



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

ECCV Welcoming Communities Guide

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Executive Summary

Over 100 000 migrants settle in Australia each year. Given the benefits that migrants offer regional Victoria it is essential that adequate services and programs exist to assist migrants settle successfully.

This document provides information and guidance on ways to assist migrants in the settlement process, with particular emphasis on:

- Preparing the community for the arrival of migrants
- Strategies to improve the settlement process for new arrivals
- Celebrating cultural diversity and promoting a culture of inclusion

Practical examples of welcoming initiatives in regional Victoria are outlined in this guide, and links to information that may assist in the process of welcoming new arrivals is also provided. Information on a range of funding options and grants programs is located at the end of the guide and may be useful for implementing future welcoming strategies.

In addition, best practice welcoming strategies for regional Victorian communities to consider are located at the end of each chapter. All strategies are aimed at strengthening the ways in which skilled migrants and their families are welcomed into our regional communities.



Introduction

Australia welcomes 100 000 migrants each year under the skilled and family streams of the national migration program. In 2005-2005, 148 884 migrants made Australia their permanent home. The combination of Indigenous Australian cultures, a history of immigration and our more recent arrivals have made Australia a diverse and multicultural society.¹

Australia is home to people from 185 countries across the globe and the benefits to stem from migration are vast. Economically, migrants boost Australia through workforce participation and skills contribution. Socially, migrants bring with them a global experience, knowledge, insight and connections which ultimately benefit the nation. Migrants also assist in boosting the Australian population, a significant factor when considering the general trend of slowing birth rates in Australia.²

Given the significant benefits of migration, it is important that migrants are provided with adequate assistance and resources to settle in their new community. The migrant experience involves uprooting oneself, often along with family members, from a permanent residence or country of origin for the purpose of settling in a new and foreign land. The reality of settling in a foreign country presents new challenges for migrants and feelings of isolation can be compounded by difficulties in understanding a new environment and customs, possible language difficulties and the challenges of finding appropriate employment.

As a result, efforts to create welcoming communities in regional are important for retaining the skills and contributions of migrants. A tendency exists amongst migrants who do not feel settled in their new communities to return to their place of origin, generally within two years of arrival.³ The cost of losing migrants in our regional communities is significant, as valuable skills and contributions to the broader community are also lost.

In a broad sense, a welcoming community is defined by the principles of :

- Valuing and celebrating diversity
- Recognising and appreciating difference
- Building a culture of inclusiveness; and
- Decisiveness in combating racism

This guide aims to provide information to assist regional Victorian communities extend a warm welcome to new arrivals. Significantly, this guide is informed by the great work already undertaken by regional Victorian communities welcoming new arrivals. The guide also provides recommendations to strengthen community approaches to skilled migration, with emphasis on:

- Preparing the community for the arrival of migrants
- Strategies to improve the settlement process for new arrivals;
- Celebrating cultural diversity and promoting a culture of inclusion

Drawing from regional experiences in Victoria, it is hoped that this guide will provide communities with further ideas for welcoming new migrants and assist in retaining the valuable skills, resources and experiences that migrants bring to our regional communities.

¹ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *More Than 60 Years of Post-War Migration*, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/04fifty.htm>

² Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *More Than 60 Years of Post-War Migration*, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/04fifty.htm>.

³ Sue Vitnell, "Newcomers Kit", *Newcomers Network*, <<http://www.newcomersnetwork.com/in/nk/nk.pdf>> (September 2004), p.4.



Chapter 1

Preparing Communities to Welcome New Arrivals

A welcoming community can be characterised by high levels of awareness in relation to the issues associated with settling migrants, as well as a commitment to making the transition into a new community as smooth as possible. Community awareness can be achieved in a variety of ways, including through encouraging consultation and discussion on migration and diversity, community education strategies; and also by encouraging schools to celebrate diversity.

Community Consultation

Meaningful consultations with communities regarding skilled migration are an important step for ensuring that new arrivals are welcomed and included in regional communities. Consultations allow a range of people to voice their opinions, concerns and also consider the benefits and challenges associated with skilled migration. Importantly, meaningful consultations require the issues identified and discussed to be addressed and followed up on. The process of consultation can give stakeholders greater ownership of issues and may encourage a proactive approach in facilitating the settlement process for skilled migrants and their families.

Community consultations can take many different forms. For example, it might be useful to hold a series of community meetings to facilitate an exchange of information pertaining to skilled migration. Alternatively, community sentiment can be gauged through inviting local stakeholders to provide written submissions on the issue. The Warrnambool Regional Migration Relocation Program⁴ researched community sentiments regarding refugee settlement in the area by looking at newspaper polls and research conducted by refugee organisations. Undertaking such research allows for greater understanding of community sentiment on the issue of skilled migration, and may highlight areas that may require more effort, education or 'myth busting'.

Community Education

Educating communities on the benefits of skilled migration and ways of supporting new arrivals will enhance the settlement process, and ultimately contribute to higher levels of migrant retention. Ideally, community education encourages engagement with new arrivals and works toward expanding the social networks of migrants. Community education might provide information on the country, religion and cultural background of recent arrivals as well as information on communicating with people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Alternatively, community education might involve utilising the local media to tell the life stories of newly arrived migrants as communicating personal stories is a powerful way of breaking down stereotypes.

Cross-Cultural Training

Intercultural communication can be strengthened through the provision of cross-cultural and culture-specific training. Initially, such training should be aimed at community members who have direct contact with new arrivals such representatives from local councils, the community sector, police, hospitals, schools and also volunteers involved in welcoming activities. Cross-cultural training may include information on cultural sensitivity, culture shock, effective communication, using translators and interpreters, occupational health and safety as well as the influence of culture on beliefs, practices and behaviours. It is a good idea to

⁴ "A Warrnambool Welcome", October 2005, p.11.



conduct training in cooperation with ethno-specific agencies, Ethnic Community Councils or Migrant Resource Centres these organisations have significant knowledge and experience in the field. The provision of cross-cultural training ensures that community members are well equipped to support new arrivals in their employment as well as day to day activities.

Cultural Diversity in Schools

Schools are well positioned to foster welcoming communities through the creation of projects that educate students about diversity. Diversity initiatives work to increase the knowledge base of young people and also make the school environment a welcoming one for new arrivals.

The 'CONNECT Project' was initiated at Blackburn English Language School and provided peer support to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The program was built out of recognition that youth who had experiences of settling into a new school environment could provide valuable support for new arrivals while they negotiated a new school, community and country. The program extended to five secondary schools and peer support leaders received training on culture, communication, settlement, creating networks, negotiation and decision making, coping strategies, leadership and peer support activities.⁵

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Community consultations are held to gauge public opinion on the topic of regional skilled migration.
- Community education strategy implemented, with emphasis on the benefits of regional skilled migration for communities as well as strategies for supporting new arrivals.
- Cross-cultural training and culture-specific training provided for workers in essential services such as police, teachers, representatives from local government and the public sector. Training is regularly updated in response to community needs.
- Diversity education and initiatives incorporated into teaching in regional schools, with particular emphasis on supporting new and emerging communities.

⁵ For more information, see the VicHealth publication 'Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of New Arrival Communities: Learnings and Promising Practices', available online at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au



Chapter 2

Assisting New Arrivals in the Settlement Process

The initial settlement period for migrants can be a stressful and confronting time as they navigate a new environment and community. It is therefore important that services and programs are developed to assist migrants in this transitional period. There are various ways in which regional communities can ensure that the settlement process for skilled migrants and their families is a straightforward and positive experience.

Welcoming Coordinators

Welcoming Coordinators are ideally individuals who are well connected within the community and are able to provide newcomers with a sound source of information about the community. They should be able to work closely with a range of community stakeholders including but not limited to Regional Migration Incentive Fund (RMIF) Coordinators, local Ethnic Communities Councils, local government, as well as representatives from public and private sectors. RMIF Coordinators work to attract and retain skilled migrants in regional Victorian communities and are important partners in the Victorian Government's Skilled Migration Program. Welcoming Coordinators must have an appreciation of the challenges new arrivals face and a commitment to improving the social connectedness of skilled migrants and their families. Welcoming coordinators should provide newcomers with information and support in their initial stages of settlement. The provision of such information in a relatively informal, one-on-one environment allows newly arrived migrants to feel comfortable accessing local information⁶

Welcoming Committee

The formation of a welcoming committee may assist in identifying resources and implementing programs which provide new arrivals with social support, information and networks that will link them into the community. A welcoming committee consists of a group of committed individuals who meet regularly to develop and implement welcoming activities for skilled migrants. Welcoming committees work collaboratively to ensure that new arrivals in their region receive a warm welcome. Ideally, a welcoming committee has a diverse membership and is made up of representatives from many different sectors of the community.⁷

Welcoming Kits and Information

A Welcome Kit is a useful tool for new arrivals as it provides information relating to local and regional services, activities and organisations. If you are part of an organisation or group that encourages diverse membership, then providing information on your group and contact information to your local RMIF Coordinator for your regional Welcome Kit could be a useful strategy for enhancing participation and numbers. Simply contact your local RMIF Coordinator to discuss the options available.

In addition to a local welcoming kit, it may also be useful to provide new arrivals with information from the Australian government Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). The booklet "Welcome

⁶ For more information on Newcomer Coordinators, see Vitnell, "Newcomers Kit".

⁷For more information, A Guide to Welcoming Committees and Activities for Regional Skilled Migrants, www.eccv.org.au/



to Victoria” provides practical information for newly arrived migrants on a range of issues such as help with English, emergency services, Australian customs and law, education and health services.⁸

The Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (VSPC) has produced a comprehensive information booklet ‘A Victorian Welcome Toolbox’ that is published by DIMA and provides information on settlement and welcoming strategies for migrants in Victorian communities.⁹ This booklet contains links to resources and agencies that can assist in the settlement process for new arrivals.

Culture Shock: Issues and Strategies to overcome it

Most people experience some degree of culture shock when settling into a new environment. Culture shock may occur regardless of how similar or dissimilar ones home country is to their new community. The term ‘culture shock’ describes the adjustment process which one experiences in an unfamiliar environment. Common reactions associated with culture shock include anxiety, stress and confusion. However, there are many simple ways that the symptoms of culture shock can be reduced. Strategies to reduce the culture shock include:

- Building an awareness of the symptoms and stages of culture shock
- Sharing ones experience with family, friends and colleagues
- Allowing time for the adjustment process to occur
- Regular physical activity as well as relaxation techniques and
- Identifying opportunities to build social networks early in the settlement process and getting involved in community life¹⁰

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Welcoming Coordinators appointed in each regional area assist new arrivals in the settlement process and work closely with RMIF Coordinators.
- Welcoming Committees established in each regional area to implement community activities for new arrivals and provide guidance and support during the settlement process.
- Comprehensive Welcome Kits provided to all new arrivals, with translated material provided where appropriate.
- Information on culture shock and strategies to overcome it are widely distributed throughout the community.

⁸ This document is available at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life/select/eng.htm>.

⁹ This document is available at: http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/_pdf/vic-toolbox.pdf

¹⁰ Elizabeth Marx, 1999, “Breaking Through Culture Shock”, Cambridge University Press: London.



Chapter 3

Including New Arrivals in the Community

Newly arrived migrants consistently identify the creation of social and community contacts as central to their successful settlement into Australian society.¹¹ Without effective social networks, newly arrived migrants can feel overwhelmed and isolated in their new environment. Programs that assist the creation of such networks provide new migrants with the chance to develop social support systems and create an invaluable sense of community that ultimately impacts favourably on migrant retention. Such programs may be developed specifically for newcomers, while broadening the scope of mainstream services and community groups to welcome and include new migrants is also an effective way of fostering community engagement.

Welcoming Clubs and Activities

Associations and clubs designed to welcome new arrivals can give migrants opportunities to engage with their new community.¹² It can also be useful to provide programs that allow new arrivals to experience and participate in local activities. Providing migrants with opportunities to participate in local community and leisure activities potentially builds bridges between people of different cultures or ethnicities.

Tips for Welcoming Activities

- Welcoming activities should aim to include the partners and children of new arrivals as they also contend with issues of social isolation
- Keep costs for welcoming activities low so that economic factors do not inhibit participation
- Ensure that welcoming activities are culturally appropriate and 'compatible' with the cultural sensitivities of their target audience eg. If food is part of a welcoming activity it is important to be sensitive to different cultural, religious and dietary requirements and provide alternatives where appropriate.

Ethnic Community Social Support

Established ethnic communities can perform a significant role in supporting new arrivals in the settlement process. A shared cultural background, home country, religion, set of beliefs or traditions can allow for strong connections and a support base to be forged. VicHealth has recognised the many ways in which more established migrants can provide valuable support to new arrivals. This support includes providing practical assistance with the tasks of settlement, familiarising new arrivals with systems and services as well as less obvious aspects of Australian society. Established ethnic communities may also link new arrivals with community networks such as cultural and religious groups, institutions and resources and utilise ethnic and business networks to facilitate employment opportunities.¹³ In addition to ethno-specific support, local Ethnic Communities Councils' have an array of experience and knowledge supporting new arrivals and play an important peer support role in welcoming regional skilled migrants.

¹¹ Vitnell, "Newcomers Kit", p.11.

¹² For a list of Welcoming activities throughout Victoria see Appendix One on page 17 of this guide.

¹³ Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), www.vichealth.vic.gov.au, "Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of New Arrival Communities: Learnings and Promising Practices."



Local Welcoming Strategy

The GV Ethnic Professionals Association emerged from a partnership between the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and local government. The association emerged as a result of recognition of the importance supporting skilled migrants and new arrivals in the region. It provides a range of services including mentoring, conflict resolution, cross-cultural training in the workplace, advocacy and sessions on community strengthening. This organisation provides migrants in the region with social support, as well as giving them the opportunity to build business and employment networks and to seek assistance in a friendly environment.

Broader Community Social Support

In addition to the social support provided by ethnic groups in the community, it is important to ensure existing community organisations are receptive to including new arrivals. Ensuring that community organisations welcome new arrivals helps to expand the social networks of migrants. Existing organisations or clubs may consider providing a flyer in their regional Welcome Kit encouraging newcomers to join. Another simple and effective strategy to include new arrivals is the extension of a personal invitation to join a group or activity. Entering a social group, activity or centre where you have one friendly point of contact can make the difference between long term participation and an opportunity missed. When extending invitations to activities it is worth considering issues such as transportation and the need for childcare which may prevent participation. Cultural sensitivity should underpin all activities. For example, it may be culturally appropriate to provide women-only, closed sessions at local community centers so that women whose cultural norms would otherwise prevent them from participating are able to do so without compromising their cultural beliefs and values.

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Welcoming events organised for new arrivals, for example a BBQ or social event, to provide skilled migrants and their families with the opportunity meet other new arrivals as well as members of the mainstream community.
- Clubs and associations to develop strategies which make them accessible to people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Activities which include skilled migrants are culturally appropriate and 'compatible' with the cultural sensitivities of their target audience.



Chapter 4

Creating Welcoming Workplaces and Businesses

“Get a job, then you are settled – the rest will manage itself”.¹⁴ The words of one newly arrived migrant echo the sentiments of many more; providing business and employment opportunities to newly arrived migrants is a component of successful settlement. Importantly though, there are many ways that businesses can ensure their workplaces are welcoming and responsive to the needs of a diverse workforce which includes skilled migrants.

New Arrivals and Employment

Facilitating the entry of migrants into the Australian workforce and economy is important both for migrants and for the wider community. Employment gives newly arrived migrants the opportunity to become financially secure in their new community. Once new arrivals gain employment they have an increased ability to engage with the wider community and build up social networks.

The increased participation of migrants in the Australian workforce and economy has overall benefits for the wider community. Given that 43% of the Victorian population was either born overseas or had one parent born overseas, and that 20% of Victorians speak a language other than English at home, it is essential for Australian businesses to cater for cultural and linguistic diversity.¹⁵ Economic arguments for skilled migration point to the benefits of a diverse workforce for business in Australia.¹⁶ Diversity in the workplace brings innovation to a business as there are more perspectives and ideas to draw from as well as detailed knowledge of niche markets overseas. The innovation that is linked to a culturally diverse workforce can lead businesses to tap into markets which otherwise would remain inaccessible.

Managing a Diverse Workplace

All new staff require support and assistance from management when settling into a new working environment, and skilled migrants are no different to other workers in this sense. Skilled migrants bring an array of skills and knowledge to the workplace, but it is important to understand that diversity must be actively managed. Importantly, the most successful businesses to manage diversity ensure that diversity in the workplace is embraced by higher management as well as throughout the hierarchy of the organisation. A well managed workplace will strive to have a culture of inclusion, a valuing of difference and all workers should feel that their knowledge and learning is respected.

Significantly, large companies operating in the international arena such as IBM have recognised the benefits of embracing and managing diversity in the workplace and have comprehensive diversity policies and practices.¹⁷ In smaller businesses there are other simple strategies that can promote an inclusive and welcoming work environment. For example, an employer may consider hosting a BBQ to welcome skilled migrants into the workplace. While deceptively simple, a welcoming BBQ may foster a friendly and informal environment in which employees get to know each other and learn about cultures which differ to their own.

¹⁴ Department of Immigration, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, Canberra, May 2004, Chapter 4, p.65.

¹⁵ For more information, see the Diversity Works! website, <http://www.diversityaustralia.gov.au/index.htm>.

¹⁶ For more information see the Australian Centre for International Business at www.econ.unimelb.edu.au/acib/

¹⁷ For more information see: http://www-8.ibm.com/au/diversity/cultural_awareness_and_acceptance.html



Resources are available to assist the business sector effectively manage diversity in the workplace. For example, Diversity Works! is a Federal Government initiative which provides training resources for businesses to encourage the employment of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.¹⁸ The "Diversity: A Way of Life" training kit is available for trainers to download for free. It covers a range of information and strategies including information about personal leadership and managing for inclusion. This resource provides businesses with the information required to effectively manage diversity in the workplace, ultimately assisting migrants to participate in the Australian workforce. The Australian Centre for International Business also has useful resources for the business community on managing diversity in the workplace.¹⁹

Employing a Skilled Migrant

If you are considering employing a skilled migrant your local RMIF Coordinator is a great point of contact. RMIF Coordinators are employed within the Victorian Government's Skilled Migration Program and work to attract and retain skilled migrants in regional Victoria. RMIF Coordinators can refer you to further information, people and resources to assist in the process of employing a skilled migrant.

The Victorian State Government developed the 'Live in Victoria' website which is a useful tool for linking employers and skilled migrants.²⁰ The website has an Employer Centre which provides information on employing skilled migrants, the services available and also outlines visa options. Employers are given the option to fill skill shortages through advertising employment vacancies online and linking with skilled migrants. In addition, further information on visa categories and options for skilled migration can be obtained via the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs website.²¹

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Buddy system in the workplace whereby established employees offer support to new arrivals and support the transition into the workplace.
- 'Floating holiday' program (an initiative of IBM Australia) allows employees to exchange a public holiday for a significant cultural holiday.
- Cross cultural training provided in workplaces to ensure that employees and managers are aware of how to work effectively in a diverse workplace, and are well equipped to support skilled migrants as well as culturally diverse clientele.
- Information and techniques for effective cross cultural communication provided to all employees, as well as information on cultural differences relating to the workplace and Australian society.
- Introduction of 'culture awareness days' to raise employee awareness specific cultures. Initiatives may include themed newsletters, special presentations, food or quizzes.

¹⁸ For more information see the Diversity Works! website, <http://www.diversityaustralia.gov.au/index.htm>.

¹⁹ For more information see <http://www.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/acib/>

²⁰ For more information see www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au.

²¹ For more information see: www.immi.gov.au



Chapter 5

Embracing Linguistic Diversity

In order to successfully welcome new arrivals to regional communities, it is important to be aware of issues surrounding language and communication. As with the rest of the Australian population the levels of English language proficiency amongst skilled migrants and their families span a considerable range. While some new arrivals may not require any language assistance others may require more intensive assistance. Regional communities can considerably improve the settlement experience of new arrivals through ensuring that language needs are satisfied. Research indicates that improved language proficiency is closely linked to workforce participation and greater social satisfaction for new migrants.²² It is therefore important that communities are aware of the importance of access to language assistance and implement programs with the intention of reducing language barriers.

The Adult Migrant English Program

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is important for helping migrants improve their language skills. Under this program 510 hours of tuition are made available to eligible clients with more hours available to some special needs groups. AMEP has a range of learning options for students including the option of studying full time, part time, or in some cases from home. AMEP also provides services such as free childcare for those who need it during class time to encourage eligible clients to take advantage of the service. AMEP also assists in the settlement process through providing new arrivals with community contact and connecting them with other new arrivals in similar situations.²³

Conversation Groups

For new arrivals that do not have access to AMEP, local activities such as conversation groups are important for the development of English language skills. Informal conversation classes tend to have a relaxed environment in which new arrivals can practice their language skills. These informal conversation groups are particularly useful for the partners of the primary visa holder. Classes are generally led by someone with the ability to assist group members with their language skills and facilitate discussion between members. Conversation groups give new arrivals the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation to their own and practice English in a supportive environment. Informal opportunities for peer mentoring may arise within conversation groups and this form of support is valuable for migrants who are in the initial stages of the settlement trajectory or are experiencing settlement challenges.

Translating, Interpreting and Listening

Communities can also be supportive of new arrivals by providing interpreter services and by being aware of the language needs of new arrivals. There are two government-funded translating and interpreting services: the Translating and Interpreting Service (Federal Government) and the Victorian Translating and Interpreting Service (Victorian State Government).²⁴ These services offer translating and interpreting services both on the telephone and on site. It is important to make newly arrived migrants aware of these

²² Department of Immigration, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, Canberra, May 2004, Chapter 4, p.78.

²³ For further information about AMEP, see the website at <http://www.immi.gov.au/amep>.

²⁴ More information about these services is available respectively at www.immi.gov.au/tis and <http://www.vits.com.au/>.



services, and also institutions such as schools aware of the need to provide assistance in matching languages, dialects and in some cases 'gender compatibility'. The Victorian Government recently launched the Interpreter Symbol and Victorian Interpreter Card which are useful resources to assist people from non-English speaking backgrounds indicate a need for assistance when accessing government services.

In order to successfully welcome new arrivals it is also important to be aware of some of the language challenges that new arrivals may encounter. Communicating with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or those who are not fluent in English requires sensitivity. A sensitive approach to communication may involve simple measures such as making sure that information for new arrivals is either printed clearly and simply, or is provided in their language of choice. It is also important when communicating verbally with new arrivals to be patient, listen carefully and repeat information if necessary. Communication can be enhanced through using simple language, avoiding jargon and speaking clearly. Information for translating needs to be simply and clearly articulated to avoid sending mixed messages. It is also important to be aware that new arrivals should not enter into any formal agreement unless it is clear that the terms are fully understood.²⁵ Cross-cultural communication improves with practice, so it is important to be patient and learn from experiences.

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Information on the Adult Migrant English Program is widely circulated throughout the community.
- Regular conversation groups held for skilled migrants; allowing new arrivals to enhance their language skills and develop social networks. Conversation groups are ideally free and held at times that are sensitive to working hours, religious commitments and family considerations.
- Volunteer tutoring scheme in place whereby new arrivals are matched one-on-one with a English language tutor.
- Information on translating and interpreting services including the Interpreter Symbol and Interpreter Card widely distributed, in community languages where appropriate.
- Information on the language barriers that new arrivals may face and strategies for efficient cross-cultural communication widely circulated throughout community.

²⁵ "A Warrnambool Welcome", October 2005, p.20.



Chapter 6

Welcoming and Celebrating Cultural Diversity

Migrants often face challenges leaving their traditional home and culture and adjusting to a new cultural environment. Communities may also need to adjust to the arrival of new cultures and traditions. One way of linking people of diverse ethnicities in communities is through creating community services and events aimed at celebrating cultural diversity. Cultural and arts festivals are effective ways of celebrating diversity and showcasing different cultures, whilst specific programs aimed at promoting diversity and harmony can be effective tools for education.

Celebrating New Arrivals - Festivals

Cultural festivals that celebrate diversity and inclusion for the entire community are a very effective way of helping new migrants to feel welcome and at home. Such festivals can celebrate a range of different things such as different foods, dress, dance or national days. Given that newly arrived migrants may struggle with having to adjust to their new environment, festivals provide migrants with the opportunity to share traditions and culture whilst connection with a new community. The cultural exchange that occurs at festivals also allows the broader community to engage and embrace new members. Cultural festivals can be viewed as a community forum in which the key message is celebrating cultural diversity in the local context.

Cultural Festivals in Victoria

The annual Pako Festa in Geelong is based on a blending of cultures, community spirit and involvement. The festival has multicultural dance, food, performance art and world music to promote an understanding of different cultures. The theme for 2007 will be "Reflections of Culture".

The Gnatannwarr Multicultural Festival is approaching its third year of celebrations in Warrnambool. Held annually during Cultural Diversity Week, the festival brings the local community together to showcase the cultural diversity of the region, through a celebration of music, dance, performance, food and traditional children's activities. The festival promotes diversity and harmony throughout the region, with the local Koori, Dutch, Sudanese, Maori, Filipino and Arabic communities participating, as well as individuals from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that are not represented in the region by an official group. A great outcome of the festival is the increase in social connectedness of individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, leading to the formation of official ethnic associations. So far, Maori, Filipino and Arabic groups have been formed as a direct result of the involvement in the festival.



Celebrating New Arrivals - Arts

The promotion of a diverse and multicultural arts community is also important for welcoming new migrants. Multicultural Arts Victoria promotes cultural diversity in the arts, producing an annual program of projects and events promoting Victoria's diverse artists and different art forms.²⁶ It provides opportunities to organise arts festivals that encourage connections between communities, offering a wide range of services such as acting as agent and broker for artists and groups, arts marketing, promotion and publicity, project administration, information and assistance regarding arts funding, grants and applications. Providing new arrivals with the opportunity to engage in art allows them to share their culture in the wider community, ultimately promoting understanding and awareness of multiculturalism.

Celebrating Diversity

In order to create welcoming communities for new migrants, it is important to educate the wider community about issues of multiculturalism and diversity. The Australian Government initiative "Living in Harmony" attempts this in a range of ways. Harmony Day, held in March every year, provides an opportunity to celebrate and commit to multiculturalism. Living in Harmony grants fund community projects designed to enhance harmony and engage the whole community.²⁷

By creating communities that are well educated about diverse cultures and arts, it is possible to create a welcoming environment for newly arrived migrants. Such initiatives help communities to become more diverse and inclusive, and smooth the settlement process for new migrants by celebrating differences and creating connections with their new home.

Best Practice Welcoming Strategies

- Multicultural festivals held in regional areas to share and celebrate the cultures of newly arrived migrants
- Strong support for multicultural art to strengthen an inclusive and diverse arts
- Community education on multiculturalism and diversity through initiatives such as Harmony Day

²⁶ For more information see www.multiculturalarts.com.au.

²⁷ For more information see www.harmony.gov.au.



Conclusion

The settlement of migrants and their families in regional Australia presents challenges for new migrants themselves as well as the wider communities. In order to ensure that migrants are able to successfully settle in Australia, and that our regional communities are able to capitalise on the significant contributions of migrants, these challenges must be addressed decisively.

There are many ways in which individuals, organisations and businesses can welcome new arrivals to regional communities. In order to feel welcomed and supported new arrivals require adequate settlement services upon arrival. Newly arrived migrants need to be given opportunities to engage with their new community, with options provided for participating in ethno-specific groups, newcomer groups and broader community clubs and organisations.

In the workplace, employers can implement simple and effective welcoming strategies such as 'culture awareness days' to ensure that skilled migrants are made to feel a valued part of the team. More broadly, cultural and artistic festivals that celebrate diversity are a great way of showcasing the multicultural character of our regional communities and bringing people together.

This guide has been informed by regional welcoming initiatives through out Victoria and has discussed ways in which the challenges of migrant settlement and retention can be addressed. Through implementing strategies to foster and maintain a welcoming community, the settlement process for migrants can be strengthened, ultimately allowing newly arrived migrants to call their new community "home".



Appendix One

Examples of Welcoming Activities in Regional Victoria

The following examples represent just some of the welcoming activities for new arrivals that have been implemented in Victorian communities. These examples may provide inspiration for the development of future activities in your community.²⁸

Woven Lands Arts Project

This ten week project brought together local, Indigenous and migrant women and saw them work on traditional and contemporary woven pieces. Warrnambool City Council provided a letter of support for the project grant application, and provided in-kind support throughout its duration. As a part of the project, the local Koori community invited the broader population in Warrnambool to a special 'welcome to country celebration which included traditional Indigenous and Sudanese dancing'. The Woven Lands Art Project also saw weekly meetings for the women involved emerge, and these meetings provided those attending with opportunities for fun, socialising and a sharing of experiences.

Multicultural Ambassador Program

This program was instigated by the City of Ballarat as a part of their overall regional skilled migration strategy, and saw Multicultural Ambassadors nominated and selected from the community. Multicultural Ambassadors are elected for a two year period in which they promote multiculturalism in the region through public speaking engagements and working collectively on community development projects.

WEAVE Program

The WEAVE program - A community Welcome to Ethnic Families through Assistance, Volunteer, orientation and Education - works to match new arrivals with a volunteer and assist in orientation and settlement processes. The WEAVE program was developed through Greater Shepparton City Council and trains volunteers to assist new arrivals in a variety of tasks associated with settlement. The tasks volunteers assist new arrivals with include locating local places of interest, service providers, linking to local sporting and service clubs and also undertaking daily activities such as using public transport and shopping. Volunteers for the WEAVE program received training on cross-cultural awareness and other issues pertaining to volunteering from the local Equity and Access worker.

Wahines Singing Group

The Wahines Singing Group for Women is an initiative of the Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities Council. The singing group meets every second Monday to sing songs from all around the world. Singing is a fun social activity for the women who participate and weekly meetings provide opportunities to share experiences and seek advice in a welcoming environment. The Wahines have performed on many occasions within Bendigo and also travelled to perform at other Victorian festivals.

"My Story" Writing Class

The Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities Council (BRECC) initiated the 'My Story' writing class and invited migrant members of the Bendigo community to record their life stories. BRECC provided funding for

²⁸ Most of the information provided is derived from the ECCV ' Guide to Welcoming Committees and Activities for Regional Skilled Migrants' available at <http://eccv.org.au/doc/RMIFWelcomeGuide.pdf>. ECCV is happy to provide further information such as contact details for any of the welcoming initiatives listed.



an English teacher to work in partnership with migrants as a part of the program. The 'My Story' writing class has been positively received and the next step for the program will be to secure funding to publish the stories as a collection-highlighting the multicultural character of Bendigo.

Establishing Incorporated Associations

The Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District has provided practical advice and guidance assisting several ethnic groups in Shepparton establish incorporated associations. Incorporated associations work to foster strong networks which members can draw upon for support and advice. In addition, incorporated associations are well structured to advocate for the needs of members and also receive relevant information from the broader community.

Inclusive Games Project

The 'Inclusive Games' project developed to expand the social networks of young refugees in Geelong. Diversitat (formerly the Geelong Ethnic Communities' Council) implemented the project with the support of Barwon Health, Leisure Networks and North Geelong Secondary College. Over the twelve week period of the program each of the fifteen participants sampled different sports, including cricket, hockey and sailing. At the end of the project each participant received a DVD which recorded their experiences undertaking new sports. This program offered new arrivals the chance to participate in activities that are important to the wider community, potentially providing common ground between new arrivals and the broader community.

Newcomers Network www.newcomersnetwork.com

The Newcomers Network is an Australia-wide organisation that provides information and support for anyone moving to a new community. The website is a very useful resource, providing forums in which anyone can pose questions, as well as information about employment and community engagement. There are also useful publications attached to the website, for example a "Newcomers Kit" that outlines many of the challenges that newcomers face, as well as offering solutions to both new arrivals themselves, and the welcoming community.

Newcomers Clubs www.newcomersclub.com/au.html www.bendigonecomers.com

Both Bendigo and Mildura have established Newcomers Clubs which are committed to welcoming newcomers to the area, and providing the opportunity for newcomers to find out information and make friends in their new home.

Cultural Cooking for Women

The women's cultural cooking initiative in Wangaratta emerged from a partnership between the Pangerang Community House and Local Council. Women from the community are invited to attend the weekly event in which international dishes are cooked. The program allows participants to share their stories, experiences and cultural heritage in an environment where children are welcome, friendships emerge and community connections are developed.



Useful Resources

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria www.eccv.org.au

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) was established in 1974 as a voluntary community based organisation and is now a broadly based, state-wide, peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria. Links to the ECCV publication 'A Guide to Welcoming Committees and Activities for Regional Skilled Migrants' can be found on the ECCV website.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs www.immi.gov.au

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs webpage provides information on a range of issues, such as visas and immigration as well as information about life in Australia, multiculturalism and Australian citizenship. The section on "Living in Australia" provides details on the settlement process as well as publications such as the "Beginning a Life in Australia" booklets which contain important information for new arrivals. The "Welcome to Victoria" booklet and "A Victorian Welcome Toolbox" contains comprehensive information for skilled migrants and regional communities respectively.

Live in Victoria website www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au

The Live in Victoria website is run by the Victorian State Government and is designed to attract migrants to Victoria. It provides a range of very useful information for new and prospective migrants including visa details, lifestyle information and a guide to Victoria's regions. This website is also a useful tool for employers in Victoria, with information and resources on this page dedicated to matching migrants and employers.

Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs www.voma.vic.gov.au

The webpage of the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs provides information specific to Victoria on a range of multicultural issues such as language services. The website also provides information about Victorian Government policy in regards to multicultural issues, and has a link to relevant grants and funding. Information and resources on the Interpreter Symbol and Interpreter Card is also available on this website.

Department for Victorian Communities www.dvc.vic.gov.au/

The website of the Department for Victorian Communities provides information on Victorian State government policies and initiatives related to the development of communities. It also provides resources and information regarding promotions and campaigns directed at consolidating and enhancing community engagement.

Adult Migrant English Program www.immi.gov.au/amep

The website of the Adult Migrant English Program provides information on the program, how it works, curriculum details, client information and related publications. This information is provided in a range of different languages.



Report on the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, May 2004. www.immi.gov.au/

This report examines the settlement services conducted by the Department of Immigration in 2003. It contains useful information on the settlement experience, as well as statistics relating to the settlement process.

Living in Harmony www.harmony.gov.au

The Living in Harmony webpage is an initiative of the Federal Government, and provides information on a range of issues, including Harmony Day, community projects and the Partnerships program. It is a useful resource for examples of projects aimed at the promotion of diversity, as well as information about government support and initiatives.

Diversity Works! www.diversityaustralia.gov.au/index.htm

The Diversity Australia webpage is devoted to the Diversity Works! Policy of the Australian Government and has a range of resources relating to creating diverse and inclusive workplaces. It provides information on the benefits of diverse workplaces as well as details about how to become an Employer of Choice. The webpage also provides a free training kit on workplace diversity that can be downloaded and presented as part of diversity training.

Translating and Interpreting Service www.immi.gov.au/tis Phone 13 14 50

The Translating and Interpreting Service webpage offers information on Federal Government translating services such as contact details and information on document translation.

Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service www.vits.com.au/ Phone (03) 9280 1950

This webpage provides information on the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service, detailing the services available through this organisation.

OnCall Interpreters and Translators Agency <http://www.oncallinterpreters.com>

OnCall provides interpreting and translating services independently as well as on behalf of the Victorian Department of Human Services. For eligibility details visit the website.

Multicultural Arts Victoria www.multiculturalarts.com.au

The webpage of Multicultural Arts Victoria provides information on current events. It also describes the services that it offers, and a membership application form can be downloaded from this website.

"A Warrnambool Welcome" – Warrnambool City Council

www.warrnambool.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=301

"A Warrnambool Welcome" is a document developed by the Warrnambool City Council through its experiences of its Regional Migrants Relocation Program. This document is a very useful source of information, describing the lessons learnt through this program and some insights for those who might consider a similar initiative.

Philanthropy Australia www.philanthropy.org.au

This website provides guidance on philanthropy and volunteering, and may be useful for those implementing volunteer programs in their welcoming initiatives.



Grants and Funding Information

Settlement Grants Program www.immi.gov.au

The Settlement Grants Program is an initiative of the Federal Government, and is aimed at services that help new arrivals to Australia settle into the community as quickly as possible. This program is application based, and applications are open on an annual basis. In the period 2006/2007 there was a total of \$31 million available for the program.

Regional Partnerships Program www.regionalpartnerships.gov.au

The Regional Partnerships Program is committed to developing partnerships between communities, government and the private sector in regional areas. As part of this program there are a range of funding options available such as the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.

Victorian Multicultural Commission www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/

The Victorian Multicultural Commission runs a grants program to assist communities and community based organisations to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This website also offers a useful section on sources of other grants, as well as information about how organisations should go about applying for grants and funding.

Grants at DVC www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au/

The Department for Victorian Communities offers a wide range of grants for initiatives such as planning, community strengthening and building community infrastructure. Grants@DVC also provides a useful grants finder that provides the opportunity to search for a range of grants, such as the Multicultural Festivals and Events grant and the Building Stronger Communities grants package. This website also provides grant application forms as well as tips and examples of other programs funded by DVC.

Living in Harmony grants www.harmony.gov.au/grants/index.htm

The Living in Harmony initiative is administered by the Federal Government, and is designed to promote community harmony and address issues of racism in Australia. A significant part of this program is the development of funded community projects that further this objective. Funding for this is aimed at community organisations that are aimed at promoting Australian values and address intolerance throughout the whole community.

Grantslink www.grantslink.gov.au

Grantslink is a very useful resource for finding available funding options. It is administered by the Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services, and provides information on a wide variety of grants. The website has several different sections such as Community and Society, and Culture and Heritage. Each section provides information on many relevant funding options, as well as contact details and application information.