

Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

Cardinia Shire

Cardinia Shire is located south-east of Melbourne and is one of ten 'interface Councils' around the perimeter of metropolitan Melbourne, providing a transition between urban and rural areas. The primary urban centre is Pakenham, which is located 55 kilometres from Melbourne's central business district. The Shire comprises of 27 rural townships and the Casey-Cardinia growth corridor along the Princes Highway which includes the townships of Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham. The urban sprawl, existing rural communities and new suburbs pose both challenges and opportunities for managing the long-term sustainability of the municipality.

Challenges facing families and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Cardinia Shire is one of Victoria's fastest growing municipalities. The Shire is growing by an average of five families every day. The estimated population for 2017 is 99,192 residents. By 2036 our population is expected to increase to 180,308 residentsⁱ. Cultural diversity is now part of Cardinia Shire's identity with almost one in five residents born overseas from 150 different nationalities (20 per cent). This figure has increased from 16.5 per cent in 2011ⁱⁱ. Our largest communities are from India, Sri Lanka, The Philippines and China with an estimated 12 percent of Pakenham's population from non-English speaking countriesⁱⁱⁱ.

The migration settlement streams of our growing culturally diverse population have shifted significantly over the last five years. In the past Cardinia Shire has been the destination for skilled and family reunion migrants. In recent times the Shire has become home to more humanitarian entrant arrivals from the Sub Saharan regions and Afghanistan. Our new and emerging communities currently require greater support to address their language and literacy needs and their access to information and services.

There are no Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) specific services operating in Cardinia Shire. As well as language barriers, family commitments and limited transport options our residents face further difficulties having to travel 32 kilometres to Dandenong to access settlement programs and support services.

Access to services, activities, education & employment

The number of young people in our Shire aged 10 to 24 years old is currently estimated at 20,331^{iv}. Last year's Cardinia Shire Youth Forum Survey received over 2,000 responses from young people aged 12 to 24 years of age. When asked *what is wanted in the local area*, young people's top three responses were:

- social activities including sport,
- counselling services and
- education and employment opportunities^v

The cost of joining a sporting club in Pakenham prohibits many of our young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds from participating. Education and employment opportunities are also limited in Cardinia Shire. There is no Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or university campus within the municipality and there are poor transport links to post-secondary education facilities outside the Shire. This situation is exacerbated for many young people, families and communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds who lack:

- information regarding education and employment pathways
- professional contacts
- understanding of the current job market in Australia and
- knowledge around what kind of skills and experience are required^{vi}

Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) data

The number of alleged offender incidents recorded in Cardinia LGA from July 2011 to June 2016 reports that **the number of Sudanese young people aged between 10 to 17 years who are allegedly committing crimes was greater than Sudanese adults aged 18 years and over**. Although the total number of Sudanese offenders is relatively small in comparison to offenders from other countries, this data highlights the need for an early intervention approach to ensure these young people are actively engaged in community and sporting activities and have access to literacy programs and resources.

The Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) Program

The HSS Program offers practical information and support to access a range of programs and services in the short term. This program has proved very successful for many families from refugee backgrounds. However, as this model has moved to self-sufficiency, it relies more on the family's ability to seek out services and support. For those who are traumatised from past experiences and/or have low levels of literacy in their own language as well as English, self-sufficiency within a few years of settling in a new country can be challenging. It has also long been argued that many families need support for more than five years for successful settlement and participation in social and economic activities.

As in a number of municipalities across Melbourne, Cardinia Shire is experiencing an increase in criminal activity from young people from African backgrounds (see LEAP data above). Our families from African backgrounds are generally larger, often because relatives are caring for young people who have lost their parents during conflict in Sudan. Adults supporting families often also struggle to find ongoing secure employment and/or are single parent families. They are financially disadvantaged and potentially have low levels of literacy which creates barriers to navigating government bureaucracies and accessing education resources. These structural barriers are creating a sense of exclusion and disconnection from both family and community as they search for their own sense of place in Australia

Sporting opportunities to support community settlement

The benefits of participating in sport and active recreation have been well documented^{vii} in the broader community but has also been seen as a 'tool for good settlement' for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.^{viii}

Playing for the Future also reported that participating in sporting activities has a range of socio cultural benefits including:

- social interaction and community strengthening
- promotion of community involvement, pride and empowerment

- ethical behaviour models
- social inclusion and cohesion

For young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Cardinia, joining a sporting club is financially beyond their reach. The registration fee to join a Pakenham basketball club for one season is \$450/person, along with the additional costs of uniforms and footwear. Transport to weekly games is also difficult with a one car household, as many of the sports offered in the Shire are played at regional venues.

Our community leaders from African backgrounds continue to advocate for their young people to have access to organised sporting activities including basketball, netball, soccer and AFL. They argue that their young people are keen to join local sporting clubs but excluded because of the cost of registration costs and transport.

“They organise their own games with young people of Pacific Island backgrounds without appropriate supervision, which to date has been orderly however as the groups grow, so will the likelihood for conflict. Or they hang out in the parks and drink alcohol, which is seen as completely unacceptable in traditional culture”.^{ix}

Hence the young people become further disconnected from their families and community and as their anti-social behaviour increases, their education prospective, their community supports and their family life disintegrates and the possibility of entering the justice system as a juvenile grows (Cardinia LGA LEAP 2016)

Cardinia Shire’s LEAP data would suggest that an early intervention approach is required to re-engage our young people from Sudanese backgrounds in community settings. To date in Cardinia Shire sporting clubs have received small one off grants to provide opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to participate in sporting activities. The response from our young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to participate in subsidised sporting activities has far exceeded the grant on offer.

The cost to keep a juvenile in detention in Australia in 2016 has been estimated at \$1400 per day^x or \$498,400 per year. Supporting a young person from a migrant or refugee background to participate in a club sport could be achieved at a cost of \$500 per year. The young person participating in the sporting activity would have increased their physical health and self-esteem and potentially have a sense of achievement, life satisfaction and improved their academic performance^{xi}. The young person in juvenile detention will suffer negative impacts on their mental and physical wellbeing, their education and their future employment prospects.

We need to ensure that our young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds feel that they have a rightful place in our communities and have access and opportunities to the civic life that most Australians take for granted. Currently many of our young people from African backgrounds are fringe dwellers given permission to be observers but not worthy enough to participate.

An accessible sports and recreation program could be seen as one small part of a broader strategy to assist community settlement. It could also provide a platform to break down the racial stereotyping that is occurring for African communities. There is no quick fix. There are many other challenges faced by our young people from African backgrounds in Cardinia including limited educational resources and employment opportunities. However, an accessible sports program could be a very positive first step to supporting our young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to be actively engaged in community settings, realise their potential and maintain a belief that they too have a place in Australian society and the right to a prosperous future.

ⁱ <http://forecast.id.com.au/cardinia>

ⁱⁱ Population and Housing Census 2011 ABS

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Social Services, Settlement Data April 2005-April2015

^{iv} <http://forecast.id.com.au/cardinia/population-age-structure?WebId=10>

^v Cardinia Shire Council Youth Forum Survey available at

http://www.cardinia.vic.gov.au/files/Youth/Youth_friendly_youth_survey_results_snapshot_2016.pdf

^{vi} Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) The Missing Link available at

<http://www.cmy.net.au/publications/missing-link-young-people-migrant-and-refugee-backgrounds-social-capital-and-transition>

^{vii} <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects>

^{viii} <http://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/Playing%20For%20The%20Future%202009.pdf>

^{ix} Riak Gordon Kiir, South Sudanese Community Development Worker, Uniting Church Pakenham

^x The Australian Detention costs rise July 2016

^{xi} Playing for the Future, Centre for Multicultural Youth 2009