



THE HUME COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Support for Indigenous Learning Project Report





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Executive Summary

Positive parent engagement significantly influences student academic achievement. Indigenous students are disadvantaged if their parents or carers experience significant barriers to engaging with their children's education.

Indigenous parents want their children to succeed. The extent to which they appear to engage or not with school has more to do with how capable parents feel in dealing with the school, and how they perceive the school community regards them, than it has to do with their hopes for their children.

Students report poor relationships with and lack of sympathy from teachers in some schools. Some also report bullying at school. This influences the nature of communication between schools and parents.

Parents' own level of education and their own experience of education also affects their capacity to assist students at home. It also provides challenges for them in fully understanding the complexities of the middle and senior secondary school system. In some cases this is exacerbated by the impact of poverty and sense of 'shame' that can be a significant obstacle to engagement. Poverty may limit participation if parents cannot afford books or other resources.

The actual Indigenous student numbers in schools may well be greater than they appear on school enrolments. Some Indigenous students choose not to identify themselves. In addition, many staff within schools are not aware which students (and how many) do identify as Indigenous. This reduces the apparent need to respond to Indigenous culture and the ways in which schools interact with parents and the wider family.

Some schools acknowledge that they are currently doing little or nothing by way of specific engagement strategies for Indigenous parents. Most have generic parent engagement approaches that take little account of Indigenous culture or needs. Schools and service providers also lack knowledge of inclusive Indigenous parent engagement models and what practical measures that schools can put in place to improve the situation.

The extent to which Indigenous culture is profiled in the school has an impact on student engagement and performance. Where schools demonstrate that they embrace culture, student attendance and learning is reported to improve. This also changes the dynamic of the communication between the parents and the school.

A Parent Engagement Strategy draft model will be piloted in the City of Hume in 2015. The pilot will create an Engagement Liaison/Project Officer role to work with school leadership and bring together the school and parents.

The role will be performed by a member of the Crossroads staff team located within the identified school/s three days per week with supervision and all administration provided by Crossroads.

The pilot will utilise and build upon the VAEAI developed resource, the Koorie Parent and Community Engagement Model, to create a framework and work plan to develop the partnership between the school/s and parents and community. This provides a process, communication resources and support for parents on how to engage with schools.

This project clearly identified that many students and families do not identify their Indigenous background, their Aboriginality. Identification is closely linked to which schools acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous culture. The engagement role will focus on establishing student support structures that encourage self-identification, and just as importantly, that school leadership and staff are aware of the extent of the Indigenous student presence in their school.

The Pilot will seek the support of Local Government, service providers and other schools within Hume to arrange a seminar and/or information process for school leadership teams across the LGA. This will

profile the approach being undertaken in the pilot school/s and will provide any other examples of similar achievements in the northern region.

The Salvation Army, Crossroads Youth & Family Services would like to extend thanks to the members of the PaCE project reference group who have supported and encouraged this project and our team. Without the reference group the project could never have been undertaken nor had any genuine resonance with the Hume Indigenous community.

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Of course without the willingness and openness of our school communities, students, parents and family members we would have no project at all. So to them and to those brave young people disengaged from school and training but willing to share with us their experience, we offer heartfelt thanks.

As we said throughout the project consultations, Crossroads is committed to take this work forward and to work with local Indigenous community members, with school communities, with families and young people to ensure improvement in the retention of our Indigenous young people in school.

To the Crossroads staff, Jason Williams, Maylene Slater-Burns, Noelle De Clifford and Nik Filips, my thanks.

And to our consultant, Peter Kellock of the Asquith Group, many thanks to you and to Jasper.



Robyn Kennedy

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The Hume Community Partnership - Support for Indigenous Learning is a Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) project funded by The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

Introduction

The Hume Community Partnership – Support for Indigenous Learning Project has been developed to improve education outcomes for indigenous students in the City of Hume. It is based on the model developed by the PaCE funded Thornbury High School & Community Demonstration Pilot in the City of Darebin in 2013.

The Hume Local Government Area has the fifth largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan Melbourne. More than 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in Hume.

This is a youthful population with a median age of 21 years. Hume's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is younger when compared to other Hume residents who have a mean age of 33 years, and is also younger than Greater Melbourne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with a median age of 23 years.

The northern metropolitan area of Melbourne has a number of successful Indigenous services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) available to the local Indigenous population. Unfortunately the City of Hume does not have any of those ACCOs services available within its boundaries and struggles to receive services from ACCOs and Indigenous specific services located predominantly in the Cities of Darebin and Yarra.

Hume has a strong Indigenous community with Elders groups and other key groups and community members engaged at various levels in the support and development of education opportunities and outcomes. There is also a range of programs delivered by various service providers for the Indigenous community including Elders, youth and disability programs. These programs although delivered by mainstream services, are community driven and well attended and supported. Parents, carers and Elders are engaged at various levels in the support and development of education opportunities and outcomes.

Hume is a large LGA and much more work and focus is required to connect and engage with the many Indigenous individuals and families who may be experiencing isolation, lack connection to community and possibly to culture.



Crossroads work with indigenous community

The Salvation Army, Crossroads Youth & Family Services has been supporting disadvantaged and homeless young people and their families in the northern metropolitan area of Melbourne, including Hume, since 1978.

Crossroads has historically provided services to members of all communities including the Indigenous community. Specific and more direct engagement with the Indigenous community in the City of Hume has been facilitated in part by Crossroads' connection to the Indigenous Education Centre at Kangan Institute and Wandarra Community group as well as through the continued development and strengthening of the organisation's response to disengaged Indigenous young people.

Crossroads has provided early intervention and reengagement programs for Indigenous young people and their families over the last four years. Funding has come from a number of sources including the Australian Government Department

of Human Services, Local Solutions Fund, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and from The Salvation Army, Mission Support funding. In particular the evolving Give It A Go program has proved to be highly successful in connecting through culture to disengaged Indigenous young people in the provision of opportunities for reengagement through training and health and wellbeing activities.

The PaCE project originated in the concern raised by Crossroads staff, service providers and members of the Indigenous community that there were significant numbers of disengaged Indigenous young people exiting school early and without support for future training, development or employment.

Project Structure

The Hume Community Partnership – Support for Indigenous Learning (a Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) project) is funded by the Commonwealth's Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

A Reference Group was established to inform and support the Project and provide advice on the consultations and structuring of the consultation questions. Membership of the Reference Group included members of the Indigenous community and is included at Attachment 1.

To gain an understanding of the views and needs of parents and families in supporting their students, the project consulted with the Indigenous community (elders, parents, carers and young people), and with organisations and services delivering programs

to Indigenous young people and adults. A brief review of relevant literature addressing Indigenous parent engagement was also conducted to assist in developing a sound engagement strategy to support Indigenous students in the City of Hume.

The consultations were primarily undertaken by the Indigenous Project Officer, Jason Williams, a member of the Nyoongah community of Western Australia, who was responsible for arranging and facilitating the discussions.

Literature Review and Other Studies

A review of relevant literature was carried out to establish a platform for an engagement strategy following the consultations.

What does parental engagement mean and how important is it?

Parent engagement generally describes two types of relationship with the school. First, the extent to which parents participate in school activities, events and discussions; and then the role that parents take as educators after school hours.¹

Many studies have confirmed that family background and other non-school factors are more influential than schools in determining academic outcomes. It has been suggested that the relative influence of the home on student achievement is somewhere in the range of 60-80 per cent, while the school accounts for 20-40 per cent based on School Effectiveness Research (SER) which examines the contribution that schools make to student achievement.²

Some factors such as genetic predisposition, family background, social status and location are also important, but levels of parental engagement in learning, and the material resources available to support learning are two areas that can be improved and supported.³

There is strong consensus, supported by decades of research evidence, that positive parent engagement can and does significantly influence student academic achievement.

Barriers to parent engagement

The 'social capital' and socio-economic position of all families affects how they engage with their children's school.

Risk factors associated with lower levels of parent engagement include family problems (poverty, poor parental education and unemployment), parental problems (poor health, substance misuse, family violence) and community problems (prejudice, poor housing, lack of study facilities at home).⁴

These risk factors are present in many indigenous families and communities, and as a result Indigenous parents may benefit from additional resources to overcome barriers to engaging with their children's education.

However, poorer children and their families still often have high aspirations for professional, managerial and skilled jobs. The issue is not improving attitudes and aspirations so much as providing better information, and access to support and advice.⁵

Issues specific to Indigenous parent engagement

For many Indigenous people, there may be additional barriers in addition to those listed above.

For example, the values fostered by schools are often not consistent with the values that are important to Indigenous children, their parents and their communities.⁶

Many Indigenous parents had bad experiences at school, and as a result feel alienated from it. In addition, many Indigenous people also do not feel comfortable with the formalities that are a standard part of school life, especially meetings conducted in what seem to them to be the disconcertingly direct manner of "European" discourse.⁷

On top of these barriers, disproportionate numbers of Indigenous people live in economically disadvantaged circumstances, giving rise to what they talk about as "shame". "Shame" can take many forms: not having the correct uniform; not being able to provide lunch; not being able to afford excursions; or not getting the child to school on time.⁸

1 D. Higgins and S. Morley, Resource Sheet no. 32, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, July 2014, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014.
2 Emerson, L, Fear, J, Fox, S and Sanders, E. (2012). Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.
3 Emerson et al
4 Higgins & Morley

5 Kintrea et al, The influences of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, University of Glasgow 2011, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
6 Higgins & Morley
7 Muller, D Parents as partners in Indigenous children's learning, 2012. A report by Denis Muller & Associates for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.
8 Muller

Perceptions and extent of engagement

Indigenous parents, like all parents, want the best for their children.

There is sometimes a disconnection between what parents expect the level of engagement should be and what the education community assumes about the importance of engagement. A lack of visible engagement with school does not necessarily reflect the importance that the parents place on education.⁹

In some cases, less visible parents are not necessarily marginalised from school but believe that school is addressing the education of their children, and that teachers could be depended on to get the job done without requiring 'engagement'.¹⁰

However, many Indigenous parents are alienated from schools as a result of their own bad experiences there. Many Indigenous parents are not starting from the same level of advantage as many non-Indigenous parents because of the legacies of the past.¹¹

The onus on schools

If there is to be a partnership, it is necessary to overcome any alienation, lack of understanding and lack of comfort that may be present for Indigenous parents and families and also for school leadership and staff. Overcoming these challenges requires the building of trust between the school and Indigenous parents.

The school has the responsibility to make the first move in building this trust.

Aboriginal family structures are different from non-Indigenous family structures, and these differences need to be accommodated by the school, recognising the role of the extended family and the community in the upbringing of children.¹²

Effective in engaging with indigenous parents

Schools that have established effective engagement with Indigenous parents share common features based around the following:

- Promoting key beliefs
- Adopting inclusive practices
- Making use of symbols

Promoting key beliefs¹³

Key beliefs that school leaders promote and share may include:

- that parents are the first educators of their children.
- that children do better when their parents are engaged in their education.
- that the best way to ensure that a child develops to his or her full potential is to create a partnership between the school and families.
- that there is a need to create a school environment that is culturally welcoming and inviting for Indigenous parents
- that parents need to be empowered to support their children's learning
- that parents need to be actively included in the children's programs
- that opportunities should be provided for parents to meet with and support each other
- that involving the community and coordinating with relevant partner agencies will provide increased support and capacity

Inclusive practices¹⁴

An outreach approach. These schools reach out, in person, in phone calls, in emails. They use whatever technologies are available, whether it is to maintain contact with far-flung Indigenous families in remote parts of Australia, or families in the neighbourhood.

Immediate and personal contact. Rather than relying on newsletters or websites or waiting for parent-teacher nights to communicate on matters of particular relevance to an individual student, or to inviting parents or families to a school event, staff ring up, or walk over to a parent in the yard for a chat.

Attention to positive news. These schools make a point of contacting parents to tell of students' achievements. If they have to ring with negative news, they also ensure that they draw attention to something the student has done well.

Resourcing the effort. These schools have at least one staff member whose primary responsibility is to make and maintain contact with Indigenous parents. In some schools, that is the staff member's fulltime job. In others it is a substantial part of their wellbeing portfolio. In some schools it is the work of several people.

Providing a first person of contact for Indigenous families. This person develops a relationship with the families, building trust,

9 Chenhall, R et al, "Parent-school engagement: Exploring the concept of 'invisible' Indigenous parents in three north Australian school communities", 2011

10 Chenhall et al

11 Muller

12 Muller

13 Chenhall, Muller

14 Muller



being an advocate for the families at the school, and facilitating the development of relationships with other members of staff, especially the student's teachers.

Providing an Indigenous presence. Having an Indigenous person in the front office or as someone whom the parents can contact directly has proved to be an effective means of creating a relationship between the school and Indigenous families. It says to Indigenous people, "*You belong here and are welcome here*". The use of elders as guest speakers can also create a presence in the school.

Fixing the front office culture. For many Indigenous people, their experiences with staff in the front offices of schools reinforce feelings of shame and inadequacy that they carry from their own school days. Creating a welcoming front office culture is highly important and in some cases involves a change of personnel.

Providing a communal venue. Some schools provide a parents' room where they can socialise informally. Some are equipped with a computer, and classes in computer use or other skills are provided. In some schools, parents can come and go to this room without having to come through the school's front door and negotiate the front office, avoiding the feelings of inadequacy and of not belonging that many Indigenous people feel when approaching schools.

Requiring teachers to make direct contact. Teachers are required to make contact with Indigenous families, and to deal with issues as they arise, without relying on the Indigenous liaison officer. In these schools, teachers are encouraged to make a point of contacting Indigenous families with good news, not only with bad.

Being attentive. These schools find ways to contact their Indigenous families frequently, sometimes just to stay in touch, sometimes to bring them up to date informally with what their child is doing, sometimes to invite them personally to some event.

Making use of Symbols

Making use of appropriate Indigenous symbols has a positive impact on the perceptions of Indigenous families and community members. They assist people to feel that they and their culture are respected; that they count.

Acknowledgment of traditional owners as original inhabitants is a settled regular part of all formalities. Omission of an acknowledgement may be seen as a lack of respect.

Examples of the use of cultural symbols include:

- flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian national flag.
- having posters or artwork depicting Indigenous motifs in the reception area and throughout school buildings.
- signage welcoming visitors to the school in the area's Indigenous language, and stating what the language is.
- developing a garden of native plants designed with the Indigenous community.
- having sporting/football jumpers redesigned to incorporate an Indigenous motif in the school colours.
- If a new building is to be erected, a smoking ceremony held on the site before work begins, and an Indigenous ceremony will be part of the opening celebrations. Perhaps the new building will carry an Indigenous name.

Structuring partnership

In 2010-2011, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) conducted a parent and community engagement project. The VAEAI PaCE project developed a resource, the Koorie Parent and Community Engagement Model, which provides all the tools on how to develop a School-Community Partnership Agreement.¹⁵

Schools wanting to work collaboratively with their local Indigenous Community to create a culture of high expectations for Indigenous students, can access and use the School-Community Partnership Agreement to provide a structure and a framework to support parent engagement. The resource is available on-line on the VAEAI website at the following website link: http://www.vaeai.org.au/uploads/_ckpg/files/KSCPA_booklet_FINAL_low_res.pdf and via facebook.

The School-Community Partnership Agreements provides a number of templates and a communication processes. The Agreement sets out how parents, carers and schools may work together for the benefit of Indigenous students.¹⁶

Underpinning the Agreement is recognition that regular positive communication between indigenous parents, carers and education staff can make an enormous difference to outcomes for Indigenous students and their experience within school.

The VAEAI tool may be utilised by any school or community group and may easily be modified to meet the needs of the particular school or group.

¹⁵ Koorie School-Community Partnership Agreements, VAEAI

¹⁶ Koorie School-Community Partnership Agreements, VAEAI

Consultations

Having completed a review of literature on other Indigenous parent engagement strategies in Australia, the project conducted a round of consultations in the City of Hume.

Consultations were held at four schools with both Indigenous students and with school staff. In addition, there were meetings with five parent groups; and with five network and service providers. (For a list of organisations consulted see Attachment 2.)

Consultations were conducted with:

- 18 students and young people
- 8 school leadership team staff members across four schools
- 10 parents / carers; and
- 16 network and service provider staff

Themes from consultations

The following section summarises the views of each of the groups consulted.

Disengaged young people

Disengaged young people reported that they thought that they had poor relationships with their teachers.

If there had been an Indigenous staff member(s) within the school, this seemed to make a difference to these young people. Where they were used, cultural programs were well received and students engaged with them (but most schools were said to be not doing much on this front).

These young people indicated that their parents were often not engaged with their school, frequently because the news they get from school is generally not positive. Contact with parents is often triggered by behavioural issues or poor performance. Parents also did not tend to discuss their child's progress and learning at school in discussion at home.

Some students with experience in schools located in other states with stronger Indigenous enrolment than non-Indigenous enrolment, where culture was celebrated through events and art program, were much more positive about those schools.

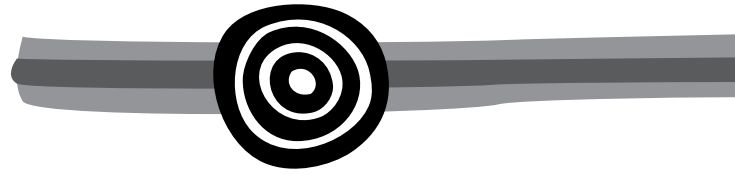
Engaged students

Students in some schools feel that their teachers are supportive.

They generally think that the Indigenous culture is not recognised or celebrated in their school, and feel that displaying artwork or teaching more about Indigenous history 'would be good.'

Schools that celebrate cultural events and demonstrate an understanding of culture receive a positive response from students. School with larger numbers of students can establish support structures such as an Indigenous education unit, which gives students a sense of belonging and identity.

Young people say that they want their parents to be more positively engaged with their school.



Parents / Carers / Elders

In the view of parents, school engagement with parents is highly variable: some do it well; others quite poorly.

In some schools, contact revolves around misbehaviour (so 'no news is good news'). As one parent stated, *"The school doesn't call very often because my kids are well-behaved, but when they do misbehave they always call."*

In contrast, one parent reported "receiving a phone call from a teacher informing me of my child's 'great test results' during a school holiday period." This makes an enormous positive impact!

Independent private schools seem to be more focussed on strengthening inclusion and celebration. (This is also the view of some service providers who think that independent schools are more proactive looking for advice on cultural awareness issues.) But there is not much in the way of support from Government Departments that is evident to parents.

Some parents find it difficult to support their child do homework, because they have never learnt those things themselves, *"but I always try and help as much as I can."* These parents need assistance to 'skill-up' so that they can understand and help their children do their homework (through such measures as workshops for example).

The issue of 'shame' was also raised by some parents; an issue to which schools need to be alert and sensitive. Lack of education skills; lack of resources; limited understanding of how the education system works; and a general sense of not being equipped to deal with the wider community all contribute to a sense of shame. This presents a significant barrier to engagement for some families. If schools treat these parents in the same way as any other family group, then they are disadvantaged.

"The school engages with us like any other family. They do that well but without any consideration of our Aboriginality. I have spoken with other Indigenous families at the school. We have offered to facilitate some cultural event in the school, but we have never been invited to do so."
(an 'engaged parent').

Strong parent engagement does not seem to be encouraged from the perspective of some families as culture is not celebrated in local schools. They suggest that much more could be done to proactively contact parents and seek responses about how schools could be more inclusive.

"Seeing some enthusiasm for Aboriginal culture would strengthen our relationship. Including Aboriginal culture amongst the many cultures that are celebrated at the school would be an improvement."

Parents consulted see value in the role of a specific Indigenous liaison role within the schools, both as a communication channel with parents and as an advocate for recognition of culture within the school. One group suggested that a useful and cost effective approach could be establishing a liaison officer for a small cluster of schools

School leadership and staff

Within schools, staff may be unaware of exactly which students are Indigenous and which are not (as students don't identify themselves in some instances). The students do not all 'look' Indigenous, and even among those who do identify as Indigenous, it appears common that while a few staff are aware many others in the school are not. As a result many school staff and school leaders are unaware of the size of their Indigenous student enrolment.

Hume schools generally treat Indigenous parents in same way as they do any other parents. *"We know we should do something different, but we don't"*. One or two schools feel that they do well engaging with parents from disadvantaged backgrounds, and manage to obtain participation from most parents including Indigenous ones. There is a view that Indigenous parents who are professionals or are active in the creative arts are more likely to engage with the schools.

Staff believe that Indigenous parents do respond to both positive and negative feedback about their children.

...Seeing some enthusiasm for Aboriginal culture...
at the school would be an improvement.

...Schools that embrace culture have a higher level of engagement with parents.

School leaders consulted indicated that they would like to know more about how to engage more effectively with Indigenous parents, but feel that they need support. They don't really know what to do and do not feel they have the time to research it.

School staff indicate that they lack both information and supporting resources to enable them to engage more effectively with Indigenous parents. Some schools in the region have sought Koorie Education Support Officer (KESO) assistance through the Victorian Department of Education, but have received no response, no follow-up or support resources.

According to some school leaders, the Wannik strategy period was good, as it provided tutoring and other supports to Indigenous students and brought parents into the school to assist in identifying what supports were required for their students. That funding has now ceased and there has been no replacement.

Schools were unaware of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, VAEAI, its role with schools and the education system or their Koorie Parent and Community Engagement Model and how it may support work with Indigenous students and their parents and carers.

There is a very low level of awareness about any approaches (good or bad) being adopted in other schools, and there is little pressure or support for this to change.

Service providers

"Schools that embrace culture have a higher level of engagement with parents."

Many schools don't create a welcoming environment. This creates a perception for some parents that they are not welcomed and are being excluded. If the school provides programs that support students, parents and carers, families are more likely to engage.

Service providers also report that school staff are not aware of the numbers of Indigenous students

in their school, and can use low enrolment numbers as a justification for not making proactive effort to acknowledge them.

Their Indigenous background is denied by some students, and is also not acknowledged by schools or teachers. Subtle racism in the form of ignorance, through views expressed by some people that young people are 'not black enough' and 'don't look Indigenous', impacts on young people who want to fit in to their school community.

Real change depends on the leadership of the principal and senior team in the school. This varies a lot from school to school.

Parents' understanding of the curriculum and school systems across Years 9-12 is often not very good. Their own previous experience in the education system can strongly influence their ability and disposition to engage with the school.

Parents may have low literacy and numeracy skills, and sometimes poor communication skills which contribute to difficulties with engagement. Struggling parents also don't have much time, capacity or energy for school engagement. Poverty continues to affect parents' capacity to fund uniform, books and excursions that create barriers to engagement.

Some schools have developed good initiatives (liaison officers, parent BBQs, community gardens) and have been working hard to create better relationships with their indigenous parents. But these are ad hoc, not coordinated, and not supported by government leadership. There is a need for a supported policy on parental engagement; not just isolated good examples.

Schools in some locations are reported to have established parent reference groups to help schools and parents drive communications and identify issues and appropriate actions. One of the groups consulted discussed the idea of establishing an 'Aboriginal Students and Parents Association' (ASPA) in schools.

Summary of Emerging Themes

The main themes emerging from the consultations across these groups involved in parent engagement are as follows:

- Indigenous parents have aspirations for their children. The extent to which they appear to engage or not has more to do with how capable parents feel in dealing with the school, and how they perceive the school community regards them, than their hopes for their children.
- The extent to which students do or don't identify as Indigenous is an important issue, because the actual Indigenous student numbers in schools may well be greater than it appears to be on the school enrolment and other documentation. In addition, many staff within schools are not aware of which students (and how many) do identify as Indigenous. This reduces the apparent need to respond to Indigenous culture and the ways in which schools interact with parents and the wider family.
- Students report poor relationships with and lack of sympathy from teachers in some schools. Some also report bullying at school. This affects the nature of communication between schools and parents, as it is often triggered by the need to discuss 'problems and bad news' from the school perspective.
- Parents' own education experience and level affects their capacity to assist students at home. It also provides challenges for them in fully understanding the complexities of the middle and senior secondary school system. In some cases this is exacerbated by the impact of poverty and sense of 'shame' that can be a significant obstacle to engagement. Poverty may limit participation if they cannot afford books, computers or other resources.
- Schools acknowledge that they are currently doing little or nothing by way of specific engagement strategies for Indigenous parents. They usually have generic parent engagement approaches that take little account of Indigenous culture or needs (though there are exceptions among Hume schools).
- Schools and service providers lack knowledge of inclusive Indigenous parent engagement models and what practical measures that schools can put in place to improve the situation.
- The extent to which Indigenous culture is profiled in the school has an impact on student engagement and performance. Where schools demonstrate that they embrace culture, student attendance and learning is reported to improve. This also changes the dynamic of the communication between the parents and the school.

Strategy for Parent Engagement

The following Parent Engagement strategy draft model is designed to be piloted in the City of Hume in 2015.

The Hume Community Partnership – School Pilot will be funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as an extension of the existing PaCE Hume Community Partnership project until December of 2015.

Engagement Liaison Role/ Project Officer

The cornerstone of the strategy is engagement with one or more secondary schools in Hume willing to participate in the pilot project and the creation of an Engagement Liaison/Project Officer role to work with school leadership and bring together the school and parents.

This liaison role would support school leadership and staff in developing their strategies to increase access for Indigenous parents, as well as supporting parents to express their interests and needs and identifying resources to assist them.

The Engagement Liaison role would be a member of the Crossroads staff team located within the identified school/s three days per week with supervision and all administration provided by Crossroads and in accordance with Crossroads policies, procedures and standards.

At face value, this role may appear to overlap that of the Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) role employed through the Department of Education's regional office. A key role of this position is to ... *"to identify and access support mechanisms, programs and initiatives aimed at improving attendance and implementing strategies to increase the engagement of Koorie families in their child's learning"* (see Attachment 3). However, feedback provided from various service providers and schools across the consultations indicates that the KESO role is not sufficiently resourced to be able to respond to or to assist the many individual schools, staff and parents that require and request support.

Pilot Project

The engagement liaison role in schools may be piloted in one or perhaps two secondary schools in Hume 2 days a week. Key roles of the liaison position would be:

- to assist schools and parents access resources to support Indigenous students;
- to establish or strengthen communication processes between schools and parents;
- to identify opportunities for the school to embrace and acknowledge Indigenous culture; and
- to identify ways in which schools and other services can provide more assistance to parents in understanding the education system and in providing greater assistance to their children's learning

Using an existing resource model

The engagement liaison role, in consultation and collaboration with school leadership, may utilise the VAEAI developed resource, the Koorie Parent and Community Engagement Model, to create a framework and work plan to develop the partnership between the school/s and parents and community. The VAEAI resource provides a process, communication resources and support for parents on how to engage with schools which would be used to develop individual school/s plans.

Inclusive practices

The inclusive practices detailed within this report will provide a secondary resource for the engagement liaison role and the school leadership in working to strengthen parent engagement.

Encourage identification

This project clearly identified that many students and families do not identify their Indigenous background, their Aboriginality.

Students from Indigenous backgrounds may not identify within the school for a variety of reasons. Lack of identification means that supports that might otherwise be available are not provided to them, and school staff may think the Indigenous student population is smaller than it actually is. Identification is closely linked to acknowledgement and celebration of culture beyond a token acknowledgement. The engagement role will focus on establishing student support structures that encourage self-identification, and just as importantly, that school leadership and staff are aware of the extent of the Indigenous student presence in the school.

Delivered to a wider audience

The Hume Community Partnership – School Pilot and strategy will seek the support of Local Government, service providers and other schools within Hume to arrange a seminar and/or information process for school leadership teams across the LGA.

This seminar will focus on strategies for strengthening Indigenous parent engagement. This would profile the approach being undertaken in the pilot school/s and will provide any other examples of similar achievements in the northern region (e.g. Thornbury SC).

School leadership and Staff in other schools can be supported through providing them with an awareness of potential strategies and practice, while local government and other service providers may have roles to play providing parents with particular skills.

... to identify and access support mechanisms, programs and initiatives aimed at improving attendance and implementing strategies to increase the engagement of Koorie families in their child's learning.





The Hume Local Government Area has the fifth largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan Melbourne with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population youthful median age of only 21 years.

REFERENCES

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Emerson, L, Fear.J, Fox.S and Sanders, E. (2012). Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.

Higgins, D and S. Morley, S , Resource Sheet no. 32, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, July 2014, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014.

Koorie School-Community Partnership Agreements, VAEAI, undated.

Muller, D, Parents as partners in Indigenous children's learning, 2012. A report by Denis Muller & Associates for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra

ATTACHMENT 1

Reference Group

- Linc Yow Yeh, Indigenous Education Centre (IEC), Kangan Institute
- Leanne Brooks, Wandarra Community Group and Hume City Council
- Deb Murray, Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet and Local Indigenous Network
- Bill Threlfall, Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- Jane McNally, Northern Metropolitan Institute of Technology, NMIT
- Meryl O'Neill, Lentara Uniting Care
- Maria Axarlis-Coulter, Department of Human Services, Centrelink
- Clinton Edwards, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, VAEAI
- Noelle De Clifford, Robyn Kennedy and Nik Filips, Crossroads Youth and Family Services

ATTACHMENT 2

Organisations and Groups consulted

- Thornbury Secondary College
- Hume Central Secondary College
- Sunbury Secondary College
- Salesian College 'Rupertswood'
- Indigenous Education Centre Broadmeadows
- Local Indigenous Network
- Wandarra Community Group
- Hume Aboriginal Partnership Network
- Yarning Circle Parent Network
- Crossroads Youth and Family Services
- Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- Sunbury Community Health Centre

In addition, a number of individual indigenous parents were consulted independently of school and community networks.

ATTACHMENT 3

Koorie Engagement Support Officers

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) support Koorie children and their families in the Victorian state education system. KESOs are focussed specifically on the engagement of Koorie students, families and communities within the government school and early childhood systems, as well as kindergartens and other areas of early childhood.

KESOs connect with other relevant internal (school and regional staff) and external support workers to assist family engagement. KESOs are controlled by the region.

One of their five key duties are:

- liaising with early childhood services, schools and regional officers to identify and access support mechanisms, programs and initiatives aimed at improving attendance and implementing strategies to increase the engagement of Koorie families in their child's learning.





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