

HEALTHY CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT
**Social Inclusion Needs of Newly Arrived Communities in
Melbourne's North East**



“Listening to my needs made me feel like a human being”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We acknowledge that the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation are the traditional owners and custodians of the land. We pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past and present.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been produced to identify the social needs and experiences of newly arrived communities linked with Your Community Health. This work is part of the social inclusion priority area in the North East Catchment Prevention Plan 2017-2021. The goal for social inclusion in this plan is that people in the North East Melbourne Primary Care Partnership PCP area are socially and civically engaged and connected with their communities.

Twenty people from newly arrived communities (mainly from Arabic speaking communities), with links to Your Community Health, participated in a survey to assess their social needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Motivations for joining social groups and activities

- There is a need for social connection among newly arrived communities.
- Involvement in Social groups helped improve participants' mental health and wellbeing.
- Meeting with people from the same culture and sharing similar situations and feelings is valuable for newly arrived people
- A social group is a place for learning new things and to have an entertainment for the whole family.
- Food binds people together in every culture, so when designing programs to address social isolation it is a good approach to include food.
- All respondents expressed satisfaction with the social activities YCH delivered.

Barriers to joining social groups and activities

- **Transport and accessibility** is a significant barrier for participation in social activities in this study. The majority of the survey participants (60 per cent) often have difficulty getting to the places needed. Either they do not drive yet, have no car, or it is hard to use the navigation because of poor English. Therefore, providing transport from their homes to the group meeting venue will help increase their participation in social groups.
- **Language** is another significant barrier to attend social groups. Providing interpreters and bicultural workers for social activities is really important to consider when planning social inclusion activities and to provide a culturally appropriate services; bicultural workers can play important role in facilitating conversations between services and communities from refugee backgrounds.
- **Settlement and family commitments and lack of time** are the other barriers to consider when planning social inclusion activities.

Motivations and barriers for volunteering

The majority of the newly arrived communities in this survey were willing to volunteer if they had the opportunity to, with the main reasons being religious beliefs and to

help others in the community. The barriers to volunteering were language and lack of time due to commitments related to settlement.

Providing opportunities for newly arrived communities

In order to provide more inclusive services and address the social inclusion needs of newly arrived communities and other vulnerable groups, organisations and practitioners should:

- Measure their clients' risk of social exclusion beyond participation in community programs. Clients should be assessed against social exclusion risk factors (included in this report) and connected with specific services and programs.
- Ensure new arrived communities are involved in the design and delivery of services, identify pathways for them to have greater decision-making power in the functioning of services and programs. Services should implement policies that ensure more diverse and inclusive representation of a broad range of newly arrived communities members across all levels of service management and governance.
- Ensure newly arrived communities have a voice within services and the community. Create more opportunities for new arrived communities to be heard, for them to share their experiences as vulnerable community members, and what they need in order to be feel more included and valued within society.

To develop culturally diverse workforces, it is important to provide volunteer opportunities and work experience for people from refugee backgrounds that include pathways to paid employment. Organisations that offer volunteering opportunities need to consider the needs of newly arrived communities and provide flexible working or volunteering hours, interpreting services and local options.

Community-led initiatives work best for developing social connections, and further to involving newly arrived communities in the design and delivery of services, it is also important for governments and services to provide 'on the ground' resources such as free or low-cost venues, transport, catering, and language support through bicultural/bilingual workers and interpreting services.

BACKGROUND

Improving mental health through building socially inclusive communities is one of the three strategic prevention priorities of Your Community Health's (YCH) 2017-2021 Prevention Plan. It is a shared plan with North East Healthy Communities (the regional primary care partnership) and other community health and women's health agencies in the region. The overall goal for the social inclusion priority area of the North East Catchment Prevention Plan is that people in the North East Melbourne Primary Care Partnership PCP area are socially and civically engaged and connected with their communities. This community consultation aligns with the plan's following objectives:

- To support and strengthen community projects that facilitate social connections for the most disadvantaged communities in North East Melbourne by 2021
- To create opportunities for the most disadvantaged communities in North East Melbourne to influence decisions that affect them by 2021.

In addition to the North East Catchment Prevention Plan, Darebin City Council within their 2017-2021 Health and Wellbeing Plan also identified a goal to 'Improve the emotional and social wellbeing of all Darebin people' (City of Darebin, 2017).

Purpose of this report

This report has been produced to identify the social needs and experiences of the newly arrived communities linked with Your Community Health. This includes their motivations for joining social activities, and identifying the barriers to participating in those activities.

The findings from this report will be used to inform future planning and design of social inclusion initiatives to ensure that they are more inclusive for the most disadvantaged.

This report is intended for organisations, groups and practitioners to assist them to provide more inclusive services and address the particular social inclusion needs of refugees and asylum seekers. The report may benefit local government health planners and health promotion practitioners in community health services, neighbourhood house staff and committees, volunteer groups and committees, volunteering organisations, and any other organisations, groups or practitioners that enable community members to learn, work, engage and have a voice.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND RELATED CONCEPTS

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as “a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2004). Three key determinants found in the literature that are indisputably linked to mental health and wellbeing are:

- **Social inclusion** (supportive relationships, involvement in community and group activity; and Civic engagement)
- **Freedom from discrimination and violence** (valuing diversity, physical security, Self-determination and control of one’s life)
- **Access to economic resources** (work, education, housing, money)

Social inclusion is a multidimensional concept that has been defined and applied in various ways, but broadly relates to equality, human rights, diversity, civic participation and social justice. The term is often used interchangeably with other concepts such as social capital, cultural capital, social cohesion, social integration and social connection (Cordier et al. 2017; Levitas et al. 2007; Popay et al. 2008).

Social inclusion

There is no universally agreed upon definition of social inclusion, however, the Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB), the Australian Government’s advisory body on social inclusion, defines social inclusion as having the resources opportunities and capabilities to:

- Learn (e.g. participate in education and training);
- Work (e.g. participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work, including family and carer responsibilities);
- Engage (e.g. connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities);
- And have a voice (influence decisions that affect them) (ASIB, 2010).

The United Nations has adopted a similar definition as part of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. However, they emphasise the need to ensure inclusion for those most vulnerable to marginalisation. They define social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights” (United Nations’ 2016).

Social exclusion

Levitas et al. (2007) describe social exclusion as ‘... a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or

political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Levitas et al., 2007, p.9).

Social capital

Social capital refers to the resources available to an individual as a result of their social connections, networks and groups (Berkman, Kawachi et al, 2014). These resources can include information, influence and solidarity, and can facilitate mutual benefit for both the individual and the community (Sander, 2002). Social isolation and loneliness are often used interchangeably, however, it is important to highlight that these are two separate concepts. Social isolation is an objective concept, and considers the overall level of people's integration into the wider social environment in which they live. A person who is socially isolated has minimal contact with others and little connection with their community. This isolation is a result of poor functional social support and may be voluntary or involuntary (Grenade & Boldy, 2008). Social isolation is one of the key contributors to social exclusion.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is closely related to the concept of social capital. The World Bank describes social cohesion as "the internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people, and the institutions in which they are embedded" (Grootaert, 1998). The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) defines a socially cohesive society as one which "works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility" (AHRC, 2015). Promoting social cohesion relies on economic and social equity, peace, security, inclusion and access (CDJ, 1997).

Social Connectedness

The concept of social connectedness has elements in common with both social capital and cohesion. It refers to the relationships people have with others, including partners, family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and other peers (i.e. school). Within the concept of social connectedness, relationships are integral to people's sense of belonging and identity, and also determine the social support people have available to them in times of need. Social connectedness also relates to the way people come together to achieve shared goals for the benefit of society as a whole (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2005). It is important to note that while these concepts are often used interchangeably, they are in fact distinct concepts. For example, social cohesion that being the degree of integration or coherence within a society will not necessarily result from reduced social exclusion, just as inclusion may not increase the extent to which people are able to live in harmony. Likewise, social inclusion is not the same as social integration and increasing social capital will not necessarily reduce exclusion (United Nations, 2010). There are obvious synergies between these concepts, but rather than simply conflating the terms it is necessary to examine their respective meanings carefully. This is particularly important when developing measures of social inclusion/exclusion

Loneliness

Loneliness is a subjective experience that occurs when there is a mismatch between the quality and quantity of the social relationships that a person has versus those that they want. Loneliness is the unwanted lack or loss of meaningful relationships and personal connections and companionship (Naufal, 2008; Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

INTRODUCTION

Newly arrived communities

This report uses the term 'people from refugee backgrounds' to refer to people who have arrived on humanitarian visas, people seeking asylum, and those who come from refugee backgrounds who arrive on another visa type, including family migration and skilled migration (State Government of Victoria Department of Health, 2014).

For newly arrived communities, 'being socially connected' is a key success factor in settlement. Making connections into the community is important to the health and wellbeing of migrants, as it is for other people in the broader community. In the context of newly arrived migrants, the value of social networks cannot be underestimated because they provide support and opportunities for new arrivals who may be experiencing exclusion from different social groups and settings either through a lack of knowledge, opportunity or access (Cederberg, 2012).

The Victorian 10 Year Mental Health Plan identifies people from refugee backgrounds as an at-risk group. 'People from refugee backgrounds, including asylum seekers, often come from countries where they have had limited, interrupted, or no access to mental healthcare and where health infrastructure is poorly developed. People from refugee backgrounds almost universally have a history of exposure to highly traumatic events that impact mental health. These factors increase the risk of poor mental health for refugees and asylum seekers.' As part of this action plan, the Victorian government identifies an outcome of reducing the gap in social and emotional wellbeing for people from refugee backgrounds (Victorian 10 Year Mental Health Plan 2015).

Researchers have also found that the loss of valued social roles impacts the health and well-being of refugees. Valuing refugees' cultural knowledge and experience may be important in recreating valued social roles and enabling them to maintain their cultural connections and identity. In summary, community-based interventions that are culturally appropriate, address post-migration daily stressors, build upon refugees' cultural strengths, occur in non-stigmatising settings, address social determinants of mental health, and include a focus on English proficiency, social support, and re-establishment of valued social roles are important (Jessica et al, 2015).

A report by the Victorian Refugee Health Network which involved consultations with 115 individuals and groups of people from refugee backgrounds in Victoria identified that social connectedness was the second most important theme that was identified by the community that impacted on their health and wellbeing (Tyrrell et al, 2016).

The following excerpts demonstrate the importance of social inclusion:

- 'Many people said that social isolation, loneliness, and separation from family members and friends makes people in their community unwell. Many people identified that they lack opportunities to socialise due to limited access to transport, language barriers, and lack of connections with the broader Australian community. Social connections were identified as sources of health advice and support for people from refugee backgrounds to access health services.'
- 'Social connections and opportunities to socialise with family, friends and the wider community were named as essential requirements for health; and social isolation, loneliness, and separation from family members and friends were frequently cited as making people unhealthy'.
- '...food binds people together in every culture, so when designing programs to address social isolation it is a good approach to involve food...'
- 'It was identified that women who come to Australia on spousal visas can be a very socially isolated group.'

Further, the Victorian Refugee Health Network report acknowledged that 'community-led initiatives work best for developing social connections, but that governments and services have a role to play in supporting and resourcing communities to develop social groups and initiatives, for example by providing free or low-cost venues for groups to meet in, transport to help people access the group, or funding for catering or materials' (Tyrrell et al, 2016).

Measuring social inclusion for newly arrived communities

The lack of international consensus on the precise definition of social inclusion means that it has been difficult to establish commonly accepted indicators for measuring social inclusion and exclusion. Multiple frameworks have been developed and within these common themes emerge that seek to explain the influences on a person's ability to be socially included:

- **Income** - a person's capacity to access adequate goods and resources;
- **Productivity/labour market participation** - a person's capacity to participate in economically or socially valuable activities;
- **Service engagement** - services can include public transport, social and health services and basic services inside the home (e.g. gas, electricity, telephone);
- **Social and civic interaction** - the extent and quality of a person's social networks, support available in normal times and times of crisis and engagement with political and civic activities (Saunders et al, 2007; Burchardt et al, 2002).

These themes correlate closely with ASIB's defining elements of social inclusion: learn (linked to productivity, income capacity and access to services); work (labour

and economic participation); engage (access to services, quality of social networks and supports); and have a voice (engagement with political and civic activities). This paper uses the social inclusion indicators adopted by the ASIB to explore the different experiences of social inclusion for newly arrived communities. These indicators measure social exclusion in relation to the following: poverty, employment, language, racism and discrimination, housing and education.

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty can be a driver of social exclusion. Those living in poverty are likely to experience a lack of resources and have fewer opportunities to participate in society. This can result in people living in poverty being excluded from ordinary living patterns and social activities, and becoming marginalised (Public Health Information Development Unit, 2012). According to the ASIB (2009), poverty remains one of the most potent elements of social exclusion. The condition of becoming a refugee is likely to be associated with poverty for many, as they leave job, family and friends behind and experience the limbo of refugee camps and then the costs of resettlement. The literature reviewed shows newly arrived refugees are very likely to experience income poverty associated with high unemployment, low wages and limited social security payments. This income poverty is exacerbated by high costs of settlement (rental bonds, furniture etc); various immigration debts, potential payment to people smugglers, legal costs or air transport costs for family reunion; loss of income during uprooting; and for support of relatives overseas (Janet, 2004).

Employment and social exclusion

Research on settlement for adult refugees emphasises employment as a key factor in integration and inclusion along with education and English proficiency. Despite eagerness to participate in employment, refugee settlers face multiple and intersecting barriers to employment. In addition to limited English proficiency, lack of Australian work experience or understanding of Australian workplace culture, many refugees also have limited access to transport and affordable housing close to employment (Olliff, 2010b). Racism and lack of networks are other difficulties for newly arrived people finding employment. Even when humanitarian entrants arrive with good English skills, post-secondary qualifications and relevant skills, discrimination and non-recognition of their qualifications, skills and previous experience pose barriers to gaining appropriate employment (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles, et al., 2002; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007).

Language and social exclusion

Without English proficiency, refugees are readily excluded from many aspects of life, including employment, education, access to services and social interaction. The DIMIA Longitudinal Study of immigrants found that English language skill was an important predictor of being employed across all visa groups (Economic Development Council 2002, p.108). Access to English classes (through the Adult Migrant English Program) and to translating and interpreting services (TIS) are provided to some refugees (newly arrived Humanitarian entrants) but are withheld from others. The lack of interpreters is a particular issue for new communities of

refugees. The expectation that mainstream services will and can provide interpreting services is often not met.

Racism, discrimination and social exclusion

Racism continues to be an issue of disquiet for some refugee families of Asian background in the Brotherhood's Life Chances Study, with some parents and their Australian-born children reporting racism in schools (Taylor & Fraser 2003). Racism, including at school, was an issue for young refugees who experienced depression (Brough et al. 2003). That study found racist violence was particularly catastrophic for those who had escaped violence in their past.

Refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iraq who escaped persecution and war have had the added indignity of being associated in the media with terrorists (Mansouri & Bagdas 2002). Justine & Rogelia (2015) found that racism, intercultural contact, and the media had multiple and interrelated effects on aspects of social cohesion such as belonging, participation, and inclusion.

Housing and social exclusion

Housing is a key factor in enabling settlement. The need for housing assistance particularly for vulnerable refugee women has been emphasised by various studies (Dunbar 1994; Pittaway 1991). Large refugee families and single people have the most difficulty in finding long-term housing (DIMIA 2003c).

Foley & Beer (2003) reviewed the literature on housing needs for refugees in Australia using an explicit framework of social exclusion and conducted research into the housing pathways of different categories of refugees (Refugee Program, Special Humanitarian Program entrants and those with Temporary Protection Visas) in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. In addition to financial barriers, they identified discrimination, cultural barriers, lack of suitable housing and lack of familiarity with the Australian housing and legal systems as problems.

Education and social exclusion

Education is often seen by refugees as the key to their future settlement and to their inclusion, or their children's inclusion in the host society. Refugee parents often lack knowledge of the education system, and young people face pressure to leave school to contribute financially to family and relatives overseas (Janet, 2004).

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A Social Work student in 2018 researched and collated a set of survey questions to gather information regarding community interest, experiences and support needs to enable a greater level of social connection during the initial years of arrival in Australia.

Your Community Health's Refugee Liaison Officer (RLO) and Refugee Health Nurse recruited twenty clients linked with YCH from newly arrived communities; mainly from Arabic speaking communities, to take part in a social needs assessment survey. Survey Monkey was used to document the interviews with the project participants. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, which included consent to record their responses in Survey Monkey. The full survey and the consent form are included in the appendix of this report.

All the interviews were conducted by the Health Promotion Officer (HPO) and RLO. The HPO read the questions to the participant while the RLO translated the questions (into Arabic) and responses (into English) back to the HPO. In recognition of participants' time and contribution, all survey participants were provided with a \$20 gift voucher.

LIMITATIONS

The number of individuals interviewed was capped at twenty. Therefore, the findings in this report are based on a small sample but nevertheless can be used to inform future projects and further consultations with newly arrived communities.

The findings of this report reflect the needs of newly arrived refugees aged 25 years and over. Hence there is an opportunity to assess the needs of young refugees aged 12-25 years in future consultations.

The methods of recruiting participants through the Refugee Liaison Officer and Refugee Health Nurse will have created a sampling bias, as all of the participants were engaged with YCH services. People who were not engaged with services have not been included in this needs assessment.

RESULTS

Profile of participants

Characteristics	Number =20
Gender	
Males	10
Females	10
Visa status	
Refugees	17
Asylum seekers	2
Australian Citizen	1
Local Government Areas	
City of Darebin	12
City of Hume	5
City of Whittlesea	1
City of Banyule	1
City of Brimbank	1
Country of origin	
Syria	8
Iraq	7
Iran	1
Egypt	1
Somalia	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Malawi	1
Languages spoken	
Arabic	16
Others/Somalian, Chicitewa, Armenian	4

A total of 20 community members/clients of the Refugee Health Nurse and/or Refugee Liaison Officer completed the survey; 50 per cent (n=10) men and 50 per cent (n=10) women.

The majority were born in Arabic speaking countries: 84 per cent (16) of respondents speak Arabic; Syria (8), Iraq (7), one from Saudi Arabia, and one from Egypt. Others languages spoken were Somali, Armenian and Chicitewa.

All respondents had been in Australia less than 5 years; 25 per cent (5) of respondents have been in Australia between one to two years. See Figure 1 below.

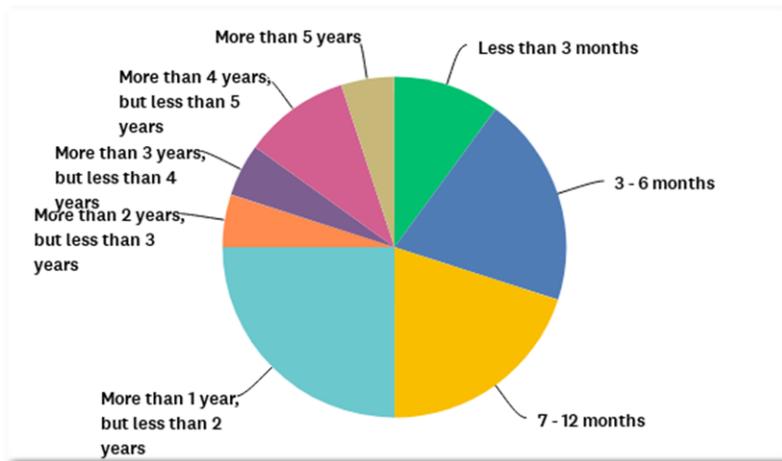


Figure 1 – Length of time in Australia

Sixty per cent (12) of respondents currently live within the City of Darebin and 25 per cent (5) in the City of Hume. See Figure 2 below.

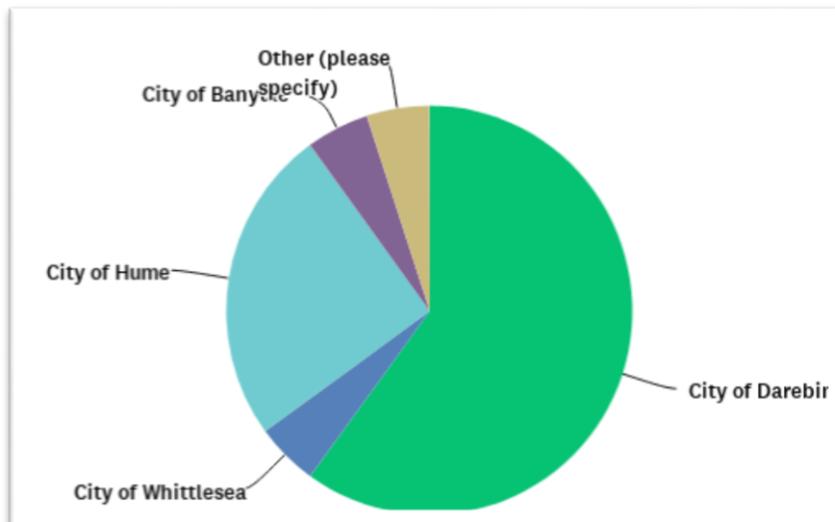


Figure 2 – Place of residence (Local Government Area)

Eighty-five per cent (17) of respondents were refugees and 10 per cent (2) were asylum seekers.

The majority of respondents were connected to YCH through referrals from AMES to the Refugee Health Clinic/Refugee Health Nurse or through the Refugee Liaison Officer at YCH and social groups.

Key results

Newly arrived communities and volunteering experience prior to coming to Australia

There was a wide range of paid and volunteer experience across survey participants, including: radio programmer, TV presenter, journalist, mechanical engineer, farmer, teacher, accountant, government organization, chef, nurse, fitness instructor, glazier and music teacher.

Since they have been living in Australia

Only 25 per cent (5) of respondents have been involved in volunteer work since they have been living in Australia such as food for homeless, activities at church, YCH dinner and ASRC.

Reasons for volunteering

Of the five participants who have volunteered, the top three reasons were other, religious beliefs and to help others/community. See Figure 3 below.

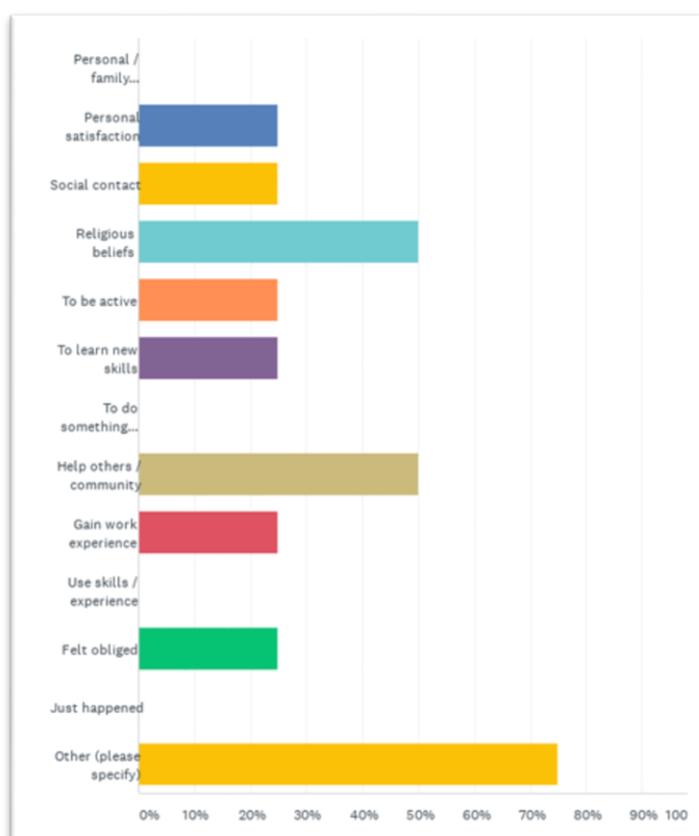


Figure 3 – Reasons for volunteering

Reasons for not volunteering

The main reasons why 75 per cent (15) of participants have not volunteered in the last twelve months were: language barriers (44 per cent, n=8), commitments related to settlement, i.e. Centrelink appointments/medical appointments (27 per cent, n=5) and transportation issues (22 per cent, n=4). Others mentioned barriers such as age, health issues low literacy and studying. See figure 4 below.

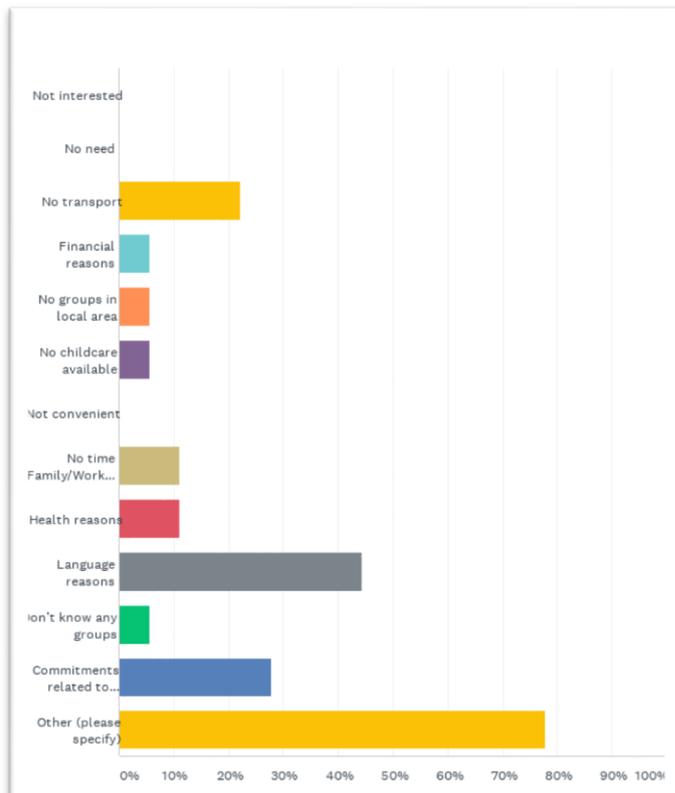


Figure 4 - Reasons for not volunteering

Volunteering interests

Eighty-four per cent (16) of respondents would be interested to volunteer if they had the opportunity to. The types of volunteering activities they would like to do were; children activities, gardening, journalism, in a school, events, helping newly arrived communities, aged care, cooking for the community, something suitable to my age, computer, and exercise. Only 15 per cent (3) were not interested in volunteering because of health issues and associated medical appointments and lack of time.

Social activities participation and experience

Eighty per cent (16) of respondents have been actively involved in social groups or taken part in an activity they organised in the last 12 months; 50 per cent (8) of respondents have been involved in local community organisation groups (YCH, Victorian Arabic Social Serveries VASS, Reservoir Neighborhood House, Reservoir Senior Center, Red Cross, 18 per cent (3) of respondents involved in active religious organisations, 12 per cent (2) in art related activities (music, dance), 12 per cent (2) in a community garden, 6 per cent (1) involved in cultural related activities , 6 per cent(1) in sport and 6 per cent (1) in educational institution. See Figure 5 below.

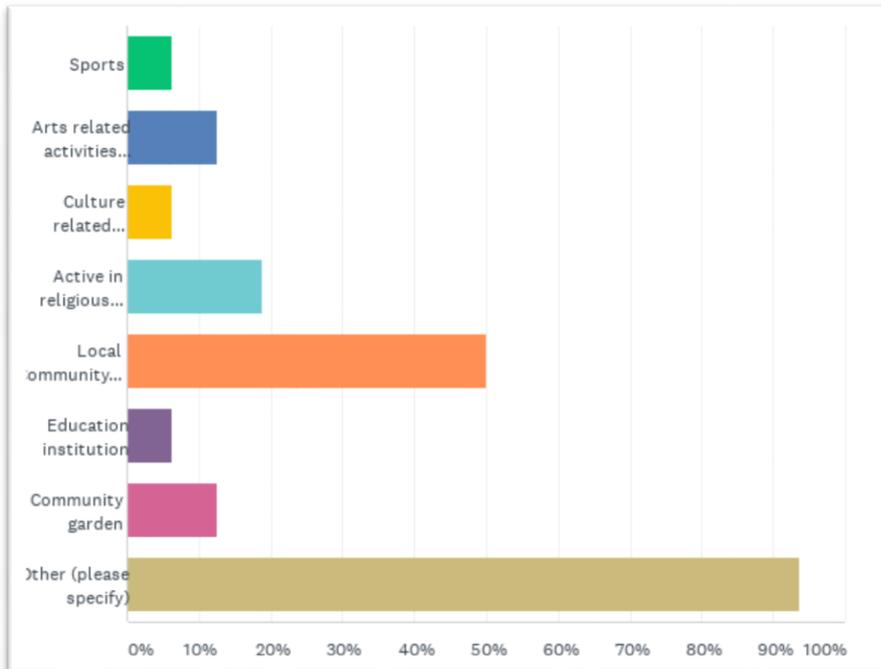


Figure 5 – Social activities participants have been involved in

Barriers to joining social groups and activities

Twenty per cent (4) of respondents had not been actively involved in social groups or taken part in an activity they organised in the last 12 months for the following reasons: no transport (37 percent, n=3) and no time because of family or work commitments (25 per cent, n=2). Other reasons were: prioritising settlement issues, not driving/no car, lots of health appointments, commitment to English classes, prioritising children’s activities. See figure 6 below.

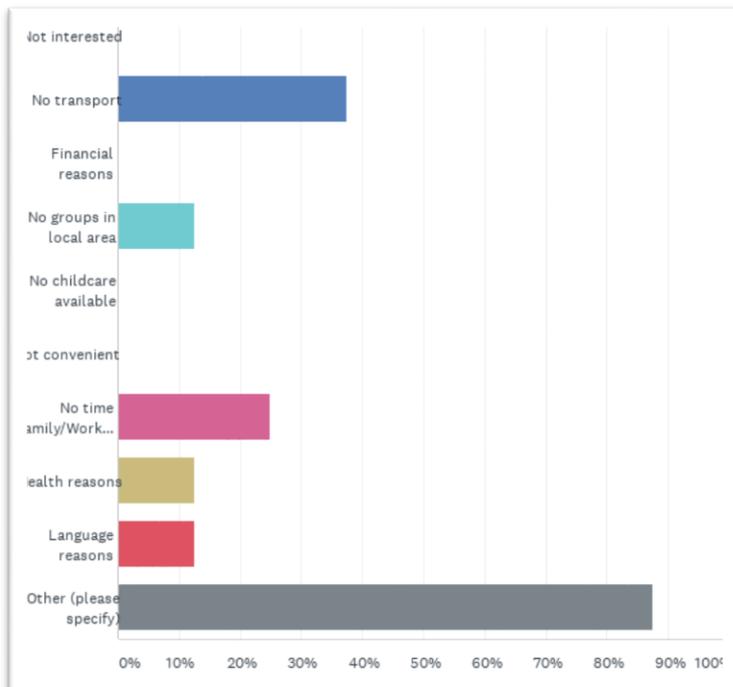


Figure 6 – Barriers to joining social groups and activities

Accessibility and transport

The majority of participants (60 per cent, n=12) often have difficulty getting to the places needed, with only 20 per cent (4) able to easily get to the places needed. See figure 7 below.

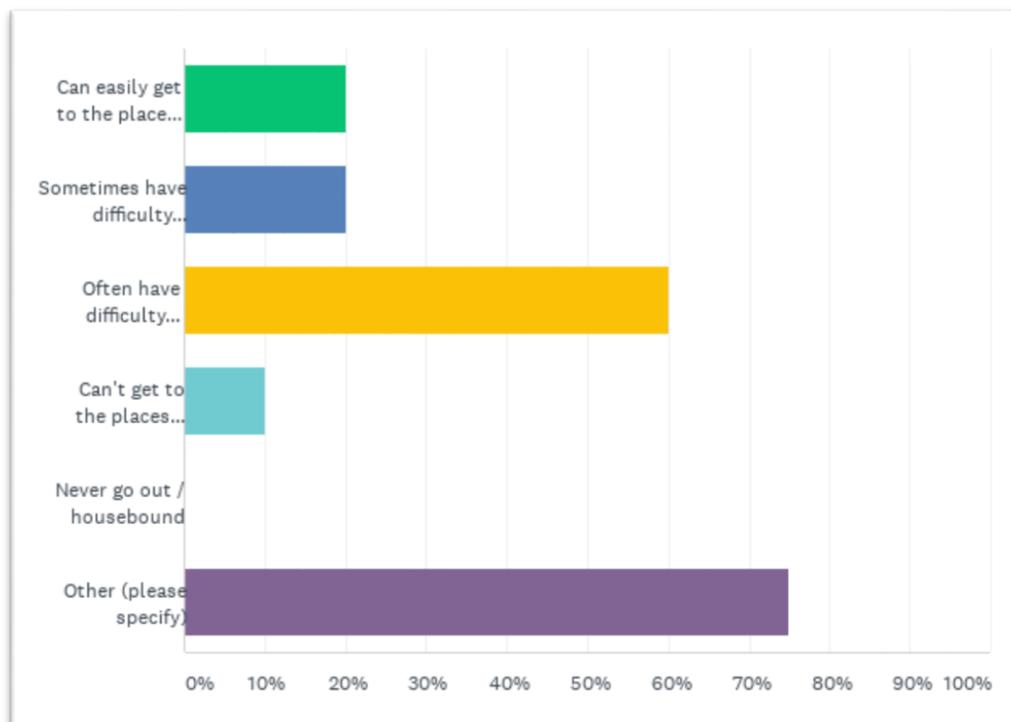


Figure 7 – Difficulty in getting to places

Some of the comments around transport issues were:

"It is hard to use GPS system for transport which we don't have home".

"Only with help from AMES, otherwise it is difficult. It is very important through AMES that we learn how to catch public transport when we are newly arrived". "Hard to renew my Myki card".

"Distance is difficult, the waiting time and travel time because I don't have a car".

Survey participants

Motivations for joining social groups and activities

"It brought about happiness and a feel of connectedness"

"Socialise, meet new friends"

"When I leave the home I leave the stress and sadness"

"Got to know people from other cultural backgrounds"

"Being together, we have the same feeling, most don't speak English, and able to share our experience as it is similar"

"Every time we learnt something new"

"The kids got entertainment, cook our cultural food and share the food"

"Staff were kind and helpful, I liked the art, soap making and jewelry".

Survey participants

Satisfaction with current activities

All respondents showed satisfaction and did not identify anything they did not like about these activities.

"all good; they are nice....you feel alive, something new to me". Survey participant

Improvements to current activities

Many participants were satisfied with the way the activities were delivered. However, a few participants suggested involving interpreters because language is really an issue for newly arrived refugees. Some of the answers to this question revealed other settlement concerns, such as learning English, difficulties in renting and finding employment.

Future social activities

Activities participants identified that they would like to attend where they could meet people from their community or other communities, from the most popular suggestions to the least:

- Social gatherings activities and groups to connect with people either from the same culture who share similar experience or from different cultures and background to learn about other cultures in Australia such as Aboriginal culture.
- Gardening groups
- Outings and relaxing activities such as going to the city or to the beach, lakes to explore in Melbourne, sewing, cooking, music, theater, walking groups and swimming lessons for older women and making and sharing things with people.
- Social groups involving preparing and sharing food and drinks
- Cultural events such as festivals, end of year events, multicultural and folk dancing and cultural fashion parade
- Social activities that help improving English language.
- Activities that involves mums and children
- Men's activities
- Sport and running competitions
- Navigating the transport system.

Other suggestions made by participants were:

- anything that could improve family relations and improving family dynamics
- activities for women to develop skills that can lead to employment (eg computers, sewing, art)
- law in Australia
- English language
- stretching exercise.

Considerations when planning future activities

When organizing a community activity for people who are newly arrived to Australia, the following issues need to be considered:

- Transport
- Venue accessibility

- Interpreter
- Food
- Bilingual worker who can link with us
- Outings that benefit the whole family
- Mixed activities with men and women.

Support needs

In the case of an emergency, 25 per cent (5) of respondents did not have someone outside their household they can rely on to care for them or their children.

The types of support participants identified that they would like to have for themselves or their children are:

- have someone to drive me/us places (42 per cent, n=8)
- support with buying food (26 per cent, n=5)
- support to pay bills/service debt (26 per cent, n=5)
- support to help pay rent/bond/other housing costs (21 per cent, n=4).

Other comments were: employment for my children, gardening, pay for swimming classes, education support for children, legal advice regarding working conditions and driving lessons.

Final remarks from participants

“Listening to my needs made me feel like a human being”

“I am very happy with your services at YCH, you linked us with other organisations, happy because the refugee liaison worker picked them to the activities”

“It was very important for me and helped me to attend the activities”,

“You treat us like emotional healing for us and making sure you enable us to attend activities, it is a unique service”,

“All the activities that you can provide will lift our emotional wellbeing and give us opportunities for interaction and learn from each other experience, and by interacting we can find out about job opportunities It’s like a key it allows us to open the door to new nationalities and learn about everyone else, we want to interact with people who live here”

Survey participants

CASE STUDY

Kamal is a Syrian man aged 62 years old; he was one of the participants in this consultation with newly arrived communities and he provided permission for his story to be highlighted as a case study.

He spoke about his life back home, of being a farmer, and of his desire to be involved in gardening in Australia. He was being pressured by Centrelink and the Job Agencies to volunteer or he would lose his payments. However due to his age and lack of proficiency in English, he was not able to find a work or an appropriate volunteering opportunity. His participation in this consultation was very timely as the RLO had a new Arabic gardening group starting at the same time. The Gardening group activities took place at the East Preston Community Centre and supported by Darebin Information Volunteer Resource Service (DIVRS). To help the Syrian man and use his skills, language and back home experience the right way; the Refugee Liaison Officer at YCH and the Program Liaison at East Preston Community Centre supported him to become registered as a volunteer with DIVRS. His volunteering role is to teach the gardening group about gardening issues. Therefore it was a perfect match for him and he was able to keep receiving the vital Centrelink payments.

“My participation in the questionnaire and the interview was one of the goals that have been achieved. First, I got my volunteer work. Secondly, this is the first time that I have met new friends in Melbourne, including Frank, John and Michel. So I feel happy and satisfied”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Motivations of newly arrived communities for joining social groups and activities

The survey findings showed:

- There is a need for social connection among newly arrived communities.
"..it brought about happiness and a feel of connectedness, socialise, meet new friends"
- Involvement in Social groups helped improve participants' mental health and wellbeing
"When I leave the home I leave the stress and sadness", "All the activities that you can provide will lift our emotional wellbeing and give us opportunities for interaction and learn from each other experience, and by interacting we can find out about job opportunities it's like a key it allows us to open the door to new nationalities and learn about everyone else"
- Meeting with people from the same culture and sharing similar situations and feelings is valuable for newly arrived people
"Being together, we have the same feelings, most don't speak English, and able to share our experience as it is similar"
- A social group is a place for learning new things and to have an entertainment for the whole family. The Arabic speaking community is a family bonded community therefore planning activities for a whole family is attractive for newly arrived refugees from Arabic speaking communities and it increases their participation in social groups.
"Every time we learnt something new, the kids got entertainment"
- Food binds people together in every culture, so when designing programs to address social isolation it is a good approach to include food. This survey finding is linked with the Victorian Refugee Health Network report' findings (Tyrrell et al, 2016).
"cook our cultural food and share the food"
- All respondents expressed satisfaction with the social activities YCH delivered.

Barriers to joining social groups and activities

When planning social inclusion projects it is important to address the barriers of newly arrived refugees for participation.

Transport and accessibility is a significant barrier for participation in social activities in this study. The majority of the survey participants (60 per cent) often have difficulty getting to the places needed. Either they do not drive yet, have no car, or it is hard to use the navigation because of poor English. Therefore, providing transport from their homes to the group meeting venue will help increase their participation in social groups.

“It is hard to use GPS system for transport which we don’t have home”.

“Only with help from AMES, otherwise it is difficult. It is very important through AMES that we learn how to catch public transport when we are newly arrived”.

“Hard to renew my Myki card”.

“Distance is difficult, the waiting time and travel time because I don’t have a car”

Survey participants.

The survey findings also showed that **language** is another significant barrier to attend social groups. Providing interpreters and bicultural workers for social activities is really important to consider when planning social inclusion activities and to provide a culturally appropriate services; bicultural workers can play important role in facilitating conversations between services and communities from refugee backgrounds.

“bilingual worker who can link with us, and an interpreter to help us to engage”

Survey participant.

Other barriers to consider when planning social inclusion activities is **settlement commitments, family commitments and lack of time**. The outcome from this survey matches the findings from Victorian Refugee Health Network report, “Many people expressed that they lack opportunities to socialise, due to limited access to transport, language barriers, and lack of connections with the mainstream Australian community” (Tyrrell et al, 2016).

Social activities

Participants in this survey identified the following activities and preferences to consider when planning and designing social programs. From the most popular suggestions to the least:

- Social gatherings activities and groups to connect with people either from the same culture who share similar experience or from different cultures and background to learn about other cultures in Australia such as Aboriginal culture.
- Gardening groups
- Outings and relaxing activities such as going to the city or to the beach, lakes to explore in Melbourne, sewing, cooking, music, theater, walking groups and swimming lessons for older women and making and sharing things with people.
- Social groups involving preparing and sharing food and drinks
- Cultural events such as festivals, end of year events, multicultural and folk dancing and cultural fashion parade
- Social activities that help improving English language.
- Activities that involves mums and children
- Men’s activities
- Sport and running competitions
- Navigating the transport system.

Volunteering experience

The majority of the newly arrived communities in this survey were willing to volunteer if they had the opportunity to, with the main reasons being religious beliefs and to help others in the community.

They prefer activities that require minimal English skills such as cooking, gardening, volunteering in aged care or activities suitable for their skills back home such as working with computers or leading exercise groups. The barriers to volunteering are language and lack of time due to commitments related to settlement. These commitments can be overwhelming for new arrived communities and include Centrelink appointments, medical appointments, language school commitments and transportation issues.

Providing opportunities for newly arrived communities

In order to provide more inclusive services and address the particular social inclusion needs of newly arrived communities and other vulnerable groups, organisations and practitioners should:

- Measure their clients' risk of social exclusion beyond participation in community programs. Clients should be assessed against social exclusion risk factors (included earlier in this report) and connected with specific services and programs.
- Ensure new arrived communities are involved in the design and delivery of services, identify pathways for them to have greater decision-making power in the functioning of services and programs. Services should implement policies that ensure more diverse and inclusive representation of a broad range of newly arrived communities members across all levels of service management and governance.
- Ensure newly arrived communities have a voice within services and the community. And create more opportunities for new arrived communities to be heard, for them to share their experiences as vulnerable community members, and what they need in order to feel more included and valued within society.

It is really important to provide volunteer opportunities and work experience for people from refugee backgrounds that include pathways to paid employment, to assist in the development of culturally diverse workforces. Organisations that offer volunteering opportunities need to consider the needs of newly arrived communities and provide flexible working or volunteering hours, interpreting services and local options (i.e., close to home).

Community-led initiatives work best for developing social connections, and further to involving newly arrived communities in the design and delivery of services, it is also important for governments and services to provide 'on the ground' resources such as free or low-cost venues, transport, catering, and language support through bicultural/bilingual workers and interpreting services.

The findings from this community consultation will inform YCH's future programs and partnerships to support social connections and reduce social isolation for people from refugee backgrounds to form social connections, particularly for more vulnerable groups such as people who are newly arrived.

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APPENDIX

Survey Monkey- online survey

your COMMUNITY HEALTH Community Consultation with newly arrived communities linked with YCH

Introduction

Hi my name is _____, thank you to giving us some of your time to answer some questions.

Lina and I are currently interviewing people in the community who are refugees or asylum seekers to gather information that will help us improve the services we provide to the community.

The interview will take about 30 minutes.

The questions we are asking will be about activities or services you would have liked when you first arrived in Australia, or things you think would be helpful for you and your friends/family now. We will also ask a few questions about you personally that helps us to break down the data for the report.

All the information we collect from your today will be stored on an online survey (this is why you will hear me typing as you are speaking – relevant when doing over the phone interviews).

The information we gather will be used to write a report that summaries all the information from all the interviews and your name will not be used in the report.

If there are any questions you don't want to answer please feel free to ask me to move on to the next question.

We will also be giving you a \$20 voucher to thank you for taking the time today to answer our questions.

1. Are you happy to go ahead with the interview?

Yes

No

2. How did you become connected with our services at Your Community Health?

3. How long have you been living in Australia?

Less than 3 months

3 - 6 months

7 - 12 months

More than 1 year, but less than 2 years

More than 2 years, but less than 3 years

More than 3 years, but less than 4 years

More than 4 years, but less than 5 years

More than 5 years

4. In what country were you born?

5. Before coming to Australia, what type of paid or volunteer work did you do?

6. In the last 12 months have you been actively involved in any social groups or taken part in an activity they organised?

Yes

No

7. If yes, what type of activities?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sports | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Community organisation (YCH) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts related activities (music, dance) | <input type="checkbox"/> Education institution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture related activities (festivals) | <input type="checkbox"/> Community garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active in religious organisation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

8. If no, can you tell me why?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not interested | <input type="checkbox"/> Not convenient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No transport | <input type="checkbox"/> No time (Family/Work commitments) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial reasons | <input type="checkbox"/> Health reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No groups in local area | <input type="checkbox"/> Language reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No childcare available | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

9. What did you like about the activities you took part in?

10. What didn't you like about about the activities you took part in?

11. What could be done differently in those activities to have made them better?

12. When you first arrived in Australia, what type of community activities would you have liked to have attended?

13. What type of activities would you like to attend were you could meet people from your community or other communities?

14. Thinking about the projects you suggested, what type of things do we need to consider when organising a community activity for people who are newly arrived to Australia?

15. I would now like you to consider all the places you need to go to, by car or other transport. Which statement best describes your overall transport situation? [1]

[1] ATR_Q01

[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DE47CCADC083E9BBCA257E7000154993/\\$File/41590do001_household_questions](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DE47CCADC083E9BBCA257E7000154993/$File/41590do001_household_questions)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can easily get to the places needed | <input type="checkbox"/> Can't get to the places needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes have difficulty getting to the places needed | <input type="checkbox"/> Never go out / housebound |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Often have difficulty getting to the places needed | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

16. Since you have been living in Australia have you been involved in any volunteer work?

- Yes
 No

17. If yes, where have you volunteered?

18. What were your reasons for being a volunteer?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal / family involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> To do something worthwhile |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal satisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Help others / community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social contact | <input type="checkbox"/> Gain work experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious beliefs | <input type="checkbox"/> Use skills / experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To be active | <input type="checkbox"/> Felt obliged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To learn new skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Just happened |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

19. What are all the reasons that you have not volunteered (in the last 12 months)? [1]

[1] Vol Q. 30

[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DE47CCADC083E9BBCA257E7000154993/\\$File/41590do001_household_questionnaire](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DE47CCADC083E9BBCA257E7000154993/$File/41590do001_household_questionnaire)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not interested | <input type="checkbox"/> Not convenient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No need | <input type="checkbox"/> No time (Family/Work commitments) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No transport | <input type="checkbox"/> Health reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial reasons | <input type="checkbox"/> Language reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No groups in local area | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know any groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No childcare available | <input type="checkbox"/> Commitments related to settlement, i.e. Centrelink appointments/medical appointments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

20. If you had the opportunity to volunteer would you be interested?

- Yes
 No

21. What would you like to do?

22. If no, can you explain your answer

23. In case of emergency do you have someone outside your household you can rely on to care for you or your children?

- Yes
 No

24. What type of support would you like to have for you or your children?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child support payments | <input type="checkbox"/> Have someone to drive me/us places |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support to help pay rent / bond / other housing costs | <input type="checkbox"/> Support to pay for educational costs / textbooks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support with buying food | <input type="checkbox"/> Support to pay bills / meet debt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support to buy or have clothing | <input type="checkbox"/> Support to buy big cost items |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Availability to borrow a car | <input type="checkbox"/> We don't need any support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

25. What languages do you speak?

- Arabic English
- Other (please specify)

26. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Unknown

27. What suburb are you currently living in?

- City of Darebin City of Moreland
- City of Whittlesea City of Banyule
- City of Yarra City of Nillumbik
- City of Hume
- Other (please specify)

28. Visa status

- Refugee
- Asylum Seeker
- Migrant
- Australian Citizen

29. Do you have anything else you would like to tell us

30. Would you like us to share the findings from this project with you?
If yes, what is the best way for us to do this?