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**The Trials and Tribulations of Partnerships in Refugee Settlement Services in  
Australia**

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## **Abstract**

The ascendancy of neoliberal ideas in education and social policy in the 1980s and 1990s was succeeded in the new millennium by a 'new' social democratic commitment with emphases on community empowerment, building social capital and a 'whole of government' approach to partnering with civil society to meet community needs. In Australia this approach has resulted in the development of partnerships between schools and community organisations formed as part of a targeted, holistic approach to service delivery to meet the settlement and educational needs of refugee youth. Drawing on interviews conducted with community workers and government officers involved in the school-community partnerships, we document how these partnerships are working 'on the ground' in Queensland schools. We analyse our findings against the international literature on changing notions of neoliberal governance, and discuss the implications of the shift to the 'partnering state' for schools and community organisations working with refugee young people.

**Keywords: partnerships, governmentality, refugees, education, neoliberalisation**

## Introduction

Although Australia's refugee intake has remained stable at about 13,000 a year since the mid 1990s, refugees from the 'African'<sup>1</sup> region have made up between 50 to 70 percent of entrants in recent times (Refugee Council of Australia 2008). Described as having welfare and educational needs never before encountered in previous humanitarian flows to Australia, a 2006 a discussion paper produced by a government committee noted:

The African caseload generally has greater settlement needs than people from previous source regions, reflecting their experiences and circumstances prior to arriving in Australia. Some of these pre-migration experiences include higher levels of poverty, larger families, lower levels of education and English proficiency, lower levels of literacy in their own languages, higher incidence of health issues, longer periods spent in refugee camps, little experience of urban environments, and higher rates of torture and trauma. (DIMA 2006: 7)

Failures in the international refugee management regime bear some responsibility for the multiple forms of disadvantage described above and experienced by refugees from Africa who are resettled in Australia. Principal among these failures are practices of 'refugee warehousing' and 'containment' which involve maintaining refugees in UNHCR coordinated camps in poor neighbouring countries for years on end. Young people are particularly disadvantaged by these arrangements, as camp schools are woefully inadequate, and children are not always able to access schools in the host country (Kagawa 2005, VFST 2007). This situation often results in significant educational disadvantages in literacy and numeracy among refugee young people.

Education is a priority for newly arrived refugee families, and it is acknowledged that schools play a significant role in the experience of settlement. It is through the experience of settlement that refugees recuperate and consolidate a sense of belonging in a new country. Settlement and schooling, put simply, are two sites from which to understand the multifarious practices through which refugees are inculcated

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<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge the limitations of using the term African to describe a region widely divergent in history and political economy, and people who are rich in ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. However, this is the language used in Australian government policy documents. Previous categories used in policy documents such as Horn of Africa were also deemed problematic for the same reasons.

into citizenship. If we needed reminders that successful settlement is ultimately about becoming a citizen, in January 2007 the federal government department responsible for refugee settlement changed its name to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) – from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). This also suggested a shift away from the ideal of multiculturalism towards an emphasis on integration.

There is now an awareness by governments of various political persuasions that student populations have diverse and different learning needs. This has led to the development of new policies and programmes for young people considered to be ‘at risk’ of disengagement from formal education systems. (te Reile 2006). Partnerships between schools and community organisations<sup>2</sup> with expertise in working with youth have thus been formalised to assist schools to meet complex and emerging educational needs, including those of refugee young people, who in addition might also experience health and settlement challenges (VFST 2007:19). Policies and practices in the different states within Australia have varied, with some exhibiting more sustained and comprehensive interventions than others. In Victoria, a state noted for pioneering culturally inclusive social policies, partnerships between community service organisations and federal and state level government departments in the fields of housing, health and education have led to a range of interventions to facilitate settlement and educational adjustments. To illustrate, community welfare organisations working in partnerships with education authorities have been responsible for producing resource materials to assist schools in engaging with refugee parents and young people, and in delivering peace and human rights education programmes within schools to increase awareness among young people of the conditions that produce refugees (see Foundation House 2008). Other organisations in Australia, including those supporting refugees in Queensland, have also found that partnerships have much to offer holistic service delivery.

However, at another level, as we show in the paper, these community partnerships have been associated with the global reach of neoliberal ideas in education and social policy over recent years. In this paper we draw on interviews conducted with community workers and government officers involved in school-community partnerships, to show how partnerships are working ‘on the ground’ in the city of Brisbane, in Queensland, Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> Community organisations are not-for-profit/ non-government organisations.

We found that in the area of refugee settlement and education the potential for community organisations 'to do things better' through partnerships is eroded by a broader state policy of competitive contractualism. This finding supports other research which associates inter-agency partnerships with the 'economisation of civil society' (Shamir 2008). In this context, partnerships have the potential to re-shape the identities of community organisations: instead of cooperating to deliver high quality, integrated services to support the education of refugee young people, community organisations are forced to compete with each other for scarce resources.

Our research was part of a larger project which investigated how Queensland schools were meeting the educational needs of refugee young people, funded by the Australian Research Council. The broader project was concerned with three lines of inquiry: first, the policy context and its impact on the provision of education for refugee youth were investigated, based on interviews with staff in selected Brisbane schools and officers in relevant federal and state government bureaucracies, together with an investigation of the web-sites of departments of education throughout Australia to ascertain policies in relation to refugee education (see, Sidhu and Taylor 2007; Taylor 2008, in press). Second, the focus of this paper, the partnerships between community service organisations and schools delivering settlement services to refugee youth and their families were investigated. Third, the experiences and realities of young people from a refugee background were documented through an analysis of their visual narratives (Ramirez and Matthews 2008).

The school interviews revealed that, in general, resources were inadequate to meet the complex needs of the growing numbers of refugee students in the schools (in terms of teachers, support staff and professional development). ESL teachers were 'bearing the brunt' of the insufficient funding in supporting the growing numbers of refugee students. They reported the difficulties they faced in providing holistic support for refugee students' needs: needs which were beyond their normal role of English language support, and which they felt ill equipped to provide (Taylor 2008). Our findings supported other Australian research which has reported that teachers often feel ill equipped and under resourced to meet the complex needs of the increased numbers of new arrivals (Cassity and Gow 2005; Miller et al. 2005). This paper investigates the partnerships supporting refugee education, with particular emphasis on the community organisations with most experience and expertise in working with refugees.

In Section One of this paper we outline our theoretical framework, governmentality, and its use in understanding partnerships between the state and civil society. Section Two uses the governmentality lens to critically review the literature on partnerships and identify the rationalities and practices that inform the use of partnerships in education and social policy. Section Three outlines the methodology informing the study and includes a brief overview of the policy context relating to the study, while Section Four reports on our research on the partnerships supporting the settlement of refugee young people. We conclude the paper in Section Five with a discussion of the disjunctures arising from the expectations held of partnerships, and the realities on the ground.

### **Governmentality : understanding governance in advanced liberal societies**

In the context of the decline in western Europe of the Keynesian Welfare State, the French historian Michel Foucault and others, were interested in understanding the changing architectures of government underpinning the neoliberal - or advanced liberal - state. Based on a genealogy of the modern liberal state in Europe, Foucault coined the neologism 'governmentality' to describe modern governance as a heterogenous undertaking of:

...different styles of thought, their conditions of formation, the principles and knowledges they borrow from and generate, the practices they consist of, how they are carried out, their contestations and alliances with other arts of governance (Rose, O'Malley and Valverde 2006: 84).

Governmentality provided the analytical tools to enable Foucault to identify and subsequently fill a gap in conventional political theory - the failure to examine the textured practices of governing in the every day (Rose et al. 2006).

Governmentality's more recent applications have been in interrogating various political projects of neoliberalism. Rather than portraying neoliberalism as a uniform ideology of governance and a political-economic reality, governmentality theorists have highlighted the innovative ways in which neoliberal practices and discourses are re-invented over time and in space, thus showing variations and mutations in neoliberal or advanced liberal governance (see Ilcan, Oliver and O'Connell 2007; Craig and Cotterell 2007 Larner and Craig 2005).

There is now a substantial body of literature on governance in advanced liberal states, covering domains as diverse as illegal immigration and refugee management (Christie and Sidhu 2006; Lui 2004; Ong 2003), state/civil society partnerships (Larner and Butler 2005;

Meade 2005; Rose 2000; Walters 2002) and corporate social responsibility (Barry 2005; Shamir 2008). We limit our discussion of this body of work to highlight key themes of relevance for this study. Given the prominence of advanced liberal governance in the public policy contexts of Britain, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, examples from these contexts will be used to illustrate how the articulation of state, civil society and market are used to govern the welfare sector.

Dean (2007:116-117) writes of two distinct and interconnected ways through which advanced liberal governance is materialised: first, through an *unfolding* of the political sphere into civil society, and second, an *enfolding* of the regulations and values of civil society into the political. Examples of the unfolding of the political into civil society are found in the partnerships, linkages and networks like the ones discussed in this paper that 'join up' state organisations with commercial, local and voluntary bodies found in civil society. The second operation - enfolding - whereby civil society values are mobilised and incorporated into the political domain is captured in appeals to mutual obligation, self-responsibility, hard work, and financial prudence. Policy prescriptions based on 'Third Way' politics (see Giddens 1998) and those that utilise the discourse of social capital to build 'cohesive communities' (see Putnam 1995) legitimise the bringing together of social and political domains.

Writing in a similar vein, Shamir (2008) describes the processes and mechanisms that comprise the 'economisation of the political', namely the embrace by state authorities of market like rationalities and practices, and the 'economisation of the social' - the practices, knowledges, and discourses that dissolve the distinction between economic and social domains of life. It is in and through the project of economising the social that civil society actors, including not-for-profit welfare bodies, are targetted as potential resources for government and sites for governmental action. As we discuss later in the paper, researchers using a governmentality approach have observed that the strategies used to govern civil society seek to build on and mobilise their agency and potential for optimal and moral conduct. To this end, commonsense understandings of civil society as a buffer against the excesses of both market and a bureaucratic state are called on (Amin 2005; Ilan and Basok 2004; Larner and Butler 2005; Larner and Craig 2005; Meade 2005). Civil society actors are thus expected to bind individuals together into a self-sufficient and responsible collective of 'community' at the same time as working according to the norms of professionalism and accountability. Nikolas Rose refers to this form of governance as *ethopolitics* - working as it does through values, beliefs, morals and sentiments (Rose 2000: 1399).



The restructuring of public services in accordance with neoliberal thought and policy has been the source of many studies; but the influence of neoliberalisation processes on civil society has been less studied. Of interest to this paper is how welfare organisations in refugee settlement - the objects of neoliberal governance - may themselves be being transformed into a means of neoliberal rule.

In the next section we use a governmentality lens to review the literature on partnerships to investigate the kinds of problems that partnerships are presumed to solve, their underpinning political rationalities, and the kinds of knowledges and identities generated in response to, and reaction against partnerships. We have extended our analysis to include a companion concept - *social capital* - that is associated with the policy discourse on partnerships. We supplement our analysis of the governmentality of partnerships in civil society with research on the operations of community service organisations in Canada, Ireland and New Zealand. We use this literature to illustrate new modes of governing and new mutations in the political project of neoliberalism.

### **Governmentalising partnerships**

The prominence of partnerships in British policy discourse has been associated with the rise of the Third Way politics, promoted by the Blair Labour government as a policy balm to heal the polarities arising from the 'free market' and deregulation agenda of the Thatcher Conservative government (see Giddens 1998). To mark itself out as contributing to an alternative political culture, New Labour mobilised a broader discourse of partnership with civil society. Based on his analysis of the discourses of partnership compacts, and interviews with welfare providers and government personnel, Morison (2000) concluded that the turn towards partnering helped steer the community sector away from a welfarist ethos, towards a managerial and economically rationalist ethos. Significantly, he found that compacts were framed in a 'language of recognition'; New Labour seemed keen to acknowledge the importance of the not-for-profit sector and the client populations they served, but were generally non-committal about the level of resources needed to discharge the responsibilities required of them. Morison argued that New Labour was less concerned with ensuring the application of democratic values of participation and accountability and more interested in instilling a value-for-money vision of market efficiency on the parts of public sector funding bodies. The Third Way thus provided the discursive legitimation to enable New Labour to continue with the Conservative government's approach to

reducing state responsibility for planning, financing and coordinating for the long term welfare of the social body. It also helped to uphold the prudential, self-managing and self-sufficient community sector as ideal subjects (see Rose 1999, 2000).

Reporting from the Irish context, Meade (2005) found that community service organisations engaged in partnership with the Irish government experienced a significant decline in their powers to influence the social policy process. She concludes (2005: 366) that their effectiveness to advocate on behalf of the socially excluded was thus compromised:

While the official language of Irish social partnership implies that there is participatory parity among the partners, [community] service participants reveal [that] their sole purpose is to contribute a legitimating social conscience to an overwhelmingly economic process.

Meade argues that partnerships steer community service organisations to participate in, and engage in a politics of recognition. This has had the collective effect of reducing their capacities to contribute to a transformative and redistributive agenda that she claims is desperately needed given the growing inequality in the 'Celtic Tiger'.

The policy trend in the US has been directed towards using partnerships informed by Putnam's (1993) model of social capital as an instrument to arrest social and economic ills. Significantly, the discourse of social capital places the responsibility for dealing with the problem of declining social capital with civil society, and not the state. Like the Third Way, Putnam's social capital model relies on, and perpetuates the notion of an unpoliticised community whose bonds and relations of exchange are informed by nostalgia, belonging and mutuality (Walters 2002: 391-392). And unlike Bourdieu (2004), Putnam fails to acknowledge the importance of economic and structural inequalities in reducing social capital (see also Cheong et al. 2007; Portes 2001). It is significant that Putnam's model has been by far the most influential amongst policymakers, governments and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank.

Partnerships have played a less salient role in Australian social policy in comparison to countries like the UK and the US where neoliberal reforms have been more strongly enacted. In the context of refugee settlement policies in Australia, the argument for social capital made by the state's immigration authorities has drawn on an imagined capacity to promote social cohesion and reduce the risks of social

isolation, disconnection and 'the costs imposed of anti-social behaviour' (DIMIA 2003: 320). The discourse of social capital has also been used by the community welfare sector (CMYI 2006: 18) to argue for improved access for public services for refugees:

One of the key tasks in the settlement process, then, is to facilitate both bridging and bonding relationships so that new arrivals are linked to public agencies and bridging across to other groups, while at the same time allowing for bonding and the development of crucial community supports and mutual care at a local level. [The] absence of either of these elements of social capital is a recipe for social exclusion.

Research on social capital partnerships in both western and non-western contexts points towards the insertion of non-government welfare organisations into neoliberalising moral economies, featuring unequal relations of exchange and discipline, that are nonetheless premised on a morality of responsibility and community obligation (Ilcan and Basok 2002; Ong 2003, 2006). In the sphere of Development, multilateral agencies have talked up 'participation', 'community' and 'partnership' while using disciplinary power to further economic liberalisation policies, all under the guise of 'good governance' (Porter and Craig 2004; Weber and Higgott 2005).

In response to public disquiet about 'rollback neoliberalism' in key neoliberal sites in western countries, a more 'inclusive liberalism' has emerged animated by a re-moralised ethos that emphasises partnerships, participation and consultation (Craig and Cotterell 2007; Porter and Craig 2004). At the same time, the soft institutionalism of partnership has been combined with the 'hard' institutionalism of New Public Management which emphasises market competition, contractualism and managerial accountability. These hard-soft hybrid modes are noted for imposing higher transaction costs for organisations at the coalface, for augmenting disciplinary surveillance by the state and in creating continuities with earlier neoliberal projects. Writing from the context of New Zealand, a country described as a laboratory for neoliberal policy, Larner and Butler (2005) and Larner and Craig (2005) point to the 'governmentalisation of partnerships'. Where partnerships were once 'localised initiatives emerging from the activities of like-minded individuals and/or organisations', they have been formalised and codified by the state as part of a new governance agenda to tackle economic and social change. Their effects have included the

creation of new institutional cultures for community organisations which lie in stark contrast to the tenets of welfare collectivism, social justice and community activism that they once operated under.

What is clear from the literature is the disjuncture between theoretical definitions of partnerships based on symmetrical and complementary relations, and partnerships in practice which are characterised by unequal relations. The research on partnerships in the Australian context has been mainly in other spheres of social policy (eg urban and rural governance, health) rather than education. A useful analysis of educational partnerships is provided by Cardini (2006) based on her study of the partnerships that constitute the Education Action Zones, a New Labour initiative in the UK. She concludes that EAZ partnerships tend to be regarded primarily as the means to achieve additional resources. Their success or failure ultimately rest on the navigation of issues of trust and power. The collaborative spirit of partnerships is significantly diluted not only by the quasi-market contexts in which they operate, but also as a result of the different organisational and professional cultures of partnering institutions. Similarly, in a Scottish study investigating voluntary sector organisations working in schools to support the mental wellbeing of children and young people, Spratt et al. (2007) found that there were tensions between the values of the organisations and those of the schools. In addition, they reported that there was an unequal division of power, where the statutory partners had control without responsibility, and the voluntary sector shouldered any risk.

In the following section the methodology used in our research on the partnerships supporting refugee education is outlined, followed by a brief overview of policy and provision relating to refugee settlement and education which provided the context for our research.

### **Methodology**

To investigate the partnerships supporting refugee education, we conducted interviews in the four main community service organisations with responsibility for working with refugees in schools. We limited our scope to inter-organisational partnerships between key community service organisations, those noted for their expertise and profile in providing support to refugees and migrants in Brisbane. We interviewed managers, coordinators and community workers. We also interviewed officers in four relevant government departments involved in funding and managing the partnerships. Our analysis draws on eighteen in-depth interviews conducted in

2006 with eleven community sector workers and seven officers working in State and Commonwealth government departments. The focus of the interviews was on their work with refugee students in schools (either directly or indirectly), and on any relevant programs and initiatives with which they were involved. We were particularly interested in how the partnerships were 'playing out' on the ground. Interviews were approximately one hour in duration, and were audio recorded and later transcribed. In some organisations, at their suggestion, two or more people were interviewed together. All the community service organisations studied were generic rather than ethnospecific in their focus - that is, they did not work with people of particular national or linguistic group (eg Sudanese, Somalian, Dinka, Nuer etc).

Before discussing our interview findings, we briefly review the policy and provision relating to refugee education in Australia which provided the context for our research. Programs and funding to support the education of refugee students came from multiple and fragmented sources: from the Commonwealth, state and also some local government sources. Commonwealth and state governments were using partnerships with community organisations to address the issues. For example, in Queensland, partnerships between schools and community organisations developed to assist schools with significant numbers of refugee students as part of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2002) program.

However, the main Commonwealth department involved in the provision of settlement services is the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), formerly the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). The Settlement Branch within DIAC manages both the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS) which provides immediate assistance to refugees on arrival in Australia, and the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) which funds community organisations to undertake migrant and refugee settlement. The Department's state and territory offices manage the contracts directly with community organisations.

A series of changes were made to settlement services following the *Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* (DIMIA 2003). The Review flagged the changing governance of refugee settlement services, and referred to: 'recent trends in government policy towards partnership between the

government, private and community sectors; [and] a whole of government shift towards an outputs/outcomes framework ...' (DIMIA 2003: 1). The review's overall aims included: '[to] strengthen partnerships among and between service providers and government; [and to] enhance the performance and accountability framework for the delivery of funded outcomes' (DIMIA, 2003: 1). The report on the review commented that the new funding arrangements represented 'a departure from the previous grants-based process to a competitive tendering/contracting environment' and that 'they also allow DIMIA to determine which organisation will most efficiently and effectively deliver the services that represent the best value for money' (170-171). The report also acknowledged problems with the competitive tendering process which some service providers were experiencing, and included extracts from submissions from community organisations outlining such problems. Following the review, a new Settlement Grants Program (SGP) was announced in April 2005, to commence in July 2006 - around the time we began conducting the interviews. Partnerships were introduced, with a tendering process in which community organisations involved in refugee support were required to compete for funds. They were also encouraged to form consortia so that DIMA could deal with larger providers. These changes, then, formed the background to our interviews.

### **Partnerships-on-the ground: complexities, tensions and power relations**

The interview data provided examples of the many ways that community service organisations were working with each other and with schools to support the settlement needs of refugee students. At the time of the interviews, most of their work was with students from the African region, mainly from Sudan. Community organisations were involved in after-school homework clubs, English classes and recreational programs. Community workers were also involved in one-to-one case management work with individual young people, in relation to transport problems, financial assistance for textbooks, mental health problems or childcare for teenage mothers.

*[One] of the reasons why we have a case worker at Bunyip School [Intensive ESL Centre] - is that for refugee students there are a whole lot of settlement issues ... Teachers are drowning in the settlement issues because they're trying to support them with their education. So there needs to be, in the school, settlement support. ...*

*It's also part of the context that we work with families. So while Steven<sup>3</sup> is working at the school we work with the family ... and that's really important. (CC5)<sup>4</sup>*

*Students are not able to focus on their education – and move on – until those settlement needs are addressed. (CC6)*

In addition, community organisations were also conducting information and professional development programmes for school staff, and providing contextual knowledge about various refugee groups including the circumstances which have led to their displacement. They are a vital lifeline to individual schools which may have little knowledge and experience of educating young people from a refugee background:

*My experience is that schools panic a lot and are alarmist about these issues. We probably receive calls where people want assistance but they are inappropriate. People think it's a mental health issue but it's not really. Once we drill down we find it's more about settlement, acculturation, school adjustment issues. I think people just want to refer somewhere and to get some expert in, and are not sure where to go. (GO5, state government)*

*We have had incredible demand for us to be present in schools. We started off at Bunyip School. Then we moved into the major high schools that receive from Bunyip, and the primary schools which are located in the suburbs where the new arrivals settle. We have not been able to keep up with that demand. ... The work in the schools is very flexible – some of it is group work, some of it is recreational, [having a] lunchtime presence. We work closely with the ESL unit in the schools. Now that we have a Youth Support Coordinator it is like a luxury for us. ... Having that position has made a big difference to the work we can do in schools and linking it to our other programmes, soccer, camps. (CC2)*

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<sup>3</sup> The names of all schools and workers have been changed.

<sup>4</sup> Abbreviations used in the interview extracts:

GO (Government Officer), CC (Coordinator, Community Service Organisation), CW (Community Worker)

Besides the provision of information workshops about refugees and their backgrounds and needs, community workers also provided a debriefing service for individual teachers, a role confirmed by teachers interviewed as part of our larger research project:

*Often teachers have the best of intentions and end up getting burnt out with trying to do so much for students ... As prepared as they can be, just having the support of someone who understands that it is hard and there are challenges, and that there are places they can refer to – and training for teachers – and understanding around the refugee experience, can just normalise that panic they may feel at having that extra responsibility in the classroom. (CW4)*

*I think teachers are under a lot of pressures from a number of levels. Teachers are always pleased to get information and always want more ... Feedback is always positive. I think teachers are often wanting to help and wanting to support the students but don't know how to. (CW3)*

Several of these extracts mention how short-falls in resources militate against integrated settlement support as well as preventing schools from providing needs-based educational support for refugee youth. Of particular concern was the need to move students from the sole 'reception' school [Bunyip School] where they received specialised language and learning support and more personalised attention to mainstream schools. There were concerns that without adequate educational and welfare follow up, students were at risk of experiencing significant learning problems and perhaps even dropping out of mainstream high schools:

*I'd like to see Bunyip well funded so they can keep students as long as is needed. Increasingly they have to move students on because of student numbers. The more settled [students] are the more competent they are with language. ... Increasingly they are having to move them on when they're not ready. (CC6)*

*The support at Bunyip enables people to stay in the school system, but unfortunately they can't stay long [at Bunyip]. Then I think the drop-out rate happens. I think we ought to look at some flexible schooling model for those*



*refugee students that have not had access to education that others have had – but still want to learn. (CC5)*

Policy programmes and funding regimes which prioritised mental health services such as torture and trauma counselling were also inadequate, and were conceptualised as separate and distinct from settlement support, even though both spheres of service delivery are important and inform each other.

*The field sees us as occupying a space that nobody else occupies (torture and trauma counselling). We have never had enough resources to meet the need, ever. There is always a waiting list and sometimes it has just been shocking. The Health money has never been enough to have resources left over to do something different. [The] funders say, 'instead of doing 1 to 1 counselling we are not stopping you dedicating a position to only doing community [work][but] we are not going to increase your funding so that you can do that as well as counselling. (CC1)*

Some interviewees offered insights about what changes were required to improve the situation in schools, in the vignette below a community worker outlines the need to reconceptualise the new education and settlement needs presented by refugee youth from Africa, not in deficit terms, but as opportunities to build new capacities in teaching and welfare provision:

*There is a perception that the African case load has had a huge impact on all services. It's true to some degree. It's also about our capacity to be flexible and responsible with this case load. ... It's really about how we make this a normal process of understanding diversity and understanding complexity, instead of just singling out refugee kids. The resources are not there at the moment to make that happen. (CC2)*

Clearly community organisations were filling an important need in a context where it seemed that schools were struggling to cope with the numbers of new arrivals. But interviewees identified significant problems with the current funding model itself which drives the formalisation of partnerships through the tendering process. The key funding body DIAC/DIMA has declared a preference for tenders that are either offered to a single large organisation with capacity in all aspects of refugee settlement service delivery (unlikely, given the complex and specialised needs of the

client population), or by consortia made up of multiple agencies each with relevant expertise. Mandatory partnerships emerge because: 'Unless you can demonstrate partnerships no one will fund you' (GO5, state).

Community service organisations also commented on the impact of these changes on their agencies' resources, noting the increased complexity involved in participating in tenders. This complexity was seen as giving larger organisations competitive advantage:

*[It's] part of the winning formula for these organisations because they are big, corporate, mainstream. They are very much run as a business. They have teams of people who do that stuff. (CW2)*

*That's right, for instance our other team member today is writing submissions. (CW1)*

A similar view was expressed by the coordinator of a different community service organisation recognised as a pioneer in the provision of specialist services to refugee communities:

*In the last round of tenders they [Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs] made it mandatory that you couldn't stand-alone. That you had to be either part of a sub-contracting arrangement, a consortium or a sole provider - which means that you provide every aspect of everything in the delivery of the Integrated Humanitarian Support Service. (CC1)*

Both community organisation staff and those in government questioned these top-down models of mandatory partnerships. In particular they were questioned by government officers with prior experiences of working with, and in, community sector organisations. Partnerships, it would appear, have become a way to secure scarce resources:

*The word partnership is very hollow. Everyone ticks off, 'we are in partnership with this, with that' ... But partnership doesn't mean you are working together and working to common objectives. [When] everyone needs to put together a funding submission – they are in partnerships with this and that – that is how you get money! (GO5, state)*

The preference for awarding tenders to larger bodies is also perceived as part of a policy of risk minimisation on the parts of funding bodies:

*I think the emphasis under IHSS [Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy], particularly in the last contract with increased emphasis on case management, [is] making sure that people don't fall through the system. I think in previous contracts there was some criticism ... people fell through cracks. (GO2, Commonwealth, state office).*

Using a moral logic of protecting vulnerable refugees from 'falling through the cracks' the new competitive funding model was introduced, with consequences for the relationships between organisations with a previous history of working in a collaborative and convivial fashion:

*These relationships are vital in a small sector - the multicultural sector . We all know each other - but over time everyone has been put up against each other competitively through some tendering process. The way they do funding now... and a lot of organisations have become competitive against each other instead of collaborative. (GO5, state, and former community services worker).*

*I would also have to say that the competitive tendering process that DIMA has constructed is a very destructive process and it has caused some very difficult relationships with other providers. People used to share information but it's much more closed now because people have got to compete for tender in a couple of year's time. (CC4)*

Government officials charged with the responsibility for implementing changes in the management of funding regimes showed sensitivity to the problems experienced by community organisations, but acknowledged limited capacity to resist the political rationality of competitiveness:

*[The] funding model is not going to change because it is all short-term and driven by political cycles. It is all short-term output driven. Nothing is long term. Looking at sustainability and integration, coordination? It's all in the rhetoric! You pick up any policy document or planning framework and it talks*

*about 'seamless, coordinated, integrated' ... but it doesn't happen on the ground because there are so many barriers. (GO5, state)*

The use of new risk-averse models of competitive contractualism to determine funding was also perceived to be bringing in new institutional players, with implications not only for the survival of existing community service organisations, but for the emergence of monopolistic practices in the long term. Workers referred to the:

*... new players doing short-term torture and trauma counselling with refugees. And it is usually big charities ... Centrecare, Anglicare, and in some cases, Relationships Australia ... These huge, huge entities who could come into the area, sacrifice the first 5 years, not making money, realising that it will all be tendered in 5 years time, and they will go for the lot and there will be millions to be made. And they have the capacity to do that. (CC1)*

Interviewees voiced concerns about the quality of the services offered by mainstream bodies with little experience or expertise in the provision of culturally sensitive services. They commented on the difficult choices they now needed to make - between strategic pragmatism to ensure organisational survival, and loyalty to a professional ideal of collegiality and quality in service provision. For example, one Coordinator commented:

*In Tasmania, I know [X service] there did not get any of the business from Immigration. But the people that did, Centrecare, keep asking the service in Melbourne, 'come and train us'. That is a real ethical dilemma! Our coalition partner did not win and the competitor is asking us to train [them]. (CC1)*

Another commented on the impact of the market rationalities being imposed on, and simultaneously embraced by, the welfare sector:

*It's like Toyota going to Mazda and asking them if they can look at their plant, to see if there is anything they can pick up and use. It's the same environment. (CC2)*

*[When] we were working in the [old] grants based way ... if someone just wanted just to come and see us to say hello and to find out what we are*

*doing , it would be 'of course, come on in. If I have the time, I will talk to you about anything'. But now we are talking about being in a business environment – 'is there anything that I can give you that can be used against me or my colleagues?'* (CC1)

Government officers interviewed expressed the view that the competitive funding model was in tension with the ethos of trust necessary to make partnerships work:

*Fundamentally, there is a lack of trust. I think the trust issues go back to the whole competitive stuff that has happened. It's a shame. But I don't think that can be changed until we change the funding model in government.*  
(GO5, state)

Interviewees were unanimous in their view that significant resources are required to make partnerships workable and viable. The partnerships fostered under conditions of competitiveness were seen to be inconsistent with organisational democracy, autonomy, and trust, long regarded as the values of community service organisations:

*There is very little thought put into the amount of resourcing that must go in sustaining partnerships. Partnerships are about building trust in working relations. Often services that have a different approach, different ideology, different philosophical base, different funding sources, different expectations, you name it, this is a big challenge.* (CC2)

*... it's the difficulty of tendering in the welfare sector. [People] who deliver [services] in that more community based way , are not skilled or equipped to write complicated tenders for \$50 million programs, and there's a great deal of reliance on that volunteerism, cooperation and spirit of 'we want to help people'. ... It doesn't take much to unravel the ... cooperative and helpful and motivated approach to helping refugees- that gets a bit lost in the fight over contracts and money, and turf and all the rest of it.* (GO7, Commonwealth.)

Commenting on the way in which community service organisations 'have to compete in a very cut throat way', one government officer said:

*Competitive tendering is not always the best solution and we should be rewarding these proposals that best describe how they are going to work collaboratively and don't replicate existing services in the area. And that should be one of our selection criteria. (GO6, state)*

Another interviewee commented: 'it's turning the community sector into a business model – [which is] not an appropriate model'. (CC3)

In summary, the interviewees in our study expressed the view that the changed policy terrain which formalised partnerships as a criterion for applying for successful tenders militated against the cooperation and trust necessary for successful partnerships. Seasoned community sector workers and managers noted that although the Brisbane-based community sector had a long history of working together in partnerships to provide support for refugees, in light of insufficient resources and short term funding individual organisations and workers were being forced to adopt competitive practices and identities.

### **Discussion and implications**

This paper has explored one instance of advanced liberal governance - partnerships between community sector organisations working within the broader context of refugee settlement services. Although partnerships have not been as strong a feature in Australian education and social policy as countries like the UK or the US where more robust neoliberal policy platforms were embraced, they have nonetheless made their appearance. Their effects have been equally discouraging, as suggested by our findings, which show that those partnerships informed by market competition and contractualism are having deleterious effects on the ability of community welfare organisations to provide specialised support for refugees. Although inter-agency cooperation and trust has long been a cornerstone of community service work in refugee and migrant settlement, the policy turn towards mandatory partnerships driven by competitive contractualism is weakening previous alliances.

Our research suggests that the relationships and commitments that have characterised the non-government welfare sector are now being harnessed towards the ends of cost-effectiveness and risk management, with consequences for professional and institutional subjectivities within the welfare sector, and implications for the work that they do. Several interviewees spoke about the preference of funding

bodies at federal and state levels of government to deal with larger organisations, based on the perception that such bodies would have the requisite infrastructure to ensure financial accountability.

By grafting policies and practices of competitive contractualism and managerial accountability on to a discourse of partnership, holistic service delivery and cooperation, we see the ethical reconfiguration of the non-government welfare sector. The 'ethical' and responsible welfare organisation is now one that provides value-for-money for the government. In this context of managerial accountability, new players are succeeding in the area of refugee settlement by crafting themselves as providers of a value-for-money service, rather than as experts in a highly specialised area of welfare support and advocates of social justice.

Based on our work on community service organisations involved with refugee settlement in Brisbane, we see partnerships as sites for the exercise of disciplinary neoliberalism – namely the development of practices and knowledges according to neoliberal values of competitiveness and productivity. And it is through a series of 'neutral' management practices and instruments that 'economisation of the social' takes place (see Shamir 2008).

As well, in response to the managerial requirements imposed by funding bodies to demonstrate accountability and efficiency, community service organisations are directing attention and scarce resources towards formalising their operational processes, making explicit benchmarks and standards, conducting audits of their effectiveness and undertaking measures to safeguard their intellectual property (personal conversation, CC2). These burdens have increased workloads in an already stretched sector. They have also prompted some organisations to alter their recruitment practices to attract staff with managerial skills. All of these developments suggest that the organisational survival of civil society welfare bodies is now premised on adopting knowledges and practices which Shamir (2008) describes as neoliberal epistemology.

Our findings also support those of Meade (2005) and Ilcan and Basok (2004), that those community service organisations which raise the ire of the government by their advocacy work on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees can find themselves as objects of surveillance and discipline. The disciplinary imperative to steer welfare bodies away from advocacy work was reiterated by our interviewees who also

identified time constraints arising from the onerous reporting requirements and tender preparations that steer them away from advocacy work.

Civil society has long been constituted in social and political theory as a network of independent groups that act to counter-balance the power of the state. Today, the allure of 'government by partnership' rests on promises of self-management, self-determination, professionalisation and autonomy for community sector organisations. Partnerships help to discursively re-engineer the state from a disinterested and distant bureaucratic entity to one that is engaged with emotions, values and grassroots democracy (Larner and Butler 2005; Larner and Craig 2005; Rose 2000). However, in the face of politico-economic imperatives that drive policies of fiscal conservatism, risk management and accountability, a form of social governance is emerging that is resolutely neoliberal. As Morison (2000) observes, it is not a matter of the state creating whole epistemologies and idioms of political power; instead the state has been effective in using civil society as a resource to govern towards convenient ends.

Partnership, then, can be regarded as a 'conceptual apparatus' which extends *recognition* to the role of community service organisations as instruments of civil society. This enables governments to claim that they are fostering a new participatory democracy by working with civil society organisations. However, our work reinforces other claims (Meade 2005; Larner and Butler 2005) that civil society actors involved in partnerships are disabled in their attempts to facilitate broader structural change, including making meaningful contributions to concrete strategies of redistribution to address social inequalities.

We suggest that there is an urgent need for all civil society actors to understand themselves as active subjects where there is more at stake than legitimating economic rationalist policies and practices however innocuous and responsible these might sound. While walking out of the corporatist partnership project is clearly not a feasible option for many community service organisations, it is important that those who have adopted the recognitive justice model pay attention to the task of finding alternative ways to address their client populations' needs. Re-scaling their advocacy and activism by joining coalitions that engage with supranational, national and local spheres is one such possibility. Critically, if refugees are to enjoy the benefits of social citizenship, it is imperative that the organisations at the coalface of service delivery collaborate to bring together the redistributive and recognitive justice



agendas.

Clearly schools play an important role in the settlement process and our research indicates that schools need help to support the complex needs of new arrivals. There are clear advantages of involving community sector organisations with local expertise in refugee support – especially when a holistic approach is needed – and they are clearly in demand in the schools. However, our research has shown that partnerships between schools and community organisations need to be adequately resourced if cooperative and effective relationships are to be sustained. It is clear that education bureaucracies and government departments such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship need to provide sufficient resources to maintain functional partnerships so that they are able to do the important work they were formed to do in the settlement and education of refugees.

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