
 - Working with media
- Computer training

Responding to information needs

An important aspect of the work of the RAP Coordinator also included organising/coordinating Information sessions and awareness activities:

- Refugee women’s health sessions – including Pap Smear clinic
- Legal Aid information sessions
- Dental health check-ups
- Family health day
- Mental health information sessions
- Department of Justice/Consumer Affairs Victoria information session
- Family law information sessions
- Public Housing information sessions
- Sureway employment and training information sessions
- Recognition of overseas qualifications

Use of ‘enabling funds’ by refugee communities

A key mechanism of the RAP model has been the availability of enabling funds for communities to implement their own activities (see above). This was seen as significant by those consulted for this evaluation, particularly due to the challenges faced by newly arrived communities to access their own funding.

the brokerage component was absolutely fantastic, because you know when you are thinking about it again, small communities competing for funding, against other communities, it is very difficult and they wouldn’t necessarily have those skills, so automatically they would be disadvantaged. AS07

Each of the agencies involved in the four partnerships reviewed for this evaluation developed individualised ways of distributing the enabling funds to communities. In at least one partnership the communities themselves were actively involved in deciding how funds should best be distributed although it was acknowledged that all the RAP communities had significant needs and it was hard to determine which community was most in need, hence an equal distribution was agreed upon. Below is a brief summary of how the funds were distributed for each of the partnerships.

NW2 - Allocated even amounts to Tier 1 groups between the two agency partnerships, and then a core amount to Tier 2 as a group for them to decide how to use that money.

Southern - Funding distributed equally to tier 1 communities and non financial support as required to Tier 2 communities.

Hume - Allocation of funds is not based on an amount per community. Wherever possible they have tried to run activities for a number of communities together to try and avoid any sense of one community gaining more resources than another.

Gippsland - The activities/program are formulated by Work Groups comprising different agency and organization representatives and reported to the Latrobe Settlement Committee (of the Council) for the approval and funding.

Snapshot of activities funded by enabling funds

Below is a snapshot of the types of community initiatives supported by the RAP program. Detailed data on the exact number of activities and participation was not available, nevertheless the list below provides for an appreciation of the breadth of community driven activities that have been undertaken based on the identified needs of specific refugee communities.

Social activities/integration

- Lawn bowls
- Sudanese 'Swim Day'
- Swimming program
- 'Say No to Crime' Project – guest speaker and sports events
- Days out (i.e. trip to Geelong, Melbourne Aquarium, Melbourne Zoo)
- Diversity celebration (dance)
- Badminton tournament
- Induction to local sporting venues and centres
- 'Girls on the Go' School Holiday program
- Women's nights (social activity/chat)
- Young women's craft group
- BBQs
- Sewing
- Driving programs

Cultural celebrations

- New Year programs (cultural event)
- Ramadan EID celebration
- Ramadan IFTAR dinner
- Refugee week celebrations

Provision of resources and equipment

- Equipment supply (sewing machines and materials), Global Studio
- Equipment supply (furniture and materials), Moe Sudanese Women's group
- Netball clinics – Netball Victoria

3.2 What difference has it made?

This section presents a summary of the outcomes of the RAP based on data collected during field visits to the four partnerships and from related documentation review. The outcome themes discussed here emerged, to a large extent, during the analysis of stories of significant change during the evaluation summit (see step 4: reflect and learn above). Based on the data available the RAP appears to have empowered communities from a refugee and humanitarian background by:

- ❖ enhancing knowledge and skills of refugees for life in Australia;
- ❖ strengthening refugee communities; and
- ❖ improving settlement outcomes for refugees.

It has also resulted in broader outcomes that will indirectly benefit the refugee community, including:

- ❖ enhanced awareness and understanding of refugee community;
- ❖ enabling service providers' access to refugee community; and
- ❖ better cohesions and coordination of services for refugees.

Each of these is discussed in more detail below with quotes from interviews and documents reviewed included to support the findings.

Enhanced knowledge and skills of refugees for life in Australia

Increased access to information and advice

A key role of the RAP coordinator is in helping communities to access relevant information and advice. An important aspect of this role is finding appropriate ways of disseminating information, particularly in terms of reaching traditionally 'hard to reach' groups. The selected story on p. 9 highlights this well with respect to reaching Muslim women with difficult health messages as does the story below.

Another key method of getting information to community members is through networks such as Employment Action for Refugees Network (EARN).

Before we don't know where to go or how things are done so now we do and we can keep updated with information and that helps us a lot. CR07

A PAP smear clinic was attended by 24 Iraqi women of whom 12 have already signed up for testing as a result of an information session. DR

I have got lots of information about different things and also where to go for more information. CR09

In the past I used to only use one employment agency, whoever Centrelink sent me to, but now through the RAP and the EARN network I know of lots of different places and ways to look for work. CR06

One time I had a lady that she was doing a course, and she was a trained doctor in India, and this woman was in my office doing work experience, so what did I do, for two days when I have the Afghani groups for prayers, and sewing, usually women brought their own garment to do, and we encourage them as it is something special and they try to give us something we learn how to make it and stuff like that, and this led us to buy a stove and oven, because they can cook here during that time; but during that break time 10 or 15 minutes, I asked the female doctor to talk about health issues with woman, very informal, 10 minutes talk, you don't have to go for half an hour or hour because people get tired, so she was picking up topics like the importance of vitamins, and especially for Muslim woman they are always covered, and what they should do, and she said children's health you know. What sort of issues to deal with the young children and that the mothers have to keep an eye on, and what is the high blood pressure, high cholesterol, the importance of exercise the diet.

Plus we had a very big session with SES volunteers, just providing information about what is SES, what can you do, and at the time we had a big storm in Shepparton 2 years ago in March and there were lots of people that needed to call for help and they did, because they were aware that we had lots of sessions and information with the Consumer Affairs of Victoria. Usually we invited the female workers, and they provided like shopping issues to consider where they do shopping and the return policy, things relevant to the woman, because the women goes to the shops all the time, and sometimes they return something, one shop can give you a refund, the other one not, unless it is faulty. AS04

Increased understanding of Australia

Often these formal and informal information sessions help arrivals to better understand Australia from the political systems, available health services to lifestyle and recreation opportunities.

They have done information sessions, leading up to the State Election, and we did get the Victorian Electoral Commission to come out to do the voting information with them and understanding the political system. AS02

We have lots of excursions and activities during the school holiday, which increase the community knowledge about the Australian lifestyle. AS04

Increased skills and knowledge

Skills' building has occurred under the RAP in a variety of ways. At least two partnerships have employed an individual from a targeted refugee community as a Community Worker/Community Liaison Officer. This has enabled the building of social capital within the refugee community as well as providing a resource for agencies to access communities. Individuals reportedly learnt a variety of skills and gained valuable work experience as a result.

Other skills acquired include those aimed at income generation, such as sewing and handicrafts. Such programs tended to achieve the dual outcome of socialisation by providing a venue to meet with others as well as learning basic skills to be able to get about. In some cases such programs were also building English language skills incidentally.

We also put aside some funds to kind of employ casually, a community liaison worker from each of those groups. So being able to support some of the women to kind of take on some more responsibility and get some basic payment in return... I think it has been a really good little stepping stone of giving them more experience and exposure to the work world. AS02

Women from the Afghan and Sudanese communities have been assisted to get their learners permit. DR

The sewing program has been an outstanding success. The women first needed support to learn how to access public transport so they could independently travel to the sessions. The women have now used these skills to travel to other places including hospitals, schools, shopping etc. As the group grew we incorporated other activity in to the sewing sessions including specialist advice on women's health, children's health, diet and exercise. DR

Strengthened leadership capacity

A key aspect of all four partnerships reviewed was the focus on building the capacity of community leaders. This seemed to be an area of need identified by communities and was highly valued by those leaders consulted for this review. It also builds on the RAP model of empowering communities to be able to address their own needs.

In addition to formal leadership training, RAP Coordinators provided informal mentoring and advice to assist leaders to establish community associations in accordance with Australian requirements. Once established such associations appear to have become a focal point for community mobilisation. Leaders also build their capacity by participating in RAP meetings and networks. As part of leadership training, participants have learnt how to initiate and implement community projects and have increased their confidence to establish activities to support their own communities (see 'improved capacity to implement activities' below).

This last time we had a leadership training and that's helped with leading our group. Before that we have no idea we just come together and we have no idea about running a group but after we did that leadership training we running our group nicely so RAP really helped us. After the training we changed our group leaders, the committee, by holding a meeting a selecting the leaders. I think that's good because we now we have rules to follow and we have nice communication and nice environment so that leadership training is good for us. CR07

What we have achieved is capacity building. What you have here is a training ground, people have come here and learnt things...you are building people's capacity and that is one thing that will help the community in the long run to do things themselves. So that's one thing that I think this project is doing. It helps to build capacity of communities. CR03

I have learnt how to initiate projects and apply for funding. I feel more confident to apply to other funders now.

The RAP program has been really useful for us in terms of providing capacity building, leadership development and also for learning about other communities. CR06

And out of the leadership training they also decided that they wanted to go to Parliament House, because a couple of the women had visited previously and I think really loved it; or it just opened their eyes a lot. And then supporting them through some leadership challenges to hold elections. So this group, they kind of have an aim that they would like to be incorporated, and they would like to be a formally recognised group. I'm trying to help them put in the basic systems, and infrastructure, because we have seen that happen with some groups, just registering and getting incorporated, then don't have the systems in place, and don't have a clear structure, and don't realise what they are supposed to be doing, in terms of accountability and reporting, and AGMs and all that sort of stuff.

So the election process I think was really good in terms of them; and I think as a group, thinking through communication and conflict resolution. How do they make decisions, because whether or not it is true, I think there was sometimes a lot of feeling that some of the women, previously in leadership, had access to all this information, and people, and they weren't sharing it. So, they had lots of those discussions about, 'well how do you have that transparency, how does everyone have the ability to put input into systems, and how do people take responsibility'; 'If you weren't at the meeting when the decisions were being made, how do you find out that information'. Just some of the very simple stuff about record keeping, and who is running this meeting, and who is taking the notes, and how do people keep informed. AS02

Strengthened refugee community

New networks and partnerships formed

A core part of the support provided by the RAP Coordinator has been linking communities with local agencies and other stakeholders in response to particular needs or interests. Being connected via networks and forming partnerships is an important aspect in the success and sustainability of refugee community groups as it opens up a whole range of opportunities from access to funding to use of sporting venues.

Being able to tap into a range of stakeholders for a particular program or activity helps communities to add value to their projects and benefit from the insight and experience of others. In many cases, the partnerships formed offer benefits to all parties, not just the refugee community (see 'Enabling service providers better access to refugee communities' later in this section and example below).

Both the Oromo women and Eritrean Youth are very well tapped into now Youth Services Neighbourhood Renewal, the Community Centre, Youth Services in North Melbourne. They boys have started accessing the North Melbourne Recreation Centre, which was pretty inaccessible; we did a lot of negotiation and bargaining to run that soccer there. AS02

We are more connected. We have built a network and we've met new people and you can use that network you've built to help our communities. So it's like an ongoing process. CR03

The value is in partnership, and sustainability is in partnership and you can link them. So looking at what we have been talking about, Burundi communities are now so well linked and well known, and I would say well supported through Council, I wonder if there are issues that might come up for them, but I would be confident knowing that they know how to navigate that. So I think that is like a success. KS03

The Advisory Committee for the Driving Program is made up of a number of different service providers, as well as the project worker, the driving project worker, and myself and [the community leader], Together we kind of threw around ideas of some services that would be good to have involved. That particular community had previously ran a driving program in conjunction with AMES Education, a couple of years ago, and [the community leader] saw the establishment the Advisory Committee as being of a real benefit to the program, and so the idea really came from him. So we looked at different services who would be relevant and would be able to add some skills and knowledge to that. And included in that is a local government rep, and we had the person who runs the L2P program down in the City of Casey as well (that is a driving program). We have also had Victoria Police involved in that that program is also in partnership with Rotary as well; they received some funding from Rotary as well. So Rotarians have been on the driving program, on the Advisory Committee too, which has been a really good link for them, and for Rotary as well, I think there has been some benefits from Rotary too, learning more about the communities that have newly arrived. So there has been that information sharing and exchange. AS08

Improved understanding of how systems and processes work in Australia

In order to benefit from the range of services and resources available to them, refugee communities need to understand how systems and processes work in Australia. The ability to navigate the often complex structures in place is an important aspect to the longer term success of community groups.

The availability of a dedicated resource person such as the RAP coordinator appears to have been instrumental in assisting communities in better understanding how to operate effectively in this context by acting as a guide and mentor.

The [Lead Agency] has helped us to set up our association. I discuss with them about the forms and what is the best way to deal with people in an Australian way, because being from an Afghani background things are different. If members of our Afghani community in Shepparton are not familiar with the Australia system, they [lead Agency] help provide some information. CRO1

At the same time, going through the RAP program we have got to know the specific departments like DPCD and FaHCSIA and even at the municipal level and the local level where are the boundaries for example of Dandenong. So this is all a learning process for us. CRO6

Before I didn't know we can benefit from city councils, but now I understand how they work in responding to settlement issues. CRO8

Improved capacity to implement activities

The support and encouragement offered through the RAP program has been attributed to improving the capacity of refugee communities to implement their own activities. The skills and knowledge acquired, particularly by community leaders, together with the availability of enabling funds for activities has meant that communities have been able to take the lead in running their own community based programs.

Numerous examples were also provided of community groups building on and applying their knowledge, experience and networks (with the support of RAP staff) to leverage additional funding in their own right

Such an outcome suggests that certain groups are on their way to becoming self-reliant, which would be an ultimate testimony to the strength of the RAP model.

A number of community leaders interviewed indicated that they now felt empowered and had a clearer idea of how of what they wanted to achieve and the skills and resources to put ideas into action.

They did a leadership training course, then out of that they formed a little working group and planned a summer excursion. So they took, it must have been about 80 women and kids down to the Geelong foreshore and they planned all of that. AS02

They [Oromo women] have been really successful and I have watched them grow in terms of their organising as well comparing the first year to the second year, and how much more professional it was. AS02

Eritrean girls were supported to obtain \$1700 from Moonee Valley Youth Foundations and \$3000 from Moonee Valley Council for on-going activities in 2011. DR

Two months ago I took 20 youth to the police academy and showed them how they are trained and they learned about what are their rights. CRO6

So we got a grant from the Moonee Valley Council to help support our group, especially for childcare 'coz [sic] when we come together we bring our kids so the childcare is important. For future if things continue for us it's good because we have to be self-sufficient and to make this we need help and ideas. So what is important is we have had a lot of experience. CRO7

Increased participation in and engagement within their local communities

Many of the activities undertaken by community groups have been aimed at increasing participation and engagement within their own communities (see selected story on p. 13).

Such activities are important in maintaining a sense of identity and connection to their respective cultures. This is particularly important in fostering and improving intergenerational relationships.

Every time Ramadan comes around, the [Eritrean] boys do Ramadan Soccer, and that is in a big tournament where they meet up; it is a social thing as well as the fact that they are eating late, and they have all this energy after dark. AS03

[The Eritrean girls] started visiting the older Eritrean women's group, and just sort of having some luncheons with them, and just starting to talk I think, showing some interest. And I think the older women were also really impressed that these 20 year old girls would be choosing to do this in their spare time and getting funding to have some lunches with them. AS02

Improved settlement outcomes

Reduced sense of isolation

For many newly arrived refugees finding themselves in an alien culture and not speaking the language results in a sense of isolation. Women, in particular can end up spending long periods of time in the home, disconnected from the world around them. It is not surprising then that many of the activities undertaken by community groups aim to address this issue.

Many activities aim to fill a dual purpose such as teaching sewing and bringing people together. Such activities help people to feel connected and also given them a sense of purpose.

RAP organised a dinner recently in sunshine and met lots of women from different cultures and it's very good because as women we stay at home with kids and sometimes we're busy at home so that opportunity was good for us to meet a lot of other people so it's good to have that kind of things. CR07

So for social isolation reasons, they come twice a week and do some English and do some sewing and it is more of a friendship group for them, then study. KS01

I have met a lot of different cultures through the RAP program; African people and Asian people, which has made me feel safer in the community. CR11

Access to employment and training

Employment was identified as a key issue by most RAP communities and refugees face considerable barriers to gaining employment, from lack of recognition of skills and qualifications to a lack of contact with potential local employers.

In some cases, the RAP has facilitated access to employment and training opportunities. These have tended to emerge as a result of connection made through RAP partnerships and networks, or in some cases as a result of activities supported through the RAP such as the Global Studio in Morwell (see selected story p. 15).

One of the project workers, who was working on the driving program, has now got part time employment as a result of being involved in the program, and there has been a couple of examples similar to that. AS08

Through the networking I was able to go and find myself a job for myself because I learned that sometimes when you want a job you don't just have to sit and wait; sometimes you have to walk for the job. CR02

Since the beginning of this year, through the partnership we've done about 50 catering gigs and that involves providing usually a three course meal ranging from small dinner parties to huge events like 400 people. We've been able to train up quite a few people. CR05

Enhanced integration into Australian society

Many of the outcomes discussed above contribute to improving integration by refugee communities into Australian society. In particular employment outcomes are often associated with successful integration of migrants and refugees. However, some of the more straight forward initiatives such as a driving program (which was common to most partnerships) can also go a long way to helping the integration process by simply making transport and access to friends, relatives and services easier.

Other initiatives which aim to overcome cultural differences such as introducing refugees to sports and recreational activities common to Australia but perhaps alien to many cultures can assist refugee communities to better integrate and participate in Australian society.

The second major thing they worked on, was a driving program ... A lot of them are single they are out here on their own, or with young children, with very limited English, so there are huge barriers to them getting their licenses, so that is very popular, subsidised driving lessons, and getting them qualified. AS02

17 Sudanese commenced the citizenship training with two sessions each week for men and women. DR

Being involved with the RAP program has helped change my perception of Australian society. CR08

There has been a range of those activities that, and I guess certainly with the soccer day, when I dropped down to that, it was encouraging, not just for the Sudanese community, but the soccer community was there, so there was a lot of interaction, and it led to the opportunity for soccer clubs to offer; for young ones interested in playing the competitive sport to continue with the soccer clubs, so that they could actually join the soccer club. AS09

New and On-going opportunities created

An important finding of the evaluation is that the RAP appears to have created a launching pad for further activities and participation by community members who have been involved in RAP initiatives. This suggests that working with and through the refugee communities offers a pathway for those refugees to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to more fully participate in Australian society by opening up new and on-going opportunities that they otherwise would not have.

A lot of those girls I have seen; two of them are working casually at the Community Centre now. Some of them have volunteered with Neighbourhood Renewal or end up running a stall on the community event. So I think RAP has just provided that resource and momentum, and support that there has been a sort of platform now that they can spring into a whole bunch of things out of the relationships, and the funding. AS04

Yeah but the group continues but just not with sewing, and they are hoping this year to do a community kitchen. AS08

And one other thing I was going to say about the Oromo group, the really positive thing that I see; it has sort of spawned that momentum of just having some projects and having some resources and getting out there, is that one of the women is based in Richmond, so she has started a Richmond Oromo women's group, and they have got already 25 – 30 women in that area, who are all very newly arrived and similarly quite isolated group of women with young children. Then similarly out in St Albans and Sunshine that used to be involved in that Flemington group, they are also moving out west now, so they have started up something out there. I think it just creates that momentum. The minute you see other people being active and getting out there, people say, well hang on, why aren't we doing that too? AS02

Probably the most significant thing that I see, is that my original students have gone, they have left me, but you know that is a beautiful thing, they are all doing something else now, Certificate 3 in Aged in Care, Certificate 3 in Child Care, but have moved onto other projects, so it is a pathway, and it is hard to let them go sometimes, but the Global Studio is a pathways, that confidence building and skills building then onto the next thing. And running the Sudanese women's program on local radio. They are our past students and again women who have found their feet or their voice and moved on. KS01

Outcomes beyond refugee community

Enhanced awareness and understanding of refugee community

The RAP has enhanced awareness and understanding of the refugee community among staff of other agencies and service providers who sometimes lack specific knowledge of cultural issues. This has occurred either by organised awareness sessions or more informally via stakeholder meetings.

In addition, some of the community based activities have also focused on engaging and informing the wider population, these have included inviting the general public to specific cultural events or holding organised information sessions, such as the screening of *'Lost Boys of Sudan'*, a feature-length documentary that follows two Sudanese refugees on an extraordinary journey from Africa to America.

Plus another important thing was our support with those networks and service providers because they have to work with the refugees or people of different nationalities, and they had no knowledge of their cultural issues, so we provided lots of information, we invited guest speakers, just to explain what was important, for example when people going into the other people's home, what they must do and what they must not do. AS04

Yes they have done a few, they got very into their events, they have done the Iftar dinners during Ramadan, where they wanted to educate their friends and broader community about why they fast and just demystify it all a little bit for people, as well as celebrating it also themselves with the local community. So they have had two of those and they did that in partnership with some of the young guys. AS02

Better cohesion and coordination of services for refugees

The RAP model has taken a partnership approach by working in partnership with targeted refugee communities, local governments and related agencies and organisations. Such collaborations have provided a bridge and opportunity for a range of stakeholders to meet and develop project opportunities. The RAP Coordinator has been instrumental in allowing a direct line through which to establish and build those relationships. This has facilitated a more strategic approach so that agencies are not operating in isolation and not duplicating what is already happening but instead sharing resources and collaborating on activities. An example of this is the swimming program in Latrobe whereby Latrobe Community Health and the RAP Coordinator organised swimming lessons for the local refugee community. Council promoted it and provided the facilities and Latrobe

Community Health has been able to provide some of the funding. The result being that improved coordination of service has led to better service provision for refugee communities.

For example in Dandenong you have 156 different nationalities, so you are one of many, so how do you make sure that your needs are met, and that your local council is aware of your needs, and you are aware of local council can offer or is offering to the community. This model allowed you to do that! AS07

Like now with some of our Sports and Recreation Department is looking at delivering, so because we have been able to know about these projects, and because we have got these relationships, so if there is a project happening or developing, getting off the ground from the Council, you have to manage, and you link the two together, and then you have got an easy program transition, and I suppose outcome for both. KS03

Well I think certainly, the coordination is a lot better now, and I think the networking between agencies, is much stronger, and I think the sharing of resources, is certainly much better. Whereas we might not be able to provide a program, Latrobe Community Health might have some money that collectively; we can do some things together. So I think the level of services are much greater than it has been in the past. AS05

As a council, we just wouldn't have had the resources to engage to this level without the RAP program, so it just allows us that opportunity to get that resourcing and to really focus strongly. Build the connections, build the relationships, identify the needs, and then start to engage the agencies, or bring the agencies together to work together. We wouldn't have been able to achieve what we have without the RAP. AS09

Enabling service providers better access to refugee communities

By providing a central contact point the RAP has enabled service providers better access to refugee communities. Often services want to access community groups or specific communities but don't have the necessary relationships or points of entry. Participating in RAP networks and structures has enabled them to directly engage with whom might be otherwise hard-to-reach communities.

So definitely I think it creates a bit of a focal point and contact for services to better tap into communities and to see how they can get involved. And similarly having the network, the Tier 2 network, you know we have had Whittlesea community connections saying we are looking to start up an employment support program, can we come and talk to the group and get some of their ideas, about what would work, and so it kind of creates a bit of a hub; a network people can just immediately tap into. AS02

From Council's perspective, why I am participating is because this is one of the communities exactly that we would like to engage more with, because more of the presenting issues, and their vulnerability, so we want to be seen as proactive in addressing some of those. So that is where motivation comes from, and wanting to engage and work with them in addressing any of the issues that we might have in respect to council and what we are doing. We don't do settlement, council don't do settlement services, but nevertheless they are residents of our municipality, and it is about providing access and equity. KS03

4. UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN CONTEXT – EXPERIENCES OF THE DIFFERENT PARTNER AGENCIES

Case Study One: Southern

Partnership

This partnership is a collaboration between two lead agencies namely, **Springvale Community Aid & Advice Bureau (SCAAB)** and the **South East Region Migrant Resource Centre (SERMRC)**, with SCAAB formally participating in the Refugee Brokerage program. The Southern partnership covers four local government areas; Greater Dandenong, Casey, Kingston, and Frankston.

Communities targeted

Each of the two agencies targets specific Tier 1 refugee communities:

- SCAAB - Burmese, Burundi
- SERMRC – Sudanese (Nazir), Afghan (Hazara, mixed)

Communities were identified in consultation with agency staff including the Access and Equity Worker (DIAC funded position at SERMRC) and project workers from both agencies who had relevant community knowledge. Non-financial support is provided as required to Tier 2 communities.

Approach taken with engagement and planning

The mode of engagement varied from community to community depending on pre-existing relationships and community structures. For example the Hazara community had its own association which had been established for some time and worked based on a committee. Therefore, this structure was used to engage the community in RAP and plan community specific activities based on their needs. In contrast the Afghan Australian Women's and Youth Association was less well established, the committee did not meet regularly and there had been no previous contact. In this instance the community plan came out of meeting with the chairperson and also the Women's Welfare Officer.

Each community developed its community specific work plan which fed into the lead agency work plan which was developed as part of the tender process.

Structures established/in place to support RAP

The model used in the Southern partnership has two distinct groups to guide and implement the RAP.

- ❖ Program Partners Group comprising key agency stakeholders including from Local Government areas, Southern Health, AMES Employment and the two lead agencies SCAAB and SERMRC
- ❖ Community Steering Committee made up of community leaders from their Tier 1 groups. From time to time the two groups come together, but are in effect run as two separate entities.

Distribution of enabling funds

Funding distributed equally to tier 1 communities and non-financial support as required to Tier 2 communities.

Particular challenges

- The southern partnership has seen changes in key staff during the RAP.
- Managing expectations of various program partners and the role and purpose of the Program Partners Group.

Case Study Two: NW2

Partnership

This partnership is a collaboration between two lead agencies namely **Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre**. EMC was formally part of the Refugee Brokerage Program. The partnership covers Hume, Moonee Valley, Melbourne, Yarra, Moreland, Darebin, Banyule, and Whittlesea.

Communities targeted

Each of the two agencies targets specific Tier 1 refugee communities:

- EMC - Ogaden community and asylum seekers
- Spectrum – Oromo women, Eritrean youth

Working closely with Tier 2 communities – Employment Action for Refugees Network (EARN)

Approach taken with engagement and planning

The mode of engagement varied from community to community depending on pre-existing relationships and community structures. For example, with the Oromo Women, after initial consultations it was identified that there was an existing group meeting, and there was a worker already engaged with those women, who made the introductions. In the case of the Eritrean youth, contact was made with an Eritrean youth worker and various different people. Then one of the Council Youth Workers indicated that he had met a group of young Eritrean women who had literally just formed and wanted to start a young women's group. In contrast the young Eritrean men was harder, it took a much longer time to find out who was out there and engage with them, and a lot of the young guys that they had initially met with, were just at a very different stage and wanting to see things happen.

Structures established/in place to support RAP

- ❖ Program Management Group (PMG)
- ❖ Employment of Community Liaison Officers from targeted Tier 1 communities
- ❖ Employment Action for Refugees Network (EARN) - a network of Tier 2 community representatives from across the northern metropolitan region, a mix of backgrounds, and that has been quite a long process of that group identifying a key settlement challenge really that they are all facing, which the identified as employment. Out of this group two key projects that have emerged as the Refugee Employment Advocacy Project (REAP) and a DVD project which aims to develop two DVDs to promote awareness; one targeting employers and the other targeting refugee communities.

Distribution of enabling funds

Even amounts were allocated amongst Tier 1 groups between the two agency partnerships, and then a core amount was distributed to Tier 2 as a group for them to decide how to use that money.

Particular challenges

- Managing PMG stakeholders and refugee communities expectations across a large region
- Limited ability to work in all LGAs covered by partnership due to large area – limited presence in outer regions.

Case Study Three: Hume

Partnership

Lead agency of partnership is the **Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District** which was formally part of Refugee Brokerage Program. Based in Shepparton, the partnership covers Greater Shepparton and Moira.

Communities targeted

Tier 1 refugee communities: Iraqi, Afghani, Sudanese and Congolese

Approach taken with engagement and planning

The mode of engagement varied from community to community depending on pre-existing relationships and community structures.

The model used for planning is based on a hierarchy of program documentation beginning with the broad program plan which is supported by community profiles, community plans, worker plans and project plans. The process involved extensive consultation with the community representatives to identify issues. This was followed by consultation with the service providers group, NEST and ESP to gain feedback on issues raised and to identify any other issues, for example the refugee maternal nurse identified that there was a lack of information about pap smears. Issues were then prioritised by each of the communities prior to developing community specific work plans. Community workers were engaged from the target communities and involved in the development of individual work plans with the target communities. Work plans are then further broken down into project plans based on the community priorities. These project plans are then again broken down into specific task components and the workers prepare budgets and timelines to achieve each component.

Structures established/in place to support RAP

- ❖ Employment (part-time) of community workers from target refugee communities to act as a conduit and facilitate access and engagement with communities.
- ❖ Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Planning Committee, hosted by the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District this steering Committee was established to work with DIAC Victoria to prepare for the arrival of refugee families.

Distribution of enabling funds

Allocation of funds is not based on an amount per community. Wherever possible they have tried to run activities for a number of communities together to try and avoid any sense of one community gaining more resources than another.

Particular challenges

- Ability of community workers and leaders to understand written project documentation.
- Large and diverse migrant population
- Loss of key community contact for Afghan women (moved out of area)

Case Study Four: Gippsland

Partnership

Lead agency of partnership is **Latrobe City Council** which covers the area of Latrobe Valley.

Communities targeted

Tier 1 refugee communities: Sudanese

Approach taken with engagement and planning

As a precursor to the RAP a forum was organised by the Latrobe City Council which was attended by local Sudanese community and relevant agencies to identify issues. Follow-up focus groups meetings were held with the Sudanese communities to prioritise the issues raised. This eventually formed the basis of the Gippsland RAP work plans, in conjunction with input from the Settlement Committee. The Settlement committee plays a major role in the development and planning of activities. A number of working groups have been developed around key areas such as 'Sport and Recreation', 'Education, Employment and Training', 'Women', etc. These sub groups comprise invited representatives related to the particular area or sector. Programs and activities are formulated by the Work Groups and reported to the Latrobe Settlement Committee for funding.

Programs and activities are often developed in response to issues identified by the welfare agencies and government departments which form the Settlement Committee. An example being the 'Journey to Work' Program that responded to a need identified by a teacher who is on that group who indicated, there was an issue in terms of these migrant kids having unreal expectations. Consequently, the approach taken by Gippsland differs significantly from that of the other partnerships reviewed, being less community development driven.

Structures established/in place to support RAP

- ❖ Latrobe City Council Settlement Committee – established to ensure government departments and welfare agencies target their services to assist the needs of refugees in the Latrobe Valley.
- ❖ Working groups established under the Settlement Committee.

Distribution of enabling funds

There is only one target community in this partnership and programs/activities are formulated by the Work Groups and reported to the Latrobe Settlement Committee for the approval and funding.

Particular challenges

- Refugee communities largely based on second wave migration so difficult to anticipate numbers and plan for.
- Ownership of activities as not community driven.

5. UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS ENABLING OR HINDERING BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES

The description of factors provides valuable insight into the drivers and mechanisms that contributed to or hindered the beneficial outcomes generated by the project. This provides potentially useful information for future initiatives.

5.1 Enabling factors

During the interviews and subsequent analysis a number of factors were identified that appear to have contributed to the success of the RAP. These enabling factors broadly fall into eight categories:

- ❖ Flexibility of the program
- ❖ Building trust
- ❖ Community driven
- ❖ Community ownership
- ❖ Appropriate and relevant training
- ❖ Cross- community interaction and learning
- ❖ The role of the RAP Coordinator as focal point and enabler
- ❖ Lead agency partnerships.

Flexibility of the program

The flexibility of the way RAP works was identified as a key strength, particularly because lot of programs don't have inbuilt flexibility. Lead agencies reported that *"If it is not working with a group, or things have taken a left turn, well, if it is not working, let's change it"*, and felt that they had the support and encouragement of OMAC to do so. The flexibility of the Program, particularly with respect to use of funds means that the RAP is able to fill a niche not covered my other funding models.

the sessions we have provided, sessions around housing, and tenancy agreements, and all that sort of information that we have been able to provide, would have just simply not happened because it doesn't fit into anybody's particular program. AS05

Because RAP is more flexible than some of the other agencies, it is better able respond to identified needs as opposed to having a set program to work with, whereby if things don't fit within specific guidelines, they are not included. This has resulted in RAP being able to include activities which otherwise would have 'fallen through the cracks'.

the RAP program has given them the flexibility to be able to I suppose find those things that have fallen between the cracks or haven't been offered by other agencies. AS02

An example of this is refugee arrivals who have been here more than 5 years, yet still can't speak English. Most agencies are unable to provide settlement assistance even though communities may still be struggling with settlement issues.

I think it is really important for the RAP program to have the flexibility, I think that is one of the really good things about the RAP program, is that it able to respond to the needs of each of the different regions. Certainly our regions needs will be different from Shepparton or something, and the fact that the RAP program is able to respond to the individual region, I think is one of the great things about it. It is not often you get funding without some really stringent guidelines, and because this has been quite flexible, I think that has been fantastic. We have been able to identify where it needs to be spent, and the VMC have always supported what we have proposed. So that has been one of the great things about it. AS05

Building trust

Another key strength of the RAP is the time that has been invested in building relationships and trust not only with communities but also with agencies and service providers.

Yeah so really just getting out and trying to meet people and I think yeah, it takes time, I think that engagement stuff really does take time, and building that trust with people, coming along to celebrations, and with the Oromo women, it was a little bit like that. AS02

I think the key one is developing those relationships, like relationships with the community settling in, but also developing those relationships with the different agencies and say government and non-government agencies, to identify where we can actually identify where we can actually jointly provide the supports. We do that in a sort of facilitative coordinated way. So I think that was key AS09

The existence of trust has also been an important factor in the management of the program and OMAC's approach or trust with the partners was also reported as significant as 'that kind of trust trickles down the whole way through' an impacts on how functioning of the respective partnerships.

Community driven

A key factor supporting the overall success of the program it is that it is a very grass roots community based program. Once relationship have been established with communities then RAP has been able to assist them in addressing issues that they see as being important to their communities.

Community ownership

The RAP model has also fostered strong community ownership. Refugee communities have been able to participate in all aspects, from the planning and decision making to the implementation of activities, 'from A to Z the group has been involved'. Building community participation and involvement, is likely to ensure community 'ownership' of a project, suit local circumstances, and increase a project's sustainability.

Appropriate and relevant training

Another factor contributing to the success of the program has been the training that has been made available through the RAP. Building the capacity of community leaders has been key in the community strengthening approach at the heart of the RAP model.

I'm always asked why they are so successful, and I think it is because they had a really strong leadership, and then the community role models, and take the lead if you like from their leaders, and I think it is very important to invest in community leaders, or current or the future ones, to develop them, and then you have got multiple kind of benefits and outcomes for the community as a whole. (AS07)

In addition, tailored training programs have been provided to address specific needs of sub-groups within communities such as citizenship training, the driving program and swimming programs.

Cross- community interaction and learning

Another factor that was identified was the cross-community interaction and learning. The different forums and networks under the RAP enabled community leaders from different communities to sit around the table together, listen to each other's issues, find a common ground, and share ideas and strategies. This has facilitated cross cultural learning.

there are so many projects that have got that cross cultural contact, and you have a steering group, where they all come together, and you should see them how they interact and talk to each other and build that friendship, so I think that is very important, and that often is rare, of different communities

working together, sitting at a table together, and here, they sit together and make some very tough decisions. AS07

The role of the RAP Coordinator as focal point and enabler

As discussed in section 3.1 above, the RAP Coordinator has been a key mechanism in the successful implementation of the RAP. The RAP worker often acts as a sounding board for communities and is able to make suggestions, links and 'walk alongside' communities. Without RAP that link is lost, and communities would not have a key point of contact and support. Having a person available to really work alongside communities and help them to plan and to look at their group, to look at what their current needs are, as well as respond to needs as and when they emerge has proved to be invaluable and played a key part in community capacity building and strengthening.

I think it is really that resourcing, like actually that there is a point of contact, and someone that is there to support them. So when they say we have got this idea, or we want to do this thing, I feel like through RAP, there has been a point of contact, and the resourcing, and they have already got some funding, and we can also help them to see where else they can get funding from, and to support them through the whole process really. AS02

Lead agency partnerships

In some instances the RAP partnership is a collaboration between two lead agencies (i.e. NW2 - Ecumenical Migration Centre and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre). Where this is the case agencies reported that it worked really well in terms of being able to collaborate and pool resources and was considered a strategic approach for both the organisations who may have previously been competing for funds.

The difference of doing it in partnership with MRC, was for me very significant, because I feel that there is this competitiveness to drive many of the service providers away from each other. While the messages from the government can be clear, that they want to see agencies working together, the nature of competitive tendering, kind of drives projects. And I think you are losing a lot of opportunities; you are missing out on a greater outcome when you put the two together, when you form the partnership. When the partnership was formed in MRC and SCAB, I thought that was of value AS07

5.2 Hinderling factors

During the interviews and subsequent analysis a number of factors were also identified that appear to have hindered the success of the RAP. These were broadly reported as issues and challenges associated with the program. These factors broadly fall into eight categories:

- ❖ Time frame of funding cycle
- ❖ Dependence of key community representatives
- ❖ Changes in staff
- ❖ Focus on gender specific activities can create inequalities
- ❖ Shifting priorities of communities
- ❖ RAP coordinator as gate keeper
- ❖ Managing mixed expectations
- ❖ Limitations of reach.

During the evaluation summit, participants were asked to rate these issues according to importance and provide reasons for their ranking.

Time frame of funding cycle

This was ranked as HIGH in terms of importance as the short funding cycle was felt to be at odds with the community development approach. When you are looking at building relationships with communities, implementing projects, and building networks with them the timescale of the program was considered short, particularly from a community development perspective.

Dependence on key community representatives

This emerged as a significant challenge and factor hindering the potential success of the program. It was ranked as HIGH. There were some instances where a key community contact had relocated to another area which had resulted in either delays or in one case a loss of contact with specific groups (e.g. Muslim women). This issue is compounded by a tendency to rely on one key English Speaker as the main liaison with non-English speaking groups and highlights the need for succession planning and ensuring that information doesn't rest with one key person.

Changes in staff

Rated HIGH TO MEDIUM, this was a common issue for agencies with the potential to result in a loss of local community knowledge and relationships. Although the Staff summary document facilitated the transition to a new staff member, it did not compensate for the time invested to build relationships and community. The earlier issue of funding cycles was also thought to impact on staff turnover due to the job insecurity that it created.

Focus on gender specific activities can create inequalities

Although there was limited consensus on the ranking of this as an issue, overall it was ranked as MEDIUM TO HIGH. It was recognised that there can be tension created by focusing on certain sub-groups within a community, such as women or youth. Focusing on one to the detriment of another can create longer-term problems and disputes in the home, particularly where women are being empowered and men feel that they are being left behind. Lead agencies need to be conscious of needs of different target groups and manage multiple interests and expectations.

Shifting priorities of communities

This was ranked as a MEDIUM level issue as while it can be challenging for support organisations and workers, the flexibility of RAP allows for this to some extent. However, it was considered important for communities to understand timelines and what can be achieved during the duration of the program.

RAP coordinator as gate keeper

This issue arises from the role of the RAP Coordinator in providing access to refugee communities for service providers, and relies on the RAP worker being able to navigate and manage extensive information and access demands. This requires skills in managing the tension between being a source of information and developing networks, and the many agencies wanting 'access' to communities. If not done well it can lead to over consultation/fatigue, hence the role of the RAP coordinator should be to check in with communities and let them know what is available so that they are able to make informed decisions about who to engage with and when. Ranked as MEDIUM TO LOW.

Managing mixed expectations

This was not considered an important issue and was ranked LOW TO MEDIUM. Again it falls to the RAP coordinator to manage expectations and establish clear roles for each of the stakeholders engaged in the Program.

Limitations of reach

This issue was ranked as LOW as although agencies did not have a huge presence across their regions, particularly where they were operating over a large area, it was felt to be more important to have a targeted impact with specific communities than try to service too many.

6. KEY LESSONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The value in having a dedicated resource person to provide on-going support to community groups

Having a person available to really work alongside communities and help them to plan and to look at their group, to look at what their current needs are, as well as respond to needs as and when they emerge, has proved to be invaluable and played a key part in community capacity building and strengthening.

Recognition of time required for a community development approach

Realistic expectations need to be established in terms of what can be achieved within a specific timeframe when adopting a community development approach. Development of a sound theory of change that identifies intermediate outcomes and time specific progress markers is one way that this can be achieved and effectively communicated to stakeholders.

Importance of flexibility of RAP to be responsive to community

The flexibility of the RAP model is what sets it apart from many other initiatives and should be maintained in any future iterations of the program. Focusing on a broad outcomes framework allows communities to respond to specific needs while at the same time contributing to improved settlement outcomes.

Importance of information sharing among stakeholders regarding community plans

In order for the Program to continue to contribute to improved service provision for refugees opportunities for information sharing and collaboration need to be maintained and/ or developed. Coordination across multiple stakeholders is a valuable means of adding value and avoiding duplication of effort.

Recognition of importance of relationships and networks

Programs and activities cannot operate successfully in isolation and it is important not to underestimate the significance of relationships and networks. The RAP has highlighted the value in investing time in ensuring strong relationships which will ultimately determine the overall sustainability of the Program.

Need for move away from dependence from individual community resource people

As we have seen, over dependence on individuals as community resource people and key contacts for specific community groups can be problematic when those individuals are no longer available. Agencies should ensure adequate succession planning and that information doesn't rest with one key person.

Importance of effective data collection and reporting

In undertaking this evaluation weaknesses in the current monitoring and reporting mechanisms have become apparent. Reporting templates were considered by some agencies to be onerous to complete and in reviewing them it was problematic to collate any of the data due to inconsistencies in reporting. While it is commendable to include a focus on qualitative reporting, this has been at the expense of quantitative data and capturing useful information on reach and participation in the Program.