

**Transition from school to employment or further education
of
refugeestudents from government secondary schools in 2010
in the
City of Brimbank**

Brimbank-Melton Local Learning and Employment Network

June 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An investigation was commissioned by the Brimbank-Melton Local Learning and Employment Network to establish benchmark data regarding the pathways of students with a refugee background. The study involved refugee students who attended government secondary colleges in the City of Brimbank in 2010. There were 3 aspects to the investigation: (a) collection of data (b) student interviews and (c) intensive casework with *atrisk* students in transition from school to further study or employment. The investigation was conducted by four teachers who were experienced in working with refugees.

The data was collected from the schools' administration records and staff interviews. In Years 7-12 at the six colleges, there were 252 refugee students, with 62% being male. The students were from a variety of countries with two-thirds being of African background. The destination data revealed that very few of these students left before the completion of Year 12. With those refugee students who undertook Year 12, there was a clear preference (80%) for VCE subjects rather than other courses such as VCAL. After Year 12, about 80% of students went on to further study with 13 enrolling in TAFE courses and 8 gaining entry to University degrees. The selected courses covered a variety of areas of interest.

Semi-structured interviews were held with 12 senior refugee students, most of whom had completed Year 12, and were described as being successful students by the Careers teachers. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain the students' perception of "what worked" in their secondary school studies and to gain their early impressions of their progress in their tertiary study. The topics covered in these interviews included experiences of education, learning skills, student identity and transition.

In recognition that refugees need additional assistance at times of transition, two advocates were employed to provide 'hands on' assistance to students who were *at risk* of not making a successful transition to further education or employment. Eight students were referred by the Careers teachers. These students lacked awareness of processes and pathways and, generally, had welfare issues as well. The Advocates assisted the students to find, apply and enrol in a course. This support was extremely successful with each of these students securing an educational pathway.

Summary of Recommendations

Schools in partnership:

- Employ two full-time Refugee Worker to work across the six schools for intensive work with refugee students.
- Monitor the progress of refugee students during the first twelve months of their further education or employment.
- Initiate dialogue with a tertiary institution to provide a model to establish support systems for refugee students (eg. Orientation program, mentors).
- Establish a network of employers who can provide part-time work to refugee students.

School administration:

- Ensure there is continuity of support across settings for exit refugee students during times of transition.
- Review attendance/exit procedures so that the number of “unknown” destinations may be reduced.
- Ensure that teachers are well informed re the backgrounds (eg. disrupted schooling) of refugee students.
- Ensure that all teachers are provided with PD on the learning and language needs of refugee/ESL students.
- Ensure there is ESL teacher support for refugee/ESL students doing VCAL.
- Continue to track the educational progress and pathways of refugee students.

Careers/MIPs teachers:

- Ensure that refugee/ESL students and their parents/guardians are well informed re the processes and pathways to career goals.
- Ensure that ESL teachers are involved in Career Education and course selection.
- Ensure that they themselves are well informed about ESL-based courses at the tertiary level.
- Encourage exit students to apply widely across different levels of tertiary courses.
- Encourage young women from refugee backgrounds to go on to further study.
- Establish several avenues of making contact with students in transition.
- Ensure that the different avenues of course entry (eg. Direct Application, Special Entry Access Schemes) are pursued for refugee students.
- Ensure that refugee students are informed about available student support services and encouraged to use them.
- Provide extra opportunity and assistance for refugee students to visit tertiary institutions and workplaces (eg. Open Days).
- Provide students with successful role models from similar cultural backgrounds.

Developments from the 2010/11 BMLLEN Refugee Transition Project

The funding from BMLLEN for the Refugee Transition project ceased in March 2011. Since that time there have been significant developments:

- Schools are now aware of the courses and pathways of their refugee students in 2010 and will monitor the trends of future cohorts.
- The St Albans/Keilor Schools Network has committed to the funding of the employment of two refugee advocates for a total of 300 hours from Nov. 2011 – March 2012. The role of the advocates will be to provide intensive case management of refugee students at risk in their transition from school to employment or further education.
- The pathways of the 8 students who received intensive assistance in 2010/11 are continuing to be tracked where possible.
- Destination data of refugee students will be collected for 2011/12.
- In the St. Albans/Keilor Network, the following outcomes have been manifest:
 - ESL teachers work more closely with the Careers and/or MIPs teachers in the course selection by refugee students
 - Careers teachers have been provided with access to lists to identify students of 'likely refugee background' and hence are more able to address the needs of these students.
 - Careers teachers are able to assist more refugee students to avail themselves of different avenues of course entry (eg. Direct Application, Special Entry Access Schemes).
 - The need to impress upon refugee (and ESL) students to apply widely and at different levels of tertiary courses has been reinforced with Careers teachers.
- A seminar for ESL, MIPs and Careers teachers has been organised at Victoria University (VU) to familiarise the teachers with the ESL courses which are offered.
- A partnership with VU has developed such that VU has agreed to trial a program to:
 - provide de-identified data on the progress of refugee students at VU in 2012
 - provide mentoring support if possible (depending on the course selections) to refugee students at VU in 2012.