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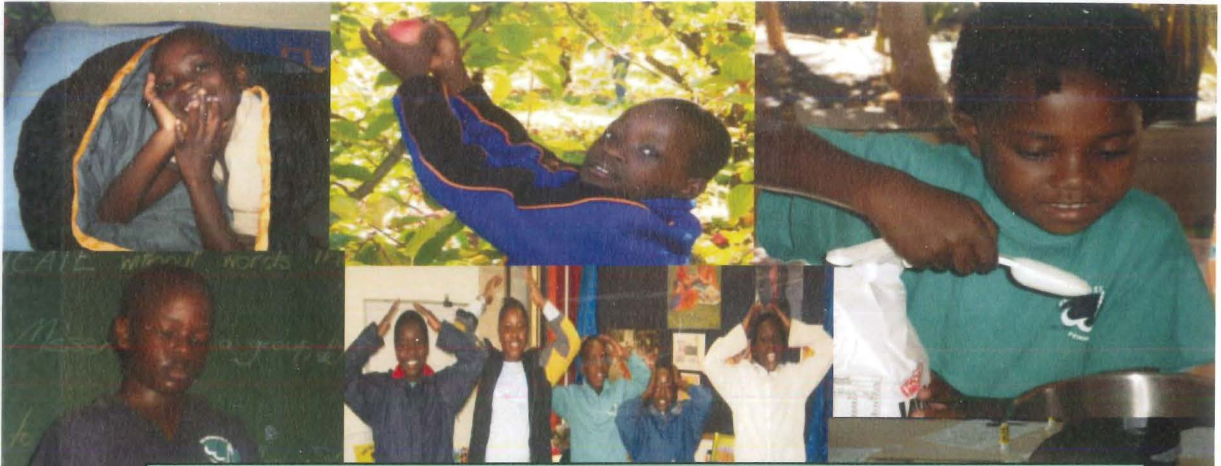
WAITING IN LINE
African Refugee Students in Western Australian Schools

Yvonne Haig and Rhonda Oliver

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Bunbury, Western Australia

2007

Waiting in Line

The name of this project has been chosen to reflect the essence of the African refugees' experience: As refugees they have waited at borders to leave their war-torn countries; once they reached a refugee camp they often waited for shelter, food, water, medical attention and more generally for a sense of safety; in the camps they waited, often in vain, for education or for something to fill the long hours. And while they waited for their most basic needs to be met, they also waited for a third country to accept them as refugees.

Even when they eventually were accepted into their host country - in this case Australia - the waiting was not over. Now they wait for suitable housing, for medical care, for appropriate education and training, and for work. Some still wait to feel safe. Many still wait for the understanding they require as refugees.

Those who work with these most vulnerable of Australia's new citizens ask when the waiting will be over. Despite their best efforts it seems the waiting goes on.

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Introduction

This study has been commissioned by the Westralian Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (WATESOL) to determine the perceptions and expectations of those stakeholders involved in the education of African refugee children.

To do this study first a literature review was undertaken in order for the researchers to determine how much information was available and to improve their understanding of the subject matter. It appears that there is a growing body of research in Australia investigating the social, psychological and educational needs of African refugees, particularly those who have faced trauma (Earnest, Housen, & Gillieatt, 2007; Muir, 2004).

Then a mainly qualitative study was undertaken which included focus groups and individual interviews to elicit information from the main stakeholders in the care and education of African refugee children. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to ESL and mainstream teachers to elicit more general information. Overall there were 117 participants in the research study, including parents and caregivers; teachers (ESL and mainstream); school deputy principals; ethnic education assistants; a youth worker and officers from the Graylands ESL Resource Centre (for details see section entitled Resources); the Mirrabooka Migrant Resource Centre and another non-government support agency. The data were analysed and the main issues that emerged are presented in the attached report.

Background to the Study

Over the past decade the demographics of the Australian refugee population has changed with implications for the existing refugee support structures in our community, particularly the school system. In the late 1990s, about half of the refugee population was comprised of people from the former Yugoslavia (West, 2004). These children, while having suffered the trauma of war, had often had some type of schooling in their home country and were for the most part literate in their first language upon arrival in Australia. There were also African refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea who represented a smaller proportion of the refugee population at that time (Cassity and Gow, 2005). However, of the total 16,759 humanitarian visas that have been granted by the Australian government to African-born people since 2001, and 65% were issued to refugees from Sudan (DIMIA cited by Miller, Mitchell and Brown, 2005). During 2005, there were increasing numbers of refugees from other African countries like Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia (Cassity and Gow, 2005). All of these African refugee groups are linguistically and culturally diverse, not only between their countries but even within their borders. For example, the Sudanese refugees, albeit from the same country, belong to different tribes which have different languages, religions and traditions

(Miller, et al, 2005). However, there are also many similarities among these people - all of the African refugee groups have endured ongoing civil war with the associated high levels of trauma and limited, if any, schooling (Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture [VFST], 2005). The limited schooling and trauma faced by the African refugee children are causing the Australian schools, the teachers, and the community to rethink the way that schooling and support services are implemented.

For schools, and particularly mainstream and ESL teachers, the African refugee students present new challenges. In an investigation of teachers' perspectives on their African refugee students, Miller, et al. (2005) found that teachers grappled with issues such as helping the students to deal with their trauma and their new way of life; meeting classroom demands for literacy and communication; and obtaining additional needed funding as well as appropriate learning resources. In response, there are many organisations that are working to help teachers deal with this new situation. For example, in New South Wales, the Refugee Resettlement Program has designed materials which are school based and aid the parents and family in their cultural transition (FICT- Families in Cultural Transition). These materials were developed from The Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). There is also a teacher development program called Understanding Torture and Trauma which gives teachers strategies for refugee issues (Palmer, 2000). In Victoria, the VFST has produced a guide for schools to become 'refugee-ready' advocating a whole school approach, professional development for staff, a stable classroom environment, supportive curriculum and programs, partnerships with agencies and communication with parents (VFST, 2005). These and other such programs are helping schools and teachers meet the new challenges the refugee students bring.

The African refugee students themselves are struggling with these issues. The VFST (2005) provides a comprehensive list of issues that Sudanese students (and presumably other African refugees) may encounter when learning in the Australian schooling system. These issues concern language and communication, literacy and numeracy, learning and development, culture and family, trauma, health, and settlement issues. Most importantly, English language skills are essential if the African refugee children are to access education in Australia (Coventry, Guerra, McKenzie, Pinkey, 2002). There are few significant studies which have dealt with the perspectives of African refugee children at school. However, Cassidy and Gow (2005) investigated the schooling experiences of 65 African refugee high school students in Western Sydney and found that they were struggling academically mainly due to their lack of previous schooling. In addition, the students felt socially disconnected as a result of the trauma and 'lost time' experienced in refugee camps. Peer-mentoring, problem solving with community and career guidance were suggested to help the students deal with these issues. Additional studies concerning the young people and children from Africa and the issues they are facing are needed to provide information to develop and implement effective school and educational programs, create appropriate materials for teachers and schools, and involve the community in projects. It is hoped that the current study will help address these needs and gaps in the literature.

Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program

Australia's Immigration Program, first implemented in 1988 as the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), includes a humanitarian component for refugees and others with humanitarian needs. The current Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program (RHP) has two components (onshore and offshore). The onshore (asylum or protection) component offers protection to people who have already entered Australia either with or without a visa, or as temporary entrants. The offshore (resettlement) component offers resettlement as a protective measure for those people who are in need of humanitarian assistance and for whom resettlement in another country is the most appropriate available option (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Fact Sheet 60, 2007). The offshore resettlement component has two categories of permanent visa applying to those people identified as refugees or those recognised under the SHP. Refugee visas are for "people who are subject to persecution in their home country, who are typically outside their home country, and are in need of resettlements". The SHP visa applies to "people outside their home country who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of human rights in their home country". The Australian Government also offers a temporary offshore visa category under the Offshore Resettlement program which is for "people who have bypassed or abandoned effective protection in another country and for whom humanitarian entry to Australia is appropriate".

Australia is one of only 10 countries in the world with an established annual resettlement program, and it continually ranks among the three largest resettlement programs globally, along with the US and Canada (http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/Discussion_paper.pdf). During 2005/06, 14,122 humanitarian visas were granted. During 2006-07 the Australian Government announced a program to meet onshore protection needs that includes 13,000 new places, with 6000 places allocated to the Refugee category and 7,000 places made available to the SHP.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for working with countries, including Australia, to provide international protection to refugees under the auspices of the United Nations (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Fact Sheet 60, 2007). The resettlement priorities of the UNHCR recommend the regional focus of Australia's RHP remains on Africa in 2006/07, followed by the Middle East and South West Asia, with an increased focus on Asia.

Since 2000-01, the majority of grants provided by Australia's Offshore Resettlement Program have been allocated to people from Africa (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007). This represents a shift from previous years, when the majority of grantees were refugees from Europe, the Middle East and Southwest Asia (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2005). In 2005-06, the highest percentage of humanitarian visa grantees (55.65%) was the refugees from African nations (DIMIA, 2006). Although this percentage represents a fall from 2003-2004 (70.78%) and 2004-2005 (70.16%), the overall number of African refugees has increased to those levels shown in the table below.

Table 1

Offshore Visa Grants by Top Ten Countries of Birth (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007

Sudan	Iraq	Afghani stan	Burma & Myanmar	Liberia	Burundi	Sierra Leone	Congo (DRC)	Eritrea	Iran	Others
3726	2150	1799	1118	888	740	460	363	274	232	1008

In 1984/85, Sudan was ranked 75th in Australia as the country of birth for permanent migrants (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1301.0 - Year Book Australia, 2007). In 1994/95, Sudan moved up the list to number 44 and in 2004/05 they were ranked 5th. Of the 13,200 migrants arriving under the Humanitarian Program in 2004/05, the greatest proportion were born in North Africa and the Middle East (61%), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (28%) and Central Asia (6%). The proportion of permanent settlers arriving under the Humanitarian Program is also increasing, rising from 7.1% in 2000/01 to 13.2% in 2004/05. These figures show that the importance placed on assisting African refugees is increasing.

The shift toward an increase in the number of humanitarian visas granted to African refugees has impacted the services provided by Australia's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) in the areas of education, health services and community services. The IHSS provides specialised services for the newly arrived humanitarian visa grantees with the aim of helping them to achieve self sufficiency as soon as possible. These services are usually provided for about six months with the potential to extend this period for particularly vulnerable grantees.

African Refugees in Western Australia

In 2003-04, 536 refugees and 685 Special Humanitarian Visa holders were settled in Perth and 10 refugees were settled in Mandurah (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2005). According to the 2001 Census data, there were 600 persons identified with a Somali ancestry; 300 each with a Sudanese or Eritrean ancestry; and 400 with an Ethiopian ancestry. This represented an increase of 134% since the 1996 Census. More recent Census data were not available at the time of writing, therefore current numbers of refugees from these countries can not be provided, but the trend toward an increase is evident.

Refugees

What Makes African Refugees Different

The extremely different circumstances of the African people compared to those from other countries have resulted in Australia altering the way in which these individuals are catered for. Most of the African people arriving in Australia on Humanitarian Visas have endured significant hardship, fleeing war into refugee camps where they may have remained for decades and in which they often suffered violence, malnutrition and no education. In contrast, the children from countries such as Asia and Europe, while still suffering the traumas of war, have often had some type of education in their home country and are usually literate in their first language. An

additional problem for African refugees is that they come from a wide variety of national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, as demonstrated by the VFST (2005), the similarities are that all of the African refugee students have experienced ongoing civil war, they have had limited, if any, schooling and they have endured high levels of trauma.

The Australian Government's regional focus on Africa for offshore humanitarian resettlement resulted in thousands of refugees arriving from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1990s (Cassity & Gow, 2005). These people are now established groups. After 2000, the focus shifted to refugees from the Southern Sudan area and then in 2005, the focus again shifted towards Liberia (West Africa) and the countries of Central Africa (Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo). The difficulty in classifying these people in terms of identity, language, community and settlement needs is exacerbated by Australia's general lack of knowledge about Africa.

Cassity and Gow (2005) explain further that some of these refugees are minorities in their own countries (such as the Southern Sudanese) and they remain small, splintered groups in Australia. They may have resided in more than one country and young people in particular have immense challenges to face including combining new schooling with domestic and family responsibilities, and the moral obligations to extended family members they have left behind in Africa.

The African refugees bring immense civil war trauma with them including experience of torture, rape, family separation and loss, and community breakdown. These findings are supported by Miller et al., (2005) who note that teachers had identified a number of factors which differentiated African refugee students from former groups including the length of time spent in refugee camps or as asylum seekers in other countries; the trauma associated with war and refugee camps; severely disrupted schooling; fragmented families; illiteracy in their first language; hybridised forms of a second language other than English (i.e. Arabic); lack of parental education; highly assertive or aggressive behaviour; and, unrealistic expectations and goals.

Muir, (2004) makes the point that students from Africa tend to be perceived as a single group and teachers need to be aware that these people are all individuals who have personal likes/dislikes and a social 'strata' that teachers, and other service providers, may not recognise. Muir also supports other literature in stating that these students may suffer psychological scarring from their traumatic experiences.

Education

The Importance of School

The VFST, in their publication 'Rebuilding Shattered Lives' (1998), identified four main ways in which war-induced trauma and its associated atrocities, presents:

1. In the first instance, the wars in these countries create "a state of terror and chronic alarm" resulting in feelings of uncertainty and helplessness in the people of that country.
2. The murder, dislocation and banning of cultural practices associated with these wars disrupts "basic and core attachments to families, friends, religious and cultural systems" creating a deep sense of loss and the breakdown of social cohesion.
3. People witnessing death and destruction results in "the destruction of central values of human existence".
4. Finally, rape, torture and other atrocities perpetrated in these wars may create "shame and guilt" which result in fundamental changes in belief systems about the self, others and the world.

This war-induced trauma manifests in symptoms and behaviours that can disrupt daily functioning and quality of life. Thus, for refugees arriving in Australia, their social networks become crucial; however, as many of these students arrive in groups that are not necessarily their own family they can be further traumatised.

Earnest, Housen and Gillieatt (2007) noted that school is important as it creates social support, but they also identified that there was a tension between emotional and educational needs, citing strong evidence linking effective social engagement to mental health outcomes. These authors stated that the "disruption of family and social networks can deplete the resources which are key to managing the emotional and practical challenges". This is further supported by Cassity and Gow (2005), who noted in their study that the biggest challenge for recently arrived young Southern Sudanese refugees is to identify a community to which they can safely belong. This is why schools are so important for developing feelings of attachment and belonging to society, and are loosely referred to as "cultural citizenship". The primary experience of belonging in Australian society for recently arrived refugees is often in school, given that they seldom venture far from the local area where they have settled. Moore (1997) also considered establishing a sense of belonging as the major challenge for young refugees, who may feel guilt for 'betraying' their cultural origins, but who also suffer isolation from the broader community if they do not embrace the new culture. Burnett and Peel (2001) also suggest that becoming part of the local school community can be one of the most therapeutic events for the refugee child.

All of the available literature appears to support the notion that education and schooling are critical to the rehabilitation of refugee children. McBrien (2005) cites a number of studies to support this:

> "The UNHCR stated that education is not only a fundamental human right but also an essential component of refugee children's rehabilitation (note that this ref does not have an author 2000). Researchers have indicated that education is crucial for restoring social and emotional healing (Eisenbruch, 1988; Huyck & Fields, 1981; Sinclair, 2001). Educators and the school environment are essential in facilitating socialisation and acculturation of

refugee and immigrant children (Hones & Cha, 1999; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). Unfortunately, when teachers have not been sufficiently trained to understand the difficulties and experiences of refugee children, they frequently misinterpret the students and their families' culturally inappropriate attempts to succeed in their new environment (Hones, 2002; Lee, 2002; Trueba et al., 1990)".

McBrien (2005) also cites Sinclair (2001), and her survey of education designed for emergency situations. This study found that restoring a sense of normalcy and hope through emotional and social healing is assisted by early educational responses. Her study also revealed a major need for successful adjustment for refugee children being resettled in the US was through "meeting the psychological and social needs of stressed and traumatised children through education". Sinclair found that the two most predominant themes in terms of the needs of refugee children were their psychosocial wellbeing and language acquisition. Psychosocial wellbeing included a sense of safety, a sense of self, and adjusting to the cultural expectations of the new host country while maintaining a connection to their own heritage. Schooling has the capacity to support both of these needs.

Limited Schooling

Students from refugee backgrounds typically have had little consistent schooling, if any at all. Students arriving in Australia, including Western Australia, are given a relatively short period of intensive English language and school socialisation training of 6 months to two years in Intensive English Centres, and are then placed into mainstream schooling.

McBrien (2005) cites Cheng (1998) and Allen (2002) who wrote that children may be competent at spoken, colloquial English but considerably behind in academic English, and so these children may be placed into special education classes or low academic tracks despite their high capability (see also Suárez-Orozco, 1989; Trueba et al., 1990). This is a language problem that is often overlooked by classroom teachers. Students are often unfamiliar with "academic English", or the language of instruction. For example, although they may be able to talk about the causes of a war, they may be at a loss if asked to "list the factors" that brought about a war (Allen, 2002, p. 6). In common with Deem and Marshall (1980), Cheng (1998) recognised numerous cultural differences that might be misinterpreted by teachers as deficiencies such as short responses, unexpected nonverbal expressions, and embarrassment over praise. Cheng (1998) called for teachers to learn about the cultures and experiences of their international students in order to facilitate their acquisition of language and academic skills.

Miller et al., (2005) describe refugee students with interrupted schooling as facing a daunting task in acquiring English in the mainstream, even following intensive programs. For example, 10,000 ESL students studied in North America showed that even a one-year program of sheltered English immersion was significantly unrealistic. While attempting to catch up to the 'native speaking' peers, who themselves are developing academic and language competency, the refugee students must acquire social communication skills as well as academic writing and speaking skills. Other research cited by Miller et al., (2005), and undertaken by Hakuta, Butler and Witt,

corroborated the body of research and evidence which estimated that 'in optimum circumstances it takes three to five years to develop oral language proficiency and four to seven years to gain academic English proficiency'. The study goes on to state that the times are much longer for some groups, including those with interrupted schooling, with some studies suggesting it can take up to ten years for such students to acquire academic proficiency. Therefore, the complexity of language acquisition for refugee students should not be underestimated, particularly for those who are further disadvantaged through their experiences or family situations.

Cognitive development which has taken place over many years in the classroom is clearly one of the key elements which refugee students are missing when they have had interrupted schooling (Miller et al., 2005). In addition, Australian language features a highly specific form of English incorporating specific behaviours and prior knowledge, along with cultural expectations and understandings. Years of formative experiences, knowledge and many skills and behaviours which these students are lacking, help with knowing 'how' to be a student, including looking like one. The oral fluency which some students achieve quite quickly can mislead teachers into expecting the students to acquire academic skills quite easily. Miller et al., (2005) describe the deficiencies of students with interrupted schooling as including a lack of the topic-specific vocabulary of academic subjects; poor understanding of register and genre; limited cultural background to structure their understanding; a lack of social understanding and learning strategies to process content; and poor literacy in their first language (which is needed to support the acquisition of a second language). These deficiencies are compounded by the complexity and specificity of cognitive academic language used in schools.

Current ESL Provision for African Refugee Students

The current provision of ESL education to African refugee students varies widely across Australian states (Miller et al., 2005), ranging from nine months in some Victorian IECs up to two years in Western Australia. This study by Miller et al., (2005) was based in Victoria, and reported nine programs in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Additionally, in Victoria during 2003, the State Government provided ESL funding of $22.9 million to mainstream schools to support 46,821 students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Another $7 million was allocated to 243 government schools for the provision of multicultural education aides to assist students on a one-to-one basis in the classroom, and also to provide a vital link between the school and the parent/caregivers. A survey of the 46,821 ESL secondary students revealed that only 6.9% started school in Australia at or after normal commencement age, with minimal, severely interrupted schooling. However, as Miller et al., (2005) and the other previously cited literature has demonstrated, the difficulty of having a consistent definition for 'interrupted schooling' leads to a concern that the real number of students in this category could be much higher. Miller et al., cite an example of one study where students stated they had received several years of education, which actually only consisted of a few hours per week of non-continuous instruction in refugee camps.

The current Victorian program provides 6-12 months of targeted English language support (Miller et al., 2005) and was designed for students with significant years of prior schooling. However, this length of time is grossly insufficient for students with interrupted schooling, particularly if they have lost a parent or been in refugee camps.

The problems highlighted by Miller et al., (2005) include the inflexibility of current programs in relation to time allocated to students who have differing needs and the movement of children to mainstream schools which is not based on academic progress in English. For example, the decision may be based on the student's oral proficiency, which may not indicate the student's readiness for the high cognitive and linguistic demands associated with mainstream classroom education. Research cited in this study by Miller makes recommendation that class sizes should be very small (sizes of six for preliterate students); tailored catch-up programs should be provided and outcomes in relation to mainstream schooling should be assessed and monitored.

Educational Needs

As previously mentioned, Sinclair's (2001) study, cited by Miller (2005), highlighted the need for successful adjustment through education. This requires meeting needs such as a sense of safety, a sense of self, and adjustment to the cultural expectations of the new country, while still maintaining the connection to their own cultural heritage. In addition to these needs, Miller (2005) discussed that teachers have identified other deficiencies such as organisational skills, time management, the ability to organise a folder or simply find yesterday's worksheet. The teachers supported the fact that interrupted schooling has significant consequences, not only on literacy, but on numeracy and science, where 'everything is skill based' and is built on previous skill sets, making it difficult for teachers to target learning at the right level as these students have variable skills and gaps in their skills. For some secondary students, teachers needed to go 'back to basics', as some students did not know the difference, for example, between fractions and percentages. The teachers in this study acknowledged that ESL teachers are better equipped for ESL students, and that significant mainstream teaching experience is of 'little use' to these students. Teachers highlighted stresses such as feeling scared, and feeling that they are not coping well and not doing a good job. These are findings that have many parallels with those in the current study.

Other research has supported Miller's (2005) findings. Ali and Jones (2000), in a study on Somali students, highlighted that most of these students have patchy or non-existent school experience, with the exception of Koranic schools. The students found it difficult to deal with new behavioural expectations and new and sometimes apparently random rules, as well as having to concentrate on learning for long periods of time. As mentioned above, the students, in addition to needing to learn basic literacy (reading and writing), did not know the basic maths and science concepts and the gaps between their needs and levels of skills, ability and performance varied. Again, these findings are similar to those found in the current research.

The study by Ali and Jones (2000) also highlighted four key barriers to achievement: the impact of previous experience on learning; school factors that may hinder achievement; issues of exclusion and out of school factors that hinder achievement. Under the first barrier, the impact of previous experience on learning, Ali and Jones (2000) discussed that many of the refugee students in the study were traumatised by witnessing killings and violence, not knowing where their parents were, and rejection by caregivers. Although some of the Somali students in the study were born in Australia, they were still suffering indirect effects of their parents' experiences. Although not common (but often over-reported), some of the students exhibited very

angry, insecure and aggressive behaviour, including violence, particularly when they felt they were being victimised, possibly leading to a negative stereotype. There are many synergies between these findings and those of the current study.

The second barrier identified by Ali and Jones (2000), school factors that may hinder achievement, encompassed a range of issues. These included unfamiliarity with the English system of education and needing to learn the new language quickly in order to connect with the curriculum. In addition, violence, aggression, issues such as racism and other forms of inter-group conflict were found to cause a problem for some of the Somali refugee students in the study. The need for information on the student's background, family circumstances and previous schooling experience was seen as an issue, including how their education system worked and how the classroom operated in the child's home country. The study identified that the cultural barriers within the curriculum itself inhibited learning, with teachers stating that they frequently needed to explain cultural concepts. This is something that is also reflected in the findings of the current study.

In the study by Ali and Jones (2000), the issue of exclusion as a barrier to achievement was identified by teachers as a sensitive issue. However, the schools involved felt that exclusion rates were relatively low, and were generally (in the case of the Somali refugee students) related to fighting or other forms of extreme anti-social behaviour. In spite of this, the responses were positive in that the schools felt that most students had settled in quickly and were responsive to being corrected if their behaviour was seen as inappropriate. Out of school factors hindering achievement identified in this study included racism, poverty, high mobility rates as a result of housing policies, health, translation issues, difficulties relating to immigration status and students losing touch with their own culture, particularly in relation to language. A number of these issues were also identified in the current research.

Educational issues

The parents/caregivers involved in this current study highlighted a number of concerns in relation to the biggest challenges faced by their children in commencing schooling in Australia. These concerns included language acquisition, losing their first language, adapting to a new environment, discrimination, the vast difference in culture, the homework and the different type of school discipline.

Creativity/Abstract Concepts
The high school teachers included in this study highlighted the problem that African refugee students had with 'thinking of something to write' and identified that students needed more literal and less abstract material. This supported the findings of Sangster (2002) who found that the most difficult class activities for refugee students included those that relied on written instruction or explanation, imagination or visualisation of abstract concepts, a shared cultural background of life experiences and those with less structure or input from the teacher.

Study Skills
The teachers involved in the current study found that study and organisational skills were lacking, and that students did not understand even basic responsibilities such as

bringing pens and paper to class or keeping their file in order. This supported the findings in Sangster's (2002) study on adult students who had the same problems with organisation.

<u>Language – English and L1</u>

A number of literature sources cited in McBrien (2005) highlighted some of the difficulties associated with second language acquisition. Many of the studies identified that immigrant students with good English language skills adjusted much better to their US school environments than students with poor English language skills. In addition, those students who struggled with language acquisition, or who used their native language or had heavy accents were punished. A study by Nicassio (1983) cited by McBrien (2005) supported the evidence that students with poor language skills were Allenated; that children viewed English language acquisition as important to their future success in the new country; that more than half the children found English acquisition difficult; and, that more than 80% assisted their parents with development of English skills. Other research cited included Deem and Marshall (1980) who found that there were problems teaching a second language in schools where there was no special program for language acquisition and explained that learning materials often presume the student is familiar with the host country's language and history. They, along with Freire and Macedo (1987) suggested the use of a 'language experience' approach drawing on the student's personal experience, strengths and knowledge to acquire new information and increase vocabulary and reading/writing capability. This approach would require sensitivity and knowledge on the part of the teacher, as some of the refugee students may have past experiences which are painful, and which they may be reluctant to disclose. Also cited were Cheng (1998) and Allen (2002) who identified that many classroom teachers overlook that children may be competent at oral English but lacking in academic English, possibly leading to children being placed in special education or low academic classes despite potential high ability. These findings support those of the current study, discussed in detail in later sections, where teachers acknowledged that they were often deficient in the knowledge required to successfully facilitate the acquisition of English language and academic skills.

The literature cited by McBrien (2005) is extensive and, in addition to the above references, includes Olsen (2000); Portes and Rumbaut (2001), Gebhard (2003) and Timm (1994). Most of the literature highlights the correlation between acquiring English and losing native language skills, the lack of knowledge about refugees and their culture among teachers, the impact of the refugees' trauma on language acquisition and the availability of parental and social support. McBrien (2005) concluded that discrimination, cultural dissonance, and the reception that refugees receive from their host society affected the students' adjustment, identity and language learning. McBrien stressed the importance of teachers familiarising themselves with the refugees' experiences and cultures.

<u>Transition to Mainstream</u>

Thomas and Collier (1997) cited by Garcia (2000) found that students with poor English proficiency initially made dramatic gains in English acquisition programs, which tended to lead teachers and administrators to the incorrect assumption that the students will continue to do as well in their English acquisition. When refugee students achieve below the levels of native English speaking students it usually goes

undetected because the progress of these students is not typically monitored in the mainstream classrooms. Cassity and Gow (2005) also found that refugee students had difficulty with the transition from the IEC to secondary school due to the new school structure, the different learning skills and classroom activities, and the structure and speed at which they were expected to work, particularly during group work. While students were positive about their IEC experience, feeling a sense of community and belonging and knowing each others families, the contrast with the larger and more multicultural high school setting was marked. In the mainstream high schools the students felt anxious, often had no friends, were confused by the different buildings and rooms and by the different subject classes. The study by Cassity and Gow (2005) also found that Australian students were singling out the refugee students and putting them down with comments about them being 'dumb' and not being able to speak English. The students had to deal with racism, fighting and schoolyard bullying, all of which added to the difficulties of the transition from the 'safe' IEC environment to the unfamiliar high school setting. Some of the students in this study spoke of friends who had 'dropped out' of high school due to the stresses associated with this transition, even though they had done well in the IEC. Once more these accounts are similar to those reflected in the current study.

Similar to Cassity and Gow's (2005) findings, teachers in a primary IEC in Western Australia expressed concern that the IEC students are singled out, not only by the mainstream students but also by staff and teachers of the mainstream host school. In the IEC high schools, teachers and students both stated that the Australian-born students would deliberately provoke refugee students.

Homework

Some of the literature showed that parents are unable to help their children with homework due to language/literacy barriers (Cassity & Gow 2005; Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006). Szente et al., (2006) stated that parents want the teachers to help children with homework as they do not understand English and do not understand the subjects and the way they are being taught. Cassity and Gow (2005) also support this, finding that the parents' lack of basic English literacy and education in general meant that they were unable to support children when doing homework tasks. The lack of a parent/caregiver with familiarity in Western culture and knowledge of modern academic practices results in the children facing low educational outcomes or failure (Dooley, 2004). Other reasons emerged in the current research, and these are discussed in greater detail in a later section of this report.

Links between Parents and School

Earnest et al., (2007), citing Ascher (1989), described the struggle for refugee children to find a balance between the new school culture and the traditional family culture, and the subsequent intergenerational stress and family conflict. Another study (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) cited in Earnest et al., (2007) also described family stress and the parent-child interaction which influenced the child's social, academic and economic outcomes, including racial discrimination, urban subcultures and labour market opportunities. Earnest et al., (2007), supported by Cassity and Gow (2005), found the literature suggests involving parents/caregivers and ethnic communities in school to help reduce intergenerational stress, involve the parents more in the lives of their children, ease the transition and support the psychosocial health of the refugee students.

As is described later in this report, a recent development is that some of the IECs in Western Australia have commenced parenting programs which aim to deal with the issue of discipline and to encourage the caregivers' involvement at the school.

Knowledge of the school system

Humpage (1998) found that Somali refugee students have very different frames of reference in terms of school behaviour, roles and values. She found tensions between the values of their home culture and those of the educational culture. In addition, the Somalians' lack of experience with group approaches, lack of writing skills, and difficulty with punctuality interfered with appropriate educational progress. Kelly and Bennoun (1984), in their research on the experience of Indo-Chinese refugees in Australia, observed that teachers, students, and parents had vastly different perceptions about what was happening to students in the education system and what they wanted from it. Rousseau, Drapeau and Corin (1996) found a wide mismatch between the perceptions of teachers and parents relating to the difficulties of refugees entering Canadian schools. Parents perceived the cultural gap between family and school as the major problem. However, teachers felt that lack of language competence on the part of the parents was the main cause of the communication difficulties between home and school. It is very likely that both perceptions captured a real problem in the communicative environment between schools and parents. Some of these issues emerged in the current study.

Future Career Prospects

Cassity and Gow (2005) found that high career aspirations are common among this group of refugees. They also found that refugee students were torn between education and family obligations, future expectations and current difficulties, with one student saying "I like school because it is the way of the future, but I must help my family". Earnest et al., (2007) also found that students had high career aspirations particularly in some professions (law, medicine, engineering, armed forces etc); however, the students were discouraged after realising that achieving these goals may not be as easy as they first thought. Some students highlighted the length of time it takes to reach their goals, the lack of encouragement, the cost of education and other responsibilities such as family commitments as obstacles to achieving their ambitions. These views were supported by the findings of the current study with some of the student participants stating that teachers/counselors were discouraging them in their aspirations. At the same time, some of the teacher participants explained that the African students with limited schooling have "unrealistic expectations".

Warrick (2000), cited in Davies et al., (2001), states that Australian research has shown that 63% of students with more than 2 years of interrupted schooling and nearly 90% of students with no prior schooling, failed to complete year 12. In another Victorian study involving young refugees, Olliff and Couch (2005) found that despite high goals for educational achievement, this cohort showed high rates of dropout, poor achievement outcomes and low-skilled employment, so they recommended a new framework for integrating refugee students into more appropriate pathways. Gunn (2005) supports this, finding that refugee students underestimated the educational requirements for professional occupations, and that students were unprepared for any bridging or other courses. Earnest et al., (2007) found the issue of unrealistic expectations had been reported in a number of other studies (as cited

above) and stressed the importance of refugee students establishing realistic and achievable goals, and that encouragement is provided when they reach these goals.

Students participating in the current study also discussed the lack of knowledge about pathways they could take, and mentioned that they 'were fretting' because they felt that they had little time to make decisions or get into the right courses. On a positive note, some universities in Western Australia have developed a special entry category for African refugee university applicants, with a number of these students now studying at various tertiary institutions in Perth.

Issues for teachers

Dealing with the unique stresses associated with teaching refugee students can have a profound effect on ESL teachers (Fabri, 1999). These students have suffered unimaginable trauma and hardship and are grieving the loss of family members and culture. Teachers are often unaware of the presence of a refugee student in their classroom and the experiences they may have had with the associated trauma and emotional distress (McBrien 2005). Hones (2002) in McBrien (2005) found that "teachers become more compassionate and willing to work with refugee and immigrant students when they became knowledgeable about their backgrounds". This is supported by Miller et al., (2005) who found that teachers felt that their prior teaching experience did not prepare them to deal with this highly vulnerable group. The teachers experienced feelings of being unable to cope and found it difficult to find suitable texts and other resources with which to teach these students. This study also highlighted that there were some tensions between ESL school staff and mainstream teachers due to the different roles and expectations of the two groups. Again this is something reflected in the findings of the current study. Cassity and Gow's (2005) research found that interrupted schooling and the associated expectations of these students is a general issue of concern for teachers, including the progress and future pathways for the African students. Teachers found that their relationships with the refugee students are important, not only for curricular support, but also for emotional support with one teacher stating that the students "felt more comfortable with teachers they like than a new counselor they don't really know".

Szente et al., (2006) found that teachers were unprepared to deal with the emotional stress experienced by refugee children, particularly given they often have no background information on the child. Teachers described being "overwhelmed" and believe that access to the background information would help them help the children. Although it is not against the law in Australia to ask about the immigration status of refugee families, information provided about the refugee child upon arrival at the IEC (primary) is kept confidential and teachers are often unable to access it. However, Szente et al., (2006) found that parents often did not wish to share their traumatic experiences. One parent was quoted as saying that they did not believe teachers needed to know why they left their home country and only wanted the teachers to talk to their child about these experiences if they were raised by the child.

Similar to Cassity and Gow's (2005) findings, several respondents in the present study emphasized the importance of understanding their students' backgrounds. Teachers felt that if they were aware of the students' country, their culture and the trauma they have experienced, they would be able to cater for these students much better. Teachers are aware that the IECs have access to information that the high

schools do not, but believe access to this information would help the teachers as much as the students.

Many teachers in this study stated that a strategy they used with their African refugee students was to understand the individual student and his/her individual needs. Similarly, Sangster (2001) found in her study of adult African learners that attempts to address the needs of the cohort as a whole were futile. Instead, she found that teachers needed to address the needs of each learner individually in order to help them achieve their literacy goals.

The differential ways in which these children, adolescents and caregivers suffered in the wars and the refugee camps as well as their individual resilience will impact on their education. Therefore, it is necessary to understand each individual's situation and cater to it.

The findings of the current research highlight the issues facing teachers, including their lack of background information about individual refugee students; the importance of monitoring their own stress levels; their emotional responses to ESL teaching; being aware of their coping mechanisms; and, the methods to help them effectively manage the stress.

Community Involvement

Cassity and Gow (2005) found that development of partnerships with parents/caregivers and their communities was one of the key challenges for schools. Parents/caregivers, particularly single parents, often look to community members when communicating with the school, and participating parents/caregivers in Cassity and Gow's study demonstrated an eagerness to know about their children's progress in school and to establish relationships with teachers.   This was easier with primary school teachers, who were considered by the parents/caregivers as the most important contact in the school, but was more difficult in the high school because there was not a single, recognisable teacher contact as the students have a number of teachers.

Social and Emotional Issues

Emotional Needs

Primary IEC teachers in this current study noted that their refugee students were often loathe to share things or to cease an activity and they hoarded food etc. This supports findings in an American study of refugee students by Szente et al., (2006) where teachers found that 'hoarding behaviours' in relation to books, clothing or food was quite common in refugee children.

Our study supported other research including Cassity and Gow's study (2005) in which refugee children with limited education experience have a major need to feel in control when entering the new school environment. Although they embraced the beginning of a new life they also described disturbing memories which affected their concentration.

Family issues

Similar to the findings of Earnest et al., (2007), the refugee children in the current study were found to take on responsibilities at home such as doing chores, assisting mothers and looking after younger siblings, which interfered with their studies.

The ability for children/students to overtake their parents in acquiring a conversational ability in their new language means they often have to translate for parents/caregivers at school, medical appointments, government agencies etc (McBrien, 2005). Children take on other responsibilities including paying bills, writing cheques and banking creating a role reversal between children and parents/caregivers which can result in identity confusion and conflict.

Many of the refugee students in the current study lacked a male role model, because many of the children were being raised in families which were 'female headed'. This supports research by Miller et al., (2005) which describes the majority of people dying as a result of war in Sudan being men, so that only about 20% of the students in the study were living with both parents.

Other research cited by McBrien (2005) shows that a parent's slower assimilation of the language causes a lack of understanding at parent/teacher conferences. For instance, the parents of Hmong students described how they viewed the teachers as experts in their children's education and highlighting their unfamiliarity with participating in the schooling process. Parents are unprepared for the Australian type of education system. Hamilton, Anderson, Frater-Mathieson, Loewen, and, Moore (n.d.). cited research which describes how poor communication between parents and schools can significantly affect the children's performance and can represent a major obstacle to resolving other refugee related problems. The study by Hamilton et al., identified the same issues among refugee students in New Zealand and Great Britain, and highlights effective communication between parents and schools as one of the major factors for improving the quality of education outcomes for these children. Several studies cited by Hamilton et al., (n.d.) suggested that mediator or interpreters could organise a parent forum to allow parents/caregivers to discuss their concerns and issues, and to provide other support mechanisms such as language acquisition classes.

Rousseau et al., (2001) suggest that family plays a key role in addressing the issues associated with the trauma and separation experienced by refugee children and which results in significant emotional distress. In addition to the trauma and stress of separation, which differs from that experienced by 'regular' immigrants due to the hasty and often traumatic nature of departure, the resettlement process can be extended over a long period of time due to administrative policy and 'red tape' and this adds to the stress. It should be noted that "the interaction between separation and trauma has been seen most often in unaccompanied children and adolescents" (Rousseau et al., 2001) and that "remaining with their immediate and extended family and social group can have a protective effect on victims". Extended separation from family can be accompanied by painful reliving of experiences, particularly with news/no news from family members. Extended separation can also result in lack of hope, feelings of guilt and concern for family members left behind, and, fear of reprisals and threats which all impact on the level of distress. The literature cited by

Rousseau et al., (2001) also highlights that, although all refugees who have lived through experiences of war, repression etc, are labeled on the basis of this common experience, it must be remembered that they come from significantly different cultural backgrounds. These cultural backgrounds are then challenged by family models proposed in the new country, particularly in relation to gender roles and the parent-child interaction.

The findings of the current study show considerable similarities to those of the above cited literature, and are described in more detail in later sections of this report.

Identity Issues

The current study also supported literature that identified the struggle that young refugees have in adapting to a new country and culture, and the search to establish an identity which will help them bridge the differences between their traditional culture and the new one. Both this study and Earnest et al., (2007) found that young African male refugees are adopting black American culture including the clothing, music, speech and body language in an attempt to fit within the Australian community. Miller et al., (2005) also found that students have to find a way of balancing their past and present lives. McBrien (2005) found that children's language acquisition was significantly important, not only to academic achievement, but also to successful acculturation and a sense of continuity with their parents and others from their home country. Bilingual children showed the highest success in education and careers, and the lowest level of depression, whereas those US schools that had a policy of 'English immersion' showed an increase in cultural dissonance causing children to lose their native language and to fall short of acquiring full proficiency in English.

McBrien (2005) cites Eisenbruch (1988) who concluded that schools can be "centres of acculturation that, with effective teachers and programs, can reduce environmental barriers and increase the child's sense of competence" and that "effective programs respect the native cultures of refugee children and allow them ample time to adjust and learn the language of their new host country". Eisenbruch (1988, cited in McBrien, 2005) argued that rapid acculturation can "negatively affect children's ability to complete their grieving process and claim their cultural identity". The current findings support this, with many parents being concerned with the potential loss of their home language and culture.

Time needed for assimilation

The literature highlights that decisions are made on the length of time that refugee students receive support services despite differences among individuals and their learning needs. In addition, the progress of ESL students in the areas of language skills and grade-appropriate subject matter is not considered (Garcia, 2000). Garcia (2000) questions the efficacy of the education policies and practices which are linked to nationally standardised assessments, with the consequence that schools tend to ignore the student's ability to acquire subject matter or learn exclusively in English by immersing them in English exclusive programs. The current study indicates support for the literature in highlighting that the length of time that services and assistance were provided is seemingly inadequate.

Summary

In summary, the literature examined highlighted a number of key issues, including the problem of African refugee children/students attempting to acquire a second language when they are not literate in their first language; cultural issues; emotional 'scarring' from the trauma experienced in refugee camps; parent/caregiver issues such as lack of male role models, parents not understanding the Australian education system, or parents not speaking the language; and, separation issues. These unique issues associated with African refugee students lead to problems for teachers. It is essential for the education system in Australia to acknowledge that these issues can vary significantly depending on which country the refugees originate from and according to individual differences.

Methodology

Overview

As previously noted, the research presented in this report was commissioned by WATESOL – the professional association for West Australian ESL teachers. The terms of reference set by the association for this study were used to inform the research questions. In turn, these questions guided the research methodology which was, in the main, qualitative. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to elicit information from the main stakeholders in the care and education of African refugee children. ESL and mainstream teachers were also surveyed more generally by way of a questionnaire. The data was analysed thematically and the key issues that emerged have been identified. Wherever possible these issues are described using the participants' own words.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following:

1) What are the language and educational needs of African refugee children?

2) What are the perceptions and expectations of stakeholders involved in the care and education of African refugee children, particularly regarding educational processes?

3) What are the perceptions and expectations of adolescent African students regarding the educational processes that will enable them to participate in the Australian workforce?

4) What are the teaching methodologies and resources that may assist these students?

Participants

In total there were 117 participants in this study. Most of these were associated with eight different schools and included parents and caregivers; teachers, both ESL and mainstream; school Deputy Principals, in particular those that coordinate the activities of the Intensive English Centres (IECs); ethnic education assistants (EEAs); a youth worker (YW); two staff working at the Graylands ESL Resource centre; two officers working at Mirrabooka Migrant Resource Centre, and two other officers working for a non-government support agency (NGO).

Eleven parents/caregivers participated in focus groups conducted at three different schools. From three separate primary schools, the IEC Deputy Principals were interviewed and 13 IEC teachers participated in focus group interviews. In addition, two high school IEC Deputy Principals and 14 IEC teachers (from five different high schools, including from the two schools where the deputies worked) were interviewed. Three mainstream teachers also participated. Sixteen adolescent students from three high school IECs participated in focus groups. In addition, eight EEAs from three schools (two primary and one high school) were interviewed. This meant that a total of 75 people participated in focus group and/or individual interviews. A further 40 ESL and mainstream teachers were involved in responding to a questionnaire. A summary of this information is provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Participants in this study

	Number	Schools
Parents	11	3
School Deputy Principals (IECS)	3 primary school 2 high school	3 2
ESL teachers (IECs)	13 primary school 14 high school	3 5
Mainstream teachers	3 primary school	2
Students	16 high school	3
Ethnic education assistants	7 primary 1 high school	2 1
Youth worker	1 primary	1
ESL resource centre staff	2	
Officers from Mirrabooka Migrant Resource Centre	2	
Officers from an NGO	2	
Teachers – ESL and mainstream (Questionnaire respondents)	40	Anonymous
Total	117	8

Procedure

The first step in this research required ethics permission to be sought from Edith Cowan University. In order to do this, information and permission letters were written, and interview schedules (for both individual and focus group situations) and questionnaire surveys were developed. After ethics approval was granted the instruments were piloted and refined. Next, schools were contacted so that volunteer participants could be recruited. Data were then collected from the following three groups of participants in the manner described below:

1) Parent/caregiver focus groups

Contact was made with parent/adult caregivers whose charges attend primary and secondary schools where there are significant cohorts of African refugee students, namely at IECs, located throughout the metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas. Caregivers were invited to attend small group meetings where interpreters were used to interact with these groups. Using a 'focus group' approach the participants were asked a number of open-ended questions. These questions were used to elicit their perceptions about language and educational needs; and more generally, about their expectations, understandings and perceptions of education in Australia.

2) Adolescent students

Participants in the adolescent focus groups were recruited from three different high school IECs. The adolescents, like the parents/caregivers, were asked questions regarding their perceived needs and their perceptions regarding educational processes in Australia, especially in relation to their future participation in the Australian workforce.

3) Teachers and IEC Deputy Principals

Teachers, both ESL and mainstream, and Deputy Principals were surveyed by way of focus group discussions and individual interviews. In addition, questionnaires were posted to all ESL teachers working as cell teachers (i.e., ESL teachers supporting students in a number of schools); to those working in IECs; and to teachers working in mainstream classes in schools receiving significant numbers of African refugee students.

In addition to collecting data from these groups of participants, this research also involved:
   a) a review of relevant and current literature, and,
   b) a survey resulting in the compilation of currently available teaching and learning resources.

Instruments

A set of interview questions specific to each of the participant groups was developed (see Appendix A). In addition, a questionnaire was also designed to survey ESL cell, IEC and mainstream teachers (see Appendix B). This was used to determine whether the issues which arose in the focus groups were similar to those identified by staff

working in other schools. The questionnaire was also used to find out about specific strategies and resources used by teachers in Western Australian schools.

Analysis

As noted in the overview, the data were analysed thematically to allow the identification of key issues. This is similar to the method used by Miller and Glassner (1997). The veracity of the findings, particularly in terms of the specific issues, was broadly gauged by how consistently they were identified by the various groups and by the strength of feeling expressed about them. To maintain the authenticity of the data the issues that emerge are described, wherever possible, using the participants' own language (as indicated by the use of this font).

Findings

Overview

In order to answer the research questions, the findings of this study are presented in four parts. To address those questions relating to the stakeholders' perception of the needs of African refugee students, the first section of the findings is presented in the form of a needs analysis. This was done on the basis that ESL teaching methodology, which has never been served by a single curriculum, uses such an approach. In the classroom this may be done either formally or informally and aims to select TESOL methodology that best suits the learners' needs. These needs may be classified as educational, emotional, physical, social or familial. Also included is a discussion of the tension that has arisen between the personal and educational needs of these particular students. At the same time this needs analysis acknowledges that African refugee students come from a range of different backgrounds and have unique needs and individual qualities. Finally, in each section there is a description of some of the strategies that the participants indicated as being useful for addressing the needs of these students.

In the second section, an outline of the findings concerned with educational issues is presented. This includes a discussion of language, including the acquisition of English and the maintenance of students' home languages. Also presented are the concerns about, and suggested approaches related to, the transition of African refugee students into the mainstream. This section also describes in detail some of the challenges that teachers face, now and in the future, with respect to teaching these students. This section concludes with an outline of the concerns and expectations of these students and their parents/caregivers, and a discussion pertaining to their future prospects.

The third section of this report presents the perception of the participants about community services. This includes a discussion of the apparent needs of the African refugee community, but gaps in the services have also been highlighted. The section begins with an outline of the type and location of such services. Next, because of its particular relevance to this cohort, an in depth discussion of health care services is provided. Finally, some strategies and potential solutions are presented.

The fourth section of this report involves a list of those resources indicated by the participants as being useful for teaching and supporting African refugee students.

Needs Analysis

Educational needs

The teachers, adolescent students, caregivers and community service providers involved in this study all considered that African background students had high levels of educational needs. One of the major concerns noted was the difference between the students' academic levels and those of their same aged Australian peers. Further, the difficulties associated with catering for these students are exacerbated by the range of abilities within the cohort itself.

Of considerable concern to the research participants is the high level of literacy and numeracy needs of these students. The majority of African refugee students come from a limited schooling background and, as such, are illiterate in their first language and have little or no experience with print based learning (Muir, 2004; Sangster, 2002). Another major issue relates to the challenge of providing a relevant curriculum for African background students. This challenge is related to both the content and the structure of the curriculum and, in turn, the pedagogical approaches these imply. It is also related to the culture that underpins the Australian schooling system and how this contrasts with the expectations and experiences of African refugee students.

Contributing further to this challenge are the differences that exist between the belief systems of these students and those involved in their education, and the impact that this has on the delivery of what the different groups deem to be appropriate education (especially in terms of additional resources that are required).

Students' performance levels

Teachers, caregivers, and, in fact, many of the African refugee students themselves all expressed concern that they are performing at levels well below their same aged peers in Australian schools. One of the caregivers noted that her son is "almost two years in school and is really far behind, he has a bit of a behaviour problem." A teacher also expressed concern that the children were aware that they were behind their peers and were trying to avoid drawing attention to this difference. "Some students understand that they are behind and they know it, and some are trying to hide it. And you can see that they are trying to hide it." This tendency to disguise their needs is particularly worrying in that it may lead to these children not receiving the assistance they require.

In many cases these students have attended IECs for longer than has been the practice with other cohorts of refugee students. Even so, the teachers who manage their learning are concerned that "there are so many gaps ". Further, they note that these gaps are "not only educational but also social and emotional". Teachers in a range of schools, public and private, primary and secondary, in specialist language and in mainstream contexts, noted that these students were generally "not ... ready" for the demands of schooling in Australia. The gaps in the students' knowledge, skills and understandings mean that accessing the curriculum is extremely difficult for them.

According to many of the participants in the study the students' levels of performance are well below those demanded by age equivalent peers in mainstream contexts. This

has serious educational implications, particularly in an era where there is an emphasis on the measurement of performance and the meeting of standards:

> Teacher 1: There is definitely a big gap between them and mainstream students. Even our year sevens have to take the WALNA testing.
> Teacher 2: Next year it's a national literacy test, not WALNA.
> Teacher 3: If it's set out in an unfamiliar way they fail.

In some cases new transition programs have been developed to try to "bridge the gap" between the programs offered in IECs and those in mainstream schools. However, some of the participants suggested that this was not addressing the issue because these programs have to be at such a simple level that the gap between what they demand of the students and what a mainstream context will require remains wide. A secondary level IEC teacher expressed her concern about this issue in the following way:

> They weren't ready for the transition program so the new program is very literal and concrete. It would be nice to be able try to get them to be more non-literal but that takes years to learn.

Thus it is apparent that these students need to acquire age appropriate levels of English language skills and background understandings to meet the demands of the mainstream curriculum. The students have such high levels of need that they will always require more time than previous cohorts of refugees to adjust to Australian schooling. This need for additional time was discussed by most teachers in the study. The teachers saw the problem of being "left behind" and as "having gaps" in learning as very serious. While the teachers recognised that learning needed to be accelerated in some way, some also expressed the belief that "as a group the African students cannot be pushed too hard".

A further concern is that where students are recognised as having "gaps" or being "very weak" because of their language, cultural and experiential backgrounds, educational expectations about their ultimate attainment may be lowered. For instance, in one primary mainstream context a student was recognised as being "very weak" because she did not have the cultural background knowledge to allow her to progress in most areas of the curriculum. However, the teacher also noted that this student was achieving well in aspects of mathematics where there were few language demands, suggesting that this student may be performing at a level not commensurate with her (especially non-linguistic) ability. Despite this, she is not currently receiving specific ESL assistance, either from her mainstream teacher or from a specialist teacher.

> My student is very weak because she doesn't grasp the concepts that we have innately in our language, the culture in the language. She still spells simple words wrong. She doesn't know basic things. There are basic ESL things and a huge ESL curriculum issue. But maths is OK unless there is language involved in it.

However, in some mainstream contexts there are teachers who do not share this concern about low levels of achievement amongst the African background students. Although there was an acknowledgement that these students had some difficulties, particularly with writing, the problems were not viewed as being serious:

> There's only one child who has issues with his writing and general understanding but he's no **weaker** than some of my other students.

There was also the ready acknowledgement that it takes time for the students' English language skills to develop. As one mainstream teacher remarked about a student in her class, "It (her English) will consolidate- there's nothing we can do for her, it's just time." Whilst such patience is laudable, there is a danger that other teachers may not recognise this need for time and that there may be a tendency to think of these students as "weak" rather than as having specific second language acquisition needs.

> There's only one child who has issues with his writing and general understanding but he's no **weaker** than some of my other students.

In some cases these students are categorised as students at educational risk (SAER) as is evident in the following quote from a mainstream teacher:

> The African kids fit in well with the SAER kids- we have a core of SAER kids in each class.

These types of comments are positive in that they reflect an understanding of the time it takes for the learning of an additional language. As such, they show an acceptance that these students, like many others in classrooms, are at educational risk and require additional assistance. In some circumstances, however, this view could also lead to lower expectations and a lack of attention to their particular needs as additional language learners.

The issue of low levels of student performance was viewed in a contrasting way by some of the African parents/caregivers who have had experience with a different education system. They see that the problem does not lie so much with their children, but rather with the Australian educational system which progresses students according to age rather than competence. They point out that in Africa the children are placed in a year level commensurate with their current level of performance and that they progress through the levels as they learn. In Australia, children are placed according to their age, so those African background students who are older but who have few literacy skills are still placed in secondary classrooms, where the demands are beyond their current levels of competence. Further, the parents/caregivers indicated that they believed the programs designed to support their children are inadequate and set up their children to fail. They also reported that the consequences of this failure are too often poor behaviour, and, in some cases, this escalates to such a degree that it involves the juvenile justice system. One of the caregivers interviewed expressed her concerns in the following way:

> School is very different in Australia to Africa – in year by age not ability – very different – children have no skills but are in year 8. In Africa you go in the class where you know the work you have to do. When children who can't read and write and have no school before Australia have one year maybe a bit more in IEC and then go to high school. They need a special program to get ready for high school. Some are in year 10 but they struggle and do bad behaviour and then they get in trouble with the law. They are in the wrong year level – no real age.

<u>Literacy levels</u>

Issues relating to literacy were mentioned by many of the informants in this study. Some of the concerns centred around the relationship between literacy and access to the curriculum, the current low levels of literacy performance by many African background students, and, the inadequacy of the current provision for these students.

Many of the teachers expressed concern about the African students' English literacy levels. In particular, they felt the levels were so low that the students would not have access to the mainstream curriculum at all. Further, low levels of literacy impact on all aspects of education and can make it very difficult for these students to experience success in a mainstream context. The teachers were especially concerned for those students who were not able to read and write in their first language. This included students who had had insufficient education in their home country or in a refugee camp to have acquired written literacy skills, and also those students who spoke a first language which did not have a written form.

> In terms of literacy development, it was noted that some language groups do not have a written form of their language and that this creates problems for students trying to acquire literacy in English.

Many teachers referred to students with particularly high levels of literacy needs as being "limited schooling". Within most WA education systems this is the term used to describe students who have had less than four years of formal schooling prior to entry into an Australian school. In some cases, these students have had interrupted schooling because of a natural or political disaster in their countries of origin, and in others they have not accessed schooling at all and may be the second or third generation of their family who have been deprived of this right.

There is a particularly high proportion of African background students who have had limited schooling prior to their arrival in Australia and many of these do not have written literacy skills in their home language. The impact of illiteracy in the first language (L1) on the learning of the second (L2) is widely recognised both in the literature, and by teachers in this study. For instance one of the questionnaire respondents wrote:

> Students and their caregivers are frequently illiterate in L1 and reading and writing in L2 takes significantly longer to accomplish than in a student with appropriate education in L1.

The teachers noted that the students needed a great deal of assistance to acquire basic language knowledge and to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. They described these needs as being at a very high level. The teachers used terms such as "HUGE", "enormous" and "significant" to describe the level of need. Again, there was reference to the time needed to develop English language skills before these students could be expected to progress in literacy. It was also suggested that their high levels of language need could be better met in small group contexts and in smaller literacy classes. As one survey respondent noted these students need:

> Time to be exposed to L2 in every way; time and small group needs to share L2; smaller classes for literacy

Many of the teachers saw the literacy needs as "basic" in that they could not take for granted the students' understanding of any aspect of learning in a classroom. Some of these basic literacy needs posed considerable challenges for teachers in the upper primary and secondary levels. Teachers in these levels of schooling do not usually have to attend to the knowledge, skills and understandings required for the early stages of literacy development. Consequently, pedagogy associated with the development of the reading and writing processes, such as building graphophonic, syntactic and semantic knowledge may not be familiar to these teachers. One of the secondary teachers interviewed noted how she really struggled with this aspect of her work and that she felt some "primary school" training in early literacy development may help her. In fact, she had found some useful information in this regard in professional literacy literature on the net.

> I use a top down, bottom up approach. I set tasks that are meaningful to the students such as writing applications for McDonalds or KFCs and then teach them the skills they need. But sometimes they struggle with the basic skills – I need primary training - and I find knowing how to help them hard. I have some help from my net searches. But I need to know more about how you learn to read and write.

Some teachers noted that while the students were making progress with acquiring oral English language skills, their reading and writing achievement was very slow and they required a great deal of on-going assistance in order to cope in the mainstream. In addition, the teachers indicated that while their students were coping relatively well with the social demands placed on their language, they were not so successful with the academic demands.

Thus it was clear from their responses that the teachers recognised that for many African students it would take a considerable amount of time for the language necessary for formal schooling to develop. This view is consistent with research in school contexts (Cummins, 1979, 1980, 1990) which suggests that while basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) take two-three years to acquire, cognitive and academic proficiency (CALP) takes from seven to nine years to develop. This is because CALP requires complex discipline specific knowledge, including how that knowledge is acquired, organised and then communicated within the different disciplines. It also includes control over complex linguistic structures and text forms. To add to the difficulty, in English there is a wider than usual separation between academic and commonly used language (Corson, 1993, 1997, 1999) so experience of this language in everyday contexts is limited. While most students in mainstream contexts have many years to gradually acquire this type of proficiency, the African background students often meet this type of language immediately on their entry into the Australian schooling system. This is further complicated by the fact that the older they are, the higher the level of schooling they enter, and so the wider the gap between their current language competency and what is demanded by the (largely age-determined) curriculum. Teachers showed they were aware of the complexity of this situation as the following extracts from survey responses demonstrate:

> (African background students are) Orally, reasonably adept when exiting IEC centres; written- very dependent on previous learning experience. Generally,

> however, grammatical structures and ability to write even basic level work, they struggle even after 3 years.

> Mostly acquire BICS quite quickly. Some arrive with English. Often reach a plateau in IEC for a while, need years to use CALP effectively.

> Different children require different amount of time to acquire basic communication language however most African students have little or no previous schooling so that the academic language takes a long time to acquire.

Many teachers recognised that because these students can seem to be quite fluent orally their understanding may be taken for granted. For instance, in a situation described by one of the teachers in the study, a child's access to justice was compromised by his lack of understanding of the term "intentionally":

> Most African students have attained appropriate fluency in English in 1-2 years but only basic vocabulary is properly understood. A 16 year old Sudanese boy had been involved in a fight during a football match on a Sunday (not a school function) following racial taunts by the opposition. A policeman asked him, "Did you intentionally hit the boy?" Answer, "Yes." A teacher (in loco parentis) asked him what 'intentionally' meant- he did not know.

The following recount of an incident experienced by a teacher also highlights the problem with using children who are assumed to be fluent in English as interpreters (something that occurs all too often, for expediency, even though it is a practice that should not occur on moral and ethical grounds).

> The mother of a newly arrived Sudanese boy arrived at school one morning to say her son had been attacked by Aboriginal students as he went home the previous day. The mother only speaks Dinka so I asked a student to interpret for me- ____ (student's name) has been with us for 2 years. Question: "Would you recognise the boys who attacked you?" ___ (Student) started to interpret and then stopped to ask what 'recognise' meant. It was substituted for "Would you know the boys?"

As well as lacking general literacy skills when entering Australian schools, many African refugee students are still developing other skills needed for success in school. For instance, one teacher noted that these students did not have the fine motor skills to do activities such as cutting, colouring, pasting or holding a pencil appropriately and that they were not able to sit for relatively long periods on a chair. One survey respondent expressed the extent of her students' needs as follows:

> HUGE! Basic- class needed especially for these students- as their skills are very limited, e.g. cutting and pasting, holding a pencil, sitting on chairs.

Many other teachers also noted how the basic skills, that is, those things required for learning in schools, were lacking. In particular, these students were seen as needing the foundation understandings that underpin literacy. Some also reported that African refugee students had high levels of need related to core social and organisational skills.

> Very acute (level of need). Need to develop basic learning skills required to cope in a classroom (social skills, organisational skills, pre-reading and pre-writing skills).

Thus a recurring theme emerging from the data in this study is that time is required by these students to learn English and to adjust to learning in Australian schools. Teachers who have had considerable experience teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students noted that these learners tend to need more time and support than has been their experience with other refugee groups. This is understandable when the background of these students is considered.

At the same time the teacher participants indicated there was also individual variation in rates of progress (as would be the case with any group). The length of time required by individual students to acquire English varied according to background factors such as: prior educational experiences; degree of trauma suffered; nature of exposure to English; level of literacy, both their own and that of their family members; family and home situation; and, the degree of cultural, social and educational difference between the student's home country and Australia.

Some teachers suggested strategies that could be used to address the literacy needs of the African refugee students. These included: basic literacy programs to provide the understandings that were the foundation of reading and writing skills; talking about the content of texts; and, providing visual material that could support students in making meaning from print. Additionally, teachers suggested that these students required "more resources and experts to teach oral language", "explicit teaching of all aspects of literacy", "as much exposure to oral, aural, visual texts as possible at a level they can cope with", "lots of help with the conventions of writing", "concrete materials", and, "constant repetition and simple texts."

The point was also made by teachers that these students will not understand the utility of literacy, or persist in their attempts at acquiring it, if they do not have relevant material and purposeful tasks as part of their learning experiences. Teachers, particularly those working with older students, saw that for material to be relevant it needed to take account of the students' cultural backgrounds. At the same time, however, they also indicated that if programs were to be successful they needed to move the students from the familiar to new contexts. This is because students' knowledge of other cultures needs to be extended to enable them to understand a broader range of texts. One of the many difficulties this presents was indicated by some teachers in their responses: Material conducive for such learning is not readily available because it needs to be culturally relevant, at an appropriate linguistic level, but also suitable for older students. Texts catering for such a niche are difficult to find.

The issue of providing appropriate literacy resources appears to be less complex for younger children. The teacher participants described the resources that this age group needed were those typically associated with beginning literacy, such as language experience approaches. For example, one teacher wrote:

> The younger children need access to books, toys, crayons, pencils, etc. which need to be treated as consumables. The African children seem to love paper/ making booklets/ colour and we go through reams of paper!

Recognition was also made for extending this provision into the students' homes. For instance, one teacher wrote:

> Literacy should be extended at home, involve the parents or guardians. The students can elaborate on what they've learnt in the classroom

The recommendation emanating from this is to build on the African parents/ caregivers literacy skills, be these first language or English language skills. Even if these family members are not literate, this does not mean that they cannot be involved in the education of their children, rather they need to be supported to do so. However, to achieve this many African parents and caregivers need to be convinced of the usefulness and appropriateness of literacy. A number of parents/caregivers in this study expressed the view that education in Africa was the business of experts in schools. As parents they do not believe they have the skills to teach their children about school related matters. Teachers wanting to initiate home based literacy programs, therefore, would need to consider the different beliefs that exist and work to bring these together for the benefit of the students.

Numeracy levels

As with literacy, the teachers participating in this study reported that the numeracy needs among the African background learners are "very high" and "basic". That is, the teachers were concerned that the core mathematical knowledge, skills and understandings demanded at the earliest levels of the curriculum could not be taken for granted with these students, regardless of their age. These difficulties included not having basic number skills and not understanding core mathematical concepts including the operations, algorithms and time. Further, it was reported that the students experience difficulty working mathematically and in applying mathematical concepts to other contexts. For example, these students find it difficult to use the index of a book because of the numerical references. One teacher noted that some of her students were more willing to participate in language activities and sports than in mathematics. Therefore the students' interest in, and motivation for, numeracy is also problematic.

Some teachers also recognised that the students' literacy levels could impact on their performance in numeracy. For example, students could be prevented from demonstrating understanding if they had difficulty in interpreting written questions in mathematics. Similarly, they may be impeded in their progress in mathematics when they cannot understand the explanations provided by the teacher. Some teachers felt that these problems were more severe because many of the concepts that supported mathematical learning had not been developed in the students' first language.

This problem could be generalised to most areas of the curriculum. Although English is a subject in itself, it is also the medium of instruction for learning in all subject areas and this means it is the way by which most learning is demonstrated. As one teacher put it, "I guess if they can't read well they'll struggle in all areas."

However, as with literacy, teachers acknowledged that not all African background students have problems with numeracy. Thus there was an overt indication by the participants that, as in all groups, the ability of individuals varies considerably. One

survey respondent noted that "Some students are very quick and have amazing memories."

Some of the teachers offered suggestions as to how to meet the students' numeracy needs. Some of these suggestions were similar to those given in relation to literacy. For instance, they suggested that additional time and small class sizes were needed, as was attention to basic skills and to explicit teaching. Materials that were concrete and activities that were "hands on" were suggested for use. There was also a call for specialist ESL teachers with an understanding of primary school level mathematics teaching to assist older students.

Other suggestions included "the use of real life experiences", "purposeful tasks", "the teaching of 'survival maths' literacy, i.e. money, time, calendar, etc. initially", and "modelling concepts through concrete objects".

Finally an important issue was raised by teachers in relation to IEC practices and numeracy teaching. Specifically, because mathematical language rather than conceptual understanding was emphasised in IECs, the students did not develop numeracy skills. This was an aspect that needs to be considered.

Curriculum issues

Many issues related to the curriculum were raised by informants in the study when they were discussing students' educational needs. These issues concerned: the content and structure of the curriculum; pedagogical practices; the culture of schooling; educational provision that may impact on students' progress; and, differences in beliefs about educational approaches. A call for additional resources for these students was also made by a number of the participants.

Teaching staff suggested that the content and structure of the curriculum needs to be adapted in order to meet the needs of African background students. It was acknowledged that effective teaching and learning programs should be based on a needs analysis, and supported where necessary by the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

> It is important to first understand the needs and requirements of the students and encourage them to gradually adapt to the needs of the curriculum and not have high expectations....Fit curriculum where possible but meet the needs of the students first....
> Individual IEPs considering background/ experiences/ schooling→ towards relevant/ age appropriate curriculum and skills that can be transferred when ready to mainstream.

It was also suggested that there needs to be an emphasis on the development of oral language, in addition to a focus on written literacy and numeracy acquisition. Related to this was the suggestion that the basic vocabulary required in school, home and the community needs to be taught explicitly. The implication here was that other subject areas should not be given as much attention until the students had achieved a reasonable level of competency in English language and mathematics skills. There was also the concern expressed that essential content knowledge, such as that related

to the students' health and welfare, should be given priority. This is possible when a needs analysis underpins the learning programs developed for these students.

Data collected in this research clearly shows that the students and their families may have different values to those held by professionals involved in their education. This includes beliefs about what is considered valuable in terms of the curriculum. In addition, some teachers noted that there are considerable differences in the teaching approaches used in the students' countries of origin and what happens in Australia. Because of these differences there are some aspects of the curriculum (e.g., the use of maps, diagrams and graphs) that are particularly problematic for these learners.

> In science, diagrams are prevalent and it's really hard for them to do and so we spend a long time learning how to do it.

While teachers were very aware of the difficulties these students face in the Australian education system, many parents/caregivers consider that the Australian education system is "too easy". In some cases, students also reject the "easier" work prepared for them by concerned teachers. Some of the students who were interviewed clearly indicated that they just want to do the standard tasks, regardless of their capacity to cope with them. Some students also complained that in Australia teachers tried to encourage them rather than giving them negative feedback on their work. They expected to be told where they had failed so they could improve their work.

> Student 1: (In Africa) When you get something wrong you can't go back if you fail you fail.
> Student 2: (In Australia) They just say it's good, they don't say you failed. They say congratulations.
> Student 3: So then you keep making the same mistakes.
> Student 4: Our results don't tell us what we've done—the report just says Yes No.
> Student 1: We are going to year 11, so I need more harder things to be prepared for year 11 but my teacher didn't give it to me.

This view that the Australian approach to education was "too soft" with regard to what it expected of students was shared by many of the parents/caregivers who were interviewed and is also discussed in other sections of this report.

Whilst the students may indicate that they want 'standard' work, some of the teachers noted that when the students are given work that is beyond their capacity, they get angry and, that because of poor conflict resolution skills, this has led to behavioural issues in the classroom.

Teachers also spoke about the students "coming with a particular world view which is very black and white" and finding it difficult to appreciate other perspectives on issues discussed in the classroom.

Suggestions were made by the teachers about the types of pedagogical approaches they had found to be effective with African refugee students. The teachers suggested that they need to provide "the best environment possible for students to learn" where students are "given time to settle in and become familiar with school". There was advice that no "assumptions should be made" about what the students understand.

Learning should progress from the concrete to the abstract, the personal to the general, and, from simple to complex language. According to the teachers this movement should be accompanied by scaffolding and active learning approaches that minimise the time spent "sitting still for hours". This included structured play for younger students and "learning how to learn skills" for students of all ages. Students concurred with this advice and indicated that these types of approaches were very supportive of their learning.

While some teachers suggested that the students have "real difficulty with imagination" and with "creative activities", others suggested that they are "very responsive to music, drama and art but find formal learning difficult". The students' reluctance to express themselves creatively through formal contexts like writing may be related to their capacity to control English and their difficulty with taking risks in learning. Some teachers noted that the students "just copy at the beginning stage". One teacher suggested the reluctance to risk-take was related to the students' shyness in the classroom, even though they may appear to be quite confident in the playground. This type of "self-protection" behaviour is recognised by experienced ESL teachers as a common pattern for newly arrived students.

With respect to learning styles, some teachers suggested that their African background students preferred rote learning and other more teacher-directed methods rather than the type of student-centred methodologies currently used in many classrooms. As some of the teachers noted, however, this may be due to a lack of familiarity with group work and collaborative approaches. It may also be that the African refugee students have yet not developed the knowledge, skills and understandings needed for student-centred learning and struggle when these practices are employed.

The student participants in this study also noted that they found it difficult to be independent learners when they did not have sufficient skills to manage the tasks they were assigned. For instance, they could not carry out research tasks when they did not know how to select appropriate books. They are more familiar and thus more comfortable with the teacher telling them which book to use. It was also apparent that many do not have the higher level skills needed to locate a book in the library or to skim, scan, identify, evaluate, synthesise and record information. Some were not even aware of what information was required.

> We also need to have more help when we research. We don't know which book to use because in Africa the books are in the classroom and the teacher tells you which one to use.

Students, parents and EEAs described how in classroom learning there was a need for teachers to be easily understood, however, when communicating with their students some felt that the teachers spoke too fast. Although other aspects, such as language complexity and unfamiliar concepts impeded comprehension, generally it seemed that the speed of the speech was the biggest problem.

> The teachers talk too fast.
> Sometimes they use big words that I don't understand.

Like the teachers, the students also indicated that they need additional time to complete tasks, especially those that they found to be complex. In addition to this, some teachers also remarked that some students got very frustrated and sometimes angry when they were directed to stop doing a task before it was completed.

An important way to support these students relates to the "culture" that is developed in classrooms and in the wider school. It was suggested that the level of African background students' needs was such that the "best environment possible" was needed to support their learning. Teachers said that to provide well for these students they need to know them and their backgrounds and to build rapport with them. Many participants indicated that teachers need to be supportive, understanding and patient and to keep and express a sense of humour. They also need to be encouraging and willing to "guide and cajole" the students through their work. In addition, they need to be conscious that some African background students will not understand the behaviour required in an Australian classroom. When these students contravene "rules" they need assistance to understand what is required, rather than punishment.

The broader school community also needs to be accepting of these students and responsive to their needs. One of the areas noted as causing difficulties, particularly in secondary school, is an inflexible timetable. Teachers reported that timetabling constraints and rigid pathways are resulting in a number of students being placed in inappropriate classes which do not meet their learning needs. Therefore this is an area that will require careful attention, now and in the future.

Schools also need to be able to accommodate and respond to the diverse emotional and social needs of these students. These issues are discussed at length in the relevant sections of this report, but are noted here in relation to the impact that they have on a students' capacity to learn. Teachers suggest that schools need to be supportive where a student's learning is interrupted or compromised by health and welfare issues.

The provision of additional resources was also viewed by teachers as necessary to support these students. They noted, here as elsewhere, that the students needed more time to meet age related standards of performance. In turn, this would require more resourcing, particularly in the form of specialist ESL support. They also suggested that smaller class sizes would assist them to meet the complex needs of these students more effectively. Further, it was noted that these students often do not have access to basic resources, usually provided by parents, such as pencils, pens and paper.

Finally, many caregivers and students recognise the valuable work being done by teachers to assist them. There were many expressions of appreciation for the work of teachers during the focus groups and individual interviews involving students and caregivers. The following comment by one of the caregivers expresses these sentiments on behalf of her community:

> The teachers are doing the work OK. When they arrived the children couldn't write, only speak. But they (teachers) are doing a lot to help...
> Generally they (parents) are quite happy with teachers. They wish to thank the teachers.

Emotional needs

Informants in this study reported that the African background students had suffered considerable trauma, both pre and post migration. Many of the teachers asserted that these were the most traumatised children they had ever taught and as a consequence, many have a very high level of emotional need. These needs have an impact on their schooling and an impact on what teachers need to understand and to do when teaching them. Many of the participant teachers remarked that learning will not happen until the emotional needs are dealt with. This is similar to the finding of McBrien (2005). In her review of the literature over the past 25 years on education needs of refugees in the United States she found that emotional needs often take precedence over academic needs. Despite this she also asserts that it is often through education that the emotional and academic needs can be met.

Pre-migration trauma

Many ESL teachers involved in this study understood that the trauma suffered by the students they taught was related to their experience of on-going war and its consequences, including loss of family members and friends, social networks, homes, land and customary ways of life and escape to refugee camps (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues [CMYI], 2006). For many refugees, their escape was not expected so they had no opportunity to prepare or even to tell family and friends who remained behind (CMYI, 2006). For many this escape to refugee camps or a second country was difficult and dangerous (CMYI, 2006).

Even after arriving in UN sponsored refugee camps, these people often experienced many hardships. The camps vary widely in terms of the basic services such as food, water, medical care, housing and safety. Therefore, most people in camps have endured prolonged periods in overcrowded conditions; cultural, social and political disruption; limited food and unsanitary conditions often resulting in poor health; disrupted or no schooling; a lack of social opportunities and very little control or choice in their lives (CMYI, 2006; Robinson, 2006)

Post-migration trauma

The trauma experienced by refugees and the emotional needs that arise from it post migration, may impact in serious ways on a child's adjustment to school and on their capacity to learn (McBrien, 2005). This is hardly surprising in that such traumatic events "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life … They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe" (Herman 1992, p. 33).

Most participants in this study recognised that as a result of the terrible conditions in their places of pre-migration, many of the African background children have high levels of emotional need which impact on their capacity both to adjust to school and to learn. After arrival in Australia, the emotional demands of adjusting to a new culture, and to new social and educational systems, have added to the pressures on these students and their families.

Many African refugee children have lost parents and siblings. Most notable for this cohort is the fact that there are few family groups with adult males. As a group they have also suffered high rates of physical and/or emotional abuse, including rape.

Many have known prolonged periods of hunger and sustained levels of fear for their safety. There are also children who have come to Australia with family members little known to them, their family believing that this will give them a better future. For some of these students, this care has been withdrawn and now, while in high school, they are living alone or with younger siblings and are managing adult responsibilities while learning in a school environment. Similarly, some male students are "heads of their families" with a great deal of responsibility, power and respect at home, but at school are still considered "children". Additionally, they must establish a new role within an unfamiliar culture which may conflict with what they have in their own family and community. Adjustment to Australian culture involves developing an understanding of a new identity as a "youth", a category which allows more freedom than is customary in their home communities. While adolescence is a stage between childhood and adulthood in Australia, in many African countries children are initiated directly into adulthood at puberty (Malual, 2004, p. 6).

This and other studies (Cassity & Gow, 2005) suggest that such cultural differences cause major adjustment issues and high levels of emotional need for some of these students. The contrast in roles also gives rise to many behavioural and attitudinal issues (these are discussed further in later sections of this report).

There are also other aspects of the post-migration experience that is challenging for these students and their families. This is particularly the case for those who come from cultural, social and religious backgrounds that contrast sharply with the way of life in Australia. It has been suggested that within the broader Australian community refugees, particularly adolescents, encounter a different system of values and pressure to adapt to the new way of life (CMYI, 2006). This may cause them to feel they are not accepted in the new culture especially where they are subject to racism, stereotyping or negative views expressed in the media. Further inner conflict may result if they feel pressured to conform to religious, cultural and social traditions within their own cultural community.

It is perhaps for these reasons that many caregivers and adolescent participants in this study reported a desire to return "home". It seems that there is a strong desire to gain an education and then return to assist those "left behind". In the case of the adult participants, they reported that they only came to Australia for their children, as one mother said, "I tell them I didn't want to be here, but I am here for them." Another mother claimed her life was "finished" and she was only here for her children. Like these parents, most of the adolescents involved in the study intended to return "home" when they had completed their education. Other studies (Guerin & Guerin, 2002) suggest that when refugees are settled in western countries they expect that life will be "better" but instead they find that it is different. That is, rather than their problems being solved, they find that they are dealing with new difficulties.

Although many African refugee students are very unhappy and long "to go home", in other cases the caregivers, ethnic education aides and teachers reported that children were happy to be in Australia. One parent reported that her children "liked everything in Australia because there was lots of food and no beatings". Even so, other children were reported to dislike Australia because of their loss of freedom (this issue is discussed further in the section on familial needs).

During the focus groups some of the more experienced ESL teachers noted the similarities between this group of students and the Cambodian students they had taught in the 1980s. Both groups suffered traumatic experiences which created difficulties for them in their education. However, these teachers indicated that the lack of men in the African background families (a situation that occurred less often in the Cambodian families) has had a serious impact on these students' adjustment to their new life.

> In some ways they are like the Cambodians we had in the 1980s. Long periods in refugee camps, malnutrition, war trauma, lack of education. But the difference is the greater lack in men – many family groups have mothers only.

Trauma and emotional needs in school

Teachers and EEAs reported the ways in which the traumatic experiences and emotional needs of some African background students are evident. They also described the impact that this was having on their learning and mentioned three broad areas of concern: the behaviour of the students, their reaction to academic challenges, and, their emotional health and sense of wellbeing.

Teachers, support staff and parents expressed grave concerns about the behaviour of some students. These particular students have unusually high levels of disruptive behaviour, they can be aggressive and have angry outbursts, often leading to violence over seemingly minor incidents. They are characterised as having major behaviour management issues and as being "out of control of their minds and bodies" or "war-like" and "bitter and angry". Some teachers expressed a concern that if these issues were not dealt with then the older students could end up in "juvy", the juvenile justice system. One of the teachers involved in this study related an incident that occurred in the playground to illustrate the impact of pre-migration trauma on these students:

> The older and younger children often hang out together at recess and lunchtime. During one play session some of the older girls play acted a sexual assault and held down a younger child. They got carried away and what was initially play became quite serious so it became almost a rape. The young girl was obviously very upset. The situation was addressed by the school by talking to the girls and to the families and things were resolved in a seemingly satisfactory manner. All the girls are friends again. However, the question remains as to why play acting such a situation would occur in the first place.

In contrast to the students who "acted out" and were disruptive, there are others who are seen as very quiet and withdrawn, easily upset and persistently sad. There was also frequent reference to the children being "sulky" and "uncooperative" when they did not get "their own way". They also were reported as having "difficulties in getting along with other students". These types of behaviours were described as having a serious impact in both the playground and classroom environment, and as consuming a great deal of the administrators', teachers', students' and parents' time. Understandably, dealing with these behaviours is taking an emotional toll on all involved.

As the communicative approach to language teaching and collaborative approaches to learning predominate in Australian ESL and mainstream classrooms, difficulties with

relationships between students or with the teacher have consequences for student learning. Students who are not able to interact successfully, who have "poor interpersonal skills" and who "lack the ability to cope with social responses" will have difficulty learning. In turn, their behaviour may impede the capacity of others to learn.

Teachers also noted that many of these students reacted negatively when they were not able to do tasks that their peers could manage. For instance, one young child became very upset when he could not hold a pencil in the same way as the other students in his class. Many teachers expressed concern about the consequence for older students who become aware of the large gap between what they know and can do and what was demanded of them in the schooling system in Australia. The teachers were concerned that this awareness led to the students suffering low self-esteem and diminished confidence, which in turn led them to "shut down". This is exacerbated by the 'self-protecting' behaviour used by these students (as described in the section entitled Educational Needs - Issues that relate to the curriculum), and in particular their reluctance to take educational risks. As Rundle and Ysabet-Scott (1995, cited in Sinclair, 2001) suggest, traumatised individuals may be reluctant to try new things or to take risks because they fear being punished, humiliated, or rejected for making mistakes. The consequence for those learning a second language is dire, given that risk taking is often considered a condition necessary for most language learning.

In a few cases there was also concern expressed by EEAs and parents that in trying to meet the emotional needs of the children, some primary school teachers were inadvertently causing confusion. They noted that teachers understandably gave the children special attention, endorsed them and expressed affection for them and this contrasted with parenting styles in their homes. In this context, parents/caregivers were often very busy managing the household and small children and did not give such individual attention to older children. Some of the children interpreted this contrast as their teachers loving them while their parents did not. One of the EEAs interviewed for this study described this situation:

> Teachers give love and care in school but this is different to what children have at home – they then expect care that is not the same in their culture – so are we doing the right thing at school? Are we raising expectations in the children and causing problems for their parents? Parents need courses to help them understand the lifestyle here. How to parent. One boy he is here three months and he run away. Just 10 years old. He say my mum doesn't love me my teacher loves me. I want to marry her. Just 10 weeks and very confused.

Despite these concerns, it was very apparent from the participants' reports that those involved with the education of African refugee students demonstrate understanding of their particular emotional needs and attempt to be supportive of them. Many teachers had researched the situations in the students' home countries and knew about the individual experiences of the children they taught. Even so the level of concern was high and many felt that they needed a great deal more support to be able to better assist these students.

<u>Meeting the emotional needs of the students</u>

Many teachers and EEAs asserted that the African background students' emotional needs were so severe that they would need to be addressed before they would be ready to learn academic content effectively. This is supported by previous research, such as that by McDonald (2000) who suggests that traumatic experiences result in the loss of a sense of control, connection and meaning and that these need to be restored before those who are traumatised can move on with their lives.

Teachers suggested that the students needed time to adjust to their new social and educational situation and its unfamiliar demands, and time to build trust and to feel safe.

> Children take time to settle in and get used to school and class routines. Can be withdrawn and tire easily. However, once they feel safe and accepted they are generally eager to learn.

McDonald (2000) also suggests that it may be very difficult for those who have been traumatised to develop trust, particularly when they are subject to the power of those asking for trust. Relative to their students, teachers are in a position of power. As such, traumatised students will take time to develop enough confidence in their teachers to feel safe and to trust them. Because emotional adjustment takes such a long time, learning is also being delayed. As one survey respondent expressed it:

> The poor social skills and extreme dependence, neediness of these young teenagers are similar to those of lower primary students. It takes 18 months to acquire the confidence to take risks re: working collaboratively and independently in academic contexts, so no wonder their literacy skills are taking 2.5-3 years to achieve level 2/ start level 3 (ESL scales).

Other teachers also noted that this group of children were taking longer to adjust to schooling in Australia than other groups they had previously taught. Teachers need to build on what the children do bring to school and then help them to acquire the strategies they need for learning in this new environment.

Teachers and EEAs also suggested that the expectations held for these children need to take account of the emotional needs that arise out of their traumatic experiences. For instance, they need to be given more time to adjust to the culture of school and a number of the participants indicated that there needs to be some tolerance of their behaviour while they learn the new rules. Some suggested that the children need more help to learn about how to behave at school, particularly in the playground, and that they should not be "picked on" by teachers or other authority figures or disciplined when they contravene rules they do not know or understand. In some cases, this may require adjustments to the school's behaviour management policy. An EEA who is an active member of her community described her views on this issue:

> I don't agree with punishment - in first term here (IEC) when they are new - one boy they pick on him - not his fault - it's hard to explain - but the child was awkward and he gets punished and he's more down and more down. The children before - the ones from Serbia they were different - they read and write and go to school before but even they are the same when they are punished they don't

understand. They need to learn - leave them one term – they don't speak the same language so they suffer. Even after only two weeks they're punished. They get angry and hold onto it. The other children laugh at them and tease them. The child do it their own way - it's different for them - they're a stranger, they don't know. Need time to adjust - they all have a different personality.

Many participants in the study also suggested what is needed is sufficient time to allow the children to adjust to the system of schooling in Australia. Many of them have never been to school before and even for those who have, the experience in Australia is very different for them.

For some students, behaviours that were once very useful to them are now seen as problematic. As described previously a number of the teachers reported that their students get very upset when they do not get a chance to finish assigned tasks before the end of a teaching period. Some teachers believe that this may be due to the lack of certainty in the child's previous experiences. For these children, there is the fear that what is not availed of today will be gone tomorrow, for such was the uncertainty of their day-to-day existence in war-torn countries and refugee camps.

This lack of certainty and trust is also the reason that teachers give for the students' apparent "pilfering" of food and other materials. These types of "dysfunctional" behaviours are seen by some as the result of adjustments made to survive in the harsh circumstances of refugee camps (Robinson, 2006). While these strategies can be seen as "lying, cheating and stealing" in a civil society, in times of severe disruption and extreme personal danger they may mean the difference between survival and death.

One group of very experienced ESL teachers noted that this group of children had posed new challenges for them as teachers. The students were requiring a great deal more support than was common, even when compared to other refugee groups. Not only were there behavioural issues, as discussed earlier, but there was also a heightened level of "neediness" (where students used unusual means to gain attention from teachers) than had previously been experienced by these teachers. For instance, a number of students habitually feigned illness to attract special care. In trying to address this issue, the teachers returned to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see for example Huitt, 2004) to guide their interventions.

> Our initial focus was social and emotional needs because the children's learning wasn't taking place. We went back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and started there. We were really concerned about our teaching and learning (approaches being used at that time).

These teachers noted that they needed to work with their colleagues and other professionals in order to help meet the needs of the students. Sangster (2001) explains that routines assist learners to participate fully in learning activities because they know what to expect. In this study, the teachers reported that they established predictable routines and as much as possible prepared the children for new things they would encounter in school.

> We work to prepare students for everything and we explain everything. Like the swimming book. Before they go to swimming lessons we show them the book about

swimming that _____ (name of teacher) made. It shows them everything that will happen. (Using pictures and text – like a big book used in shared reading). It gets them ready. Takes them step by step. When a relief teacher is coming into the room — you have to prepare the children for it. The timetable needs to be up on the wall. Change is when they go off. So you have to tell them everything.
Try to keep the same relief teachers. Tandem teaching is brilliant because they (the two teachers working together) can cover for each other.

Teachers, sometimes with the assistance of other agencies, have developed and adapted a range of approaches and programs to meet the particular emotional needs of the students. These included establishing predictable routines, implementing special programs such as drumming programs, art therapy, play therapy, counselling, parenting programs, simplified behaviour management approaches, special anger control programs (for example - "stop, think, do"), improved access to health and welfare support, subsidised housing and staff-awareness-raising programs. More information about intervention programs is provided in Appendix C of this report.

Konyoa is an eleven year old Sudanese student who has attended an Intensive English Centre for a little over a year. While he now enjoys positive relationships with his teachers and peers, this was not always the case. In Konyoa's early months at the Centre his teacher noticed that he continually "pushed" her with his challenging behaviour – as if "waiting for me to lose my temper with him". On reflection she realised that Konyoa was "trying her out" to see if she was worthy of his trust. She had read about this type of behaviour developing as a result of the trauma many refugee students had suffered. These students had had their trust violated so many times that they now needed to test the worthiness of new adults to "check if they could be trusted".

Physical needs

As a group, African background students have unusually high levels of need related to nutrition, hygiene and disease/illness. These issues impact on the students' adjustment to their new life in Australia and on their learning. It was suggested that the appointment of school based health professionals could do much to reduce the negative impact of health issues. Another related issue is the management of students' health records, particularly in relation to the communication between different agencies.

Nutrition
Teachers suggested that the students' poor nutrition has an effect on their participation in learning at school. In the main the teachers were concerned that caregivers are unable to provide healthy diets for their families as they do not have the knowledge to do so. Additionally, some children caught the school bus very early and others were responsible for their younger siblings and so did not have enough time to eat breakfast or prepare lunches. It was felt that these students found it difficult to concentrate in class.

> Many things are common to all waves of migrants but nutrition is different with this group - mums don't know what to cook. They watch TV and get ideas about what to buy and this isn't nutritious food. The kids come to school with a packet of biscuits for lunch and are then troppo in period five after lunch.

Related to the issue of nutrition is that of malnutrition. A number of the teachers reported that they believed some of the children had suffered from this during their early formative years. The teachers claimed that "ongoing problems from malnutrition can have long term effects on learning" and attributed some children's learning difficulties to such deprivation. Many IEC and other specialist ESL teachers understood the difficulties families experienced with nutrition because they know about the conditions in refugee camps. In such camps people are given food when it is available. Any kind of productive activity (such as gardening, keeping animals) is forbidden – this means that when the food supply is low, as it often is, people just have to go hungry. The consequence of these experiences is that some refugees have no previous experience of choosing or shopping for food, particularly in a western context, nor do they have the skills or opportunity to produce or attain food cheaply (by growing their own vegetables, for instance).

As with other issues, there were teachers who developed innovative ways to deal with their students' nutritional needs. For instance, some schools started a breakfast club while others provide food free of charge from the school canteen. Most teachers incorporated information about nutrition into the curriculum, in this way providing the students with valuable knowledge as well as teaching them English. Some teachers referred to this as "double teaching". Teachers also noted that students' nutritional status did improve as a result of these strategies. It was also recognised by the teachers that parents/caregivers need education about good nutrition – however, such programs are only possible when parents feel comfortable to participate in their children's schooling (see the section entitled Educational needs - Literacy levels).

Hygiene

Teachers, particularly those in the secondary schools, find that hygiene is an issue for their students' health. Many teachers spoke about their students' problems with cleanliness and with body odour and the impact this has on their social relationships, particularly with mainstream peers.

> Personal cleanliness can be an issue in the classroom. Also need to wash uniforms regularly, some are very tired, young moms and those who stay up late for family reasons and/or watch TV.

Although the teachers realise that the issue of hygiene can affect the students' health and social wellbeing, some also described their reluctance to address this problem within their classroom. For example, one teacher described her early reticence about informing her students for fear of offending them. Yet, despite her fears, when she did so, the students merely accepted the information without taking offence. The teacher believed that to them it was simply information with no stigma attached.

> I was worried about offending one of the students. The teachers said he should use deodorant—he said- why didn't they tell me?! He just didn't know.

In some schools, teaching staff are taking positive steps toward helping these students learn about hygiene. In one such program, the year nine mainstream students worked with IEC students to assist them in developing understandings about personal hygiene as well as the practical skills required.

> Hygiene is a huge issue. We did a program with mainstream year nines and IEC year nines where the mainstream students taught the IEC students about hygiene. They don't come from 'running water' backgrounds, they don't know about washing clothes.

Disease and illness

Teachers also expressed concern about the students' overall health status and about how soon this was assessed once they entered the schooling system. Some IEC teachers suggested that "health needs to be checked immediately on arrival at school not after nearly a year". The teachers recognised that these children suffered from many more serious health issues than has been the case for other groups.

Survey respondents listed the types of illnesses/ diseases that had been diagnosed in children. These included: general poor health, mental health issues, skin diseases, hearing and vision problems, untreated asthma symptoms, headaches, intestinal worms, malaria, and vitamin deficiencies.

As with other issues, the teachers recognised the impact of this on their students - both in terms of their overall welfare and in the way poor health impacted on learning. Many teachers reported that they have implemented programs that are used to promote healthy eating, exercise and stress management. In some schools, a school psychologist was also involved in assisting students with mental health issues.

System constraints

Teachers responding to the survey suggested that there are some problems for this group of refugees in terms of accessing the health system in Australia. One suggestion made was that increasing 'school nurse time' is seen as an effective way to minimize school absences and improve health. In some cases, schools responded to this need by using funds to extend the IECs access to the school nursing service.

> I took money from one area and put it into getting more school nurse time because that's what we needed at the time.

Health Records: Communication between agencies

Teachers in this study suggested that communication between agencies concerned with the health of newly arrived refugees may need improvement. They reported that important information gathered by other agencies was not always communicated to the school. They suggested that reporting protocols were needed to address this issue. In one focus group an EEA and a YW had the following exchange:

EEA: Sometimes the information about a newly arrived child is held by the case worker, you need someone to follow up. The reporting system should be effective for all stakeholders.

YW: The case worker only stays for a few weeks, then the family suffers.

EEA: Sometimes with the school nurse it takes forever for information to be passed on to teachers.

A further complication occurs in mainstream schools where this information may not be made available on enrolment.

Social needs

The social needs of these students were seen by the teachers and the adolescent students as being great. The issues that were raised related to the placement of students in appropriate year levels, the development of social skills generally, and then specifically as these related to Australian schooling and community contexts, and, the development of relationships with Australian peers. Other issues emerging related to racism and bullying. Finally in this section there is discussion about an issue of particular importance for adolescent students, namely that of identity.

Age appropriate placement

Determining the correct age of refugee children entering the Australian school system has been a long term problem. This is due, in part, to the lack of birth registration processes in some home countries and the differences in the relative importance of chronological age in some cultures. In other cases, it has arisen out of the perceptions of some refugees about how things will work best with regard to their migration. That is, some parents lower the age of their children so that they meet the definition of 'child' and the older members of the family do not have to risk rejection when applying for refugee status as adults. Others do likewise in the belief that the younger the child the better the chance of the family being granted refugee status. Some also believe that if the child is registered as younger they will have longer in school and a better chance of being successful in education.

From the data collected in this study it seems that the parents were far more concerned about the educational implications of the decisions they made than the social and emotional consequences. Teachers, however, were concerned about the social consequences for some of their students. For many students, placement in a year level below their real age made it difficult for them to socialise with peers and thus to make friends. Additionally, the approach to learning and behaviour management in the class may be socially inappropriate for the older child.

They are older than they say they are—and socially it's an issue. The younger girl has established great friends but the girl who is older can't make friends because she is so much more mature.

A similar issue arose when parents expected their daughter to be "kept down a year" because her learning was below what was expected of her peers. The mainstream teachers involved expressed concern that the child's social and emotional needs would not be met by this action. They also claimed that her learning needs could be

dealt with in an age appropriate class through an outcomes based approach. They expressed a belief that the social and emotional needs of the student were as important a consideration as the educational needs.

One girl's parents wanted to keep her down for a year, but we said 'no!' because we are based on outcomes, it doesn't matter. The social and emotional side is just as important (as the academic)!

Development of social skills

Teachers identified this cohort of students as having high levels of need in the area of developing social skills. This is understandable given the nature of their social and cultural background and how it differs to the Australian culture. There is also the added complication of their traumatic experiences and their high levels of emotional need.

Students arrive with very poor social skills, little understanding of expected behaviour- thus students shout at teachers, refuse to follow teachers' instructions, walk out of class without permission. Students' problems need to be dealt with immediately- if a student walks out of class because of the way someone has "looked" at them, the teacher, Deputy Principal, Pastoral Care Coordinator must assist the student before the situation is allowed to escalate into a fight!! "I'll speak to him later" does NOT help!!

It was noted that there was a wide range of knowledge, skills and understandings related to the social skills required by these students. Some were required by all the students, others were needed by specific subgroups. For instance, some skills are needed by all the children, others are very age dependent.

The more generalised aspects included a need to develop awareness of social norms, to communicate their needs in "an acceptable way", to accept differences in others, and, to be sensitive to others' needs. They need to learn to be cooperative and to be tolerant of different ways of behaving. As a group the students require assistance to develop the capacity to share, to take turns, to respect others' property, and, to deal with conflict in acceptable ways. Some of these aspects were mentioned by the following teacher when she described what her students needed to learn:

Their needs are social as well as emotional. (They need help with) cooperative learning. With their background (in a refugee camp) if something comes along you take it, pilfer; teach them sharing, knowing something will be there tomorrow, finishing work. They don't want to finish or stop because they think it won't be there tomorrow, trust….

Younger children were perceived as needing assistance to learn how to play appropriately. The reasons for this need may be cultural differences or because of the trauma suffered by these children. Studies after the civil war in the former Yugoslavia found that many refugee children were unable to play and their parents were unable to provide the parenting that was the norm for their culture (Tolfree, 1996, cited in Sinclair, 2001). In this study, teachers described how they have designed art activities, clay modelling, storytelling and expressive games and

exercises to build the children's confidence, improve their social interaction, and provide them with a sense of control when they experience difficulties.

Teachers also thought that the students need to learn how to behave appropriately when the whole class is moving about the school whilst other students are engaged in learning activities. African students are seen to be "very noisy" and "unruly" in the context of school.

Older students, particularly males, are perceived as disrespectful of authority, especially in their attitudes toward female teachers. The teachers indicated that generally this group of students need to learn to speak with appropriate respect to teachers and to conform to the social norms of the school.

The differences in cultural behavioural norms seem to create particular problems for these children. Firstly, the expectations of schools and the broader community are unfamiliar to these students, and not as transparent as many assume. One of the teachers, for instance, described how "most of these students have been brought up in societies that are closely knit, however, while here life becomes more individualistic, making it challenging". Secondly, many of the cultural differences, "ways of being" clash with the students' expectations placing them in a difficult position. Thirdly, the background experiences of these children, such as having a high degree of responsibility within the home, may make the strictures of school and the change in power positions they experience difficult for them to manage. This was reflected in a previous study of Burundian refugees in a Tanzanian camp conducted by Turner (1999) who found that a surprising number of young men had held leadership positions such as street leaders, NGO workers and political leaders. This upsets the usual hierarchy where the older generation are in positions of power. Turner also notes that when young men such as these are treated like children in the schooling system, this results in social problems.

Some teachers also recognised the need for "explicit teaching of Australian cultural understandings" including social conventions and behaviour. This should include not only those understandings related to school, but also those which would help the students "adapt to a new culture" and "learn about the social and cultural differences between them and other Australians".

Social interaction at school
School is a very important place for children and youth to develop relationships with others and to learn how to interact in socially appropriate ways in the broader community. Responses from some of the participants in this study indicated that the African background students were integrating well in their new community, particularly where the school provided the structures and encouragement to "mix and attend social functions" and to be involved in sporting activities.

Some teachers reported that girls tended to form a "closer network system" than the boys. Other participants described how some students were deemed "well liked" because of personal attributes such as musical ability or uninhibited dancing.

However, the majority of participants in the research noted that many of these African background students had a high level of social need and were not able to interact

effectively in the context of school. There was widespread concern that these students were generally not building positive relationships with peers from different social and cultural groups. They also recognised that the students needed support to be able to build relationships and to integrate socially.

> Ability to interact with Aussie kids in mainstream is non-existent at first - need a lot of work.

Some teachers suggested ways in which the students could be encouraged to interact more productively. For instance, some suggested that the school provide opportunities for students to interact socially for real purposes and that the African background students' peers should be encouraged to be more active in inviting interaction. There was also recognition that the English language and social skills required for successful social interaction need to be taught explicitly.

Jacob is a 16 year old African refugee. Although his skills are raw, he has been recruited out of a club basketball team to play in the WA Basketball League. This is a district level competition in which the best players compete. Part of the competition involves lightning carnivals usually held over a weekend. Between games at one such carnival some of the boys - all from different teams - congregated on an empty court. They took enormous pleasure in helping Jacob develop his slam-dunking skills, a feat that is restricted to the tallest and/or most athletic. Thus in participating in such a sport, Jacob is getting the opportunity to develop social skills, to improve his language skills and, perhaps most importantly to develop a positive self-identity (particularly as a very tall black youth).

Social interaction in the community

Social interaction in the community is important for students, particularly as they move into middle childhood and adolescence. This study found that although some African background children and youth were integrating into their new communities, the majority were experiencing a great deal of difficulty doing so. Many students and their teachers reported that they had "no friends where they live" and found it "boring" at home.

The findings of the study suggest that there are a range of reasons for this difficulty. For some students, particularly those with younger siblings to care for or with other home responsibilities, it was a matter of having different cultural and social priorities. For some it was that their parents were very fearful of the unfamiliar social environment and wanted to protect their children from harm. However, for many it seemed to be related to a lack of opportunity or knowledge of how to access community activities. A further impediment to full social participation may be racism (this issue is discussed in the section Racism and Bullying below).

Sport, both at school and in the community, was seen as one way that students could be encouraged to interact socially with their peers. Quite a few teachers mentioned that sport made some African background students popular and helped them to "mix

with other students". Involvement in sport was also seen as conferring health benefits on those who participated and a worthwhile activity for students to do out of school hours. However, some students reported that they were excluded from participation in sporting teams because the school "doesn't pick us for out of school activities".

Some participants in the study expressed a belief that teachers should assist students to interact more effectively. They suggested, for example, that African background students be recognised for the contributions that they do make to the school community. Teachers could also facilitate the students' access to community activities such as church groups, sporting clubs and the like according to the individual student's background and interests.

Racism and bullying

Racist attitudes and behaviour act as a considerable impediment to social integration and this certainly appears to be the case for students from an African background. Findings from this study show that racism and bullying exist in schools, and in the broader community. In fact, the findings of this research would suggest that the African refugees as a group encounter particularly high levels of racism and bullying in the community. Together these have serious consequences for students and their families.

Many participants in this study described the impact of the very apparent visual and cultural differences between the African refugee students and other Australian students. Teachers suggested that because these students are so "visually different" they are subject to a higher level of racist behaviour which is both "overt" and "covert". This difference was viewed as making it difficult for the children to "hide within the group". Adolescent students also spoke about the racism that they, their peers, and their family members had experienced.

In school and community contexts, the students had a view that the trouble they experienced was related to their being "black". They asserted that they did not seek trouble but other people pushed them, verbally abused them and tried to provoke them to retaliate. They claimed the "African people" did not retaliate because they knew that the "war would get bigger" and they would be the ones that ultimately would be harmed. This perception was supported by some teachers. For instance, one teacher claimed that "Australian society has always been about why white is good and black is not good. So Australians immediately have this racist viewpoint". If this is indeed the case, then being so "black" is quite likely to increase the level of racism.

During the interviews, many instances of racism were reported. In fact during the process of collecting data for this project, such an event unfolded: Prior to assisting in an interview with a group of parents at one school, one interpreter was harassed by a group of local adolescent boys. The interpreter had arrived at the school early. While waiting for the school to open she was approached by a group of white male teenagers who taunted her about being "black", told her to "go home", and then one boy proceeded to produce a rope and threatened to tie her up. Perhaps even more alarming was the fact that despite this occurring on school grounds, the police were not contacted by the teaching staff that day because the Principal was away from the school for the day and the remainder of the staff were reluctant to act without his say

so. In another example, a teacher reported how she observed a woman abusing an African background caregiver and her children.

> ____went past a conflict yesterday - there was a security guard and a lower class white lady was hurling abuse at a black lady and kids. "You get here and you get everything (given to you by the government)".

Other teachers concurred, reporting that it was a "huge problem (that) Africans were seen as receiving government assistance that could be going elsewhere". Two issues emerge from these examples. The first is that the "visual difference" makes African refugees "easy targets for racism" and the second is that misinformation about them can lead to prejudice.

School based racism was also reported to be part of the experience of some students attending IECs, although it was more often reported as arising from interactions with mainstream students. As was reported in the section on physical needs, many teachers in the study reported that African background students have hygiene issues that are impacting on their capacity to interact positively with their peers. In this case, hygiene is not only a health issue, it is also a social issue because other students may be reluctant to interact with the African students or may even tease them if they have strong body odour. As the students themselves indicated, part of the verbal abuse they experience comes about when they are told they "are smelly".

In some situations, teachers also reported that African background refugee students were "ostracised by mainstream students" who were "finding it hard to accept the students". Even more seriously, teachers recognised that mainstream students sometimes deliberately try to cause trouble for the African background students. For instance, "if Aussie kids want to get a rise, they will mock bully the African kids, which agitates them and they end up getting angry and in trouble." Similarly, another teacher noted that "there were a lot of stories about the mainstream students setting them up to get into trouble. For instance, ringing the bell on the bus and then saying "the African kids did it". Racism is evident in the graffiti seen around some schools with slogans such as "Africans go home" scrawled on toilet walls. It is also evident when the mainstream students tell the African refugee students that "This is not your country".

These observations by the teachers were supported by the adolescent students. They reported that other students are often "Swearing at us, throwing things at us" and that "People blame us for everything".

The African background students also described how people harass them in their homes by throwing rocks through their windows and threatening violence. In these situations they reported that the police take a long time to respond and that this increases their fear. In cases where people retaliate the situation becomes worse. Participants described how the police warn them not to retaliate in any situation: Even if they are hit or verbally abused they are expected to ignore it.

Students who reported such events do not think that this is fair. They do not understand why they need to tolerate such treatment when they did not cause the trouble. They feel they are not defended by the law. One student reported that a youth

known to his family was shot on the street prompting him to say, "It not right, African kids are dying. There is too much prejudice – white and black."

Another form of racism (and bullying, too) is more subtle, occurring through the exclusion of African students from groups and/or activities. For example, mainstream students can exclude African background students by refusing to work with them or to have them in their teams when playing games. Some IEC teachers claimed that not all mainstream teachers challenge this type of behaviour and that even they, as ESL teachers, feel obliged to go "softly, softly" and try persuasion rather than confrontation because of a perceived lack of support for integration in their school.

Related to the issue of exclusion is that of access. Senior secondary teachers described how they perceived that entry into VOC (vocational education) programs was sometimes restricted for their students. They "reported that to be accepted they (their students) need to be 'better' than Australian students". Therefore, they felt that they had "to work hard on our students' eligibility for structured workplace learning" and in this way racism had an impact on the future options of these students.

In addition to these instances of racism, one teacher in the survey claimed that there were also cases of "reverse racism". That is, his/her students, particularly the males, insulted others, especially the Asian background students.

> I find with my cohort racism works in reverse- they are very racist towards us and generally (especially the boys) have a huge chip on their shoulder. We are an extremely MC (multicultural) school but it's my black boys who are the first to sling insults to others- especially my Asian students.

In some contexts, the students, staff and community service providers also reported that there was a lot of tension between the Aboriginal and African background students, both within and outside of school. Some teachers, particularly those teaching in "low socioeconomic" areas saw this as a "huge conflict" which impacts considerably on the students. Many of these incidents take place in public areas in the community such as shopping centres, bus stops, railway stations, local parks and the like. In many cases, this conflict crosses into the school environment.

Some teachers also noted that there was racism between the African background children themselves, and that this was seen to be related to the class system in their home countries and indirectly to their skin colour. The following conversation in a focus group provides an example of the way in which this type of racism can be experienced by children in school or the community.

> Teacher 1: I think it sometimes upsets them to be called "the African children".
> Teacher 2: Within the African continent there is a class system.
> Teacher 3: I got called down to the bus: The bus driver was racist; he said "All you black kids get to the back. They all looked black to me. But he was talking about all the Dinka kids and sending them to the back.
> Teacher 4: A girl got some black dolls. Her friend said, "They are awful. They are too black."

Unfortunately the consequence of racism such as that described above is that it can become "a two-way street". That is, when one group of students practices racist behaviour towards another group, then this in turn promotes a form of racism from the victims towards the perpetrators. Unless positive action is taken to address this, the relationship between the two groups deteriorates and the consequences of the racism become more severe. As one survey respondent described it:

> African students are constantly being taunted. "Black c--- go back where you came from". It creates hurt and anger in the African students because they don't understand why people feel that way.

This type of persistent racism in turn "creates hatred among students" which impacts on all of the school community. Unfortunately, as one of the teachers noted, this type of endemic racism is not restricted to older children and adolescents:

> I'd like to think racism with the young kids doesn't exist, unfortunately it does. It can result in aggression/ avoidance/ intimidation from both black & white children.

Other consequences of racism were also described by teachers involved in the study. They described how the African background students became very angry and consequently were poorly behaved. One survey respondent described how in her school racism "very often leads to anger outbursts and acute behaviour problems". In addition, students who were subject to racism developed negative attitudes towards their school and education generally. Teachers noted that the impact was "huge" and meant that "students often start out excited about their new school and then fights, teasing etc by mainstream students" soon takes the pleasure out of the experience. Many teachers lamented that too often their hard work to make these children feel "safe and welcome in their new school" was undone by the racism they experienced in the playground and community.

Further consequences of these types of experiences of racism were also seen to be "poor self-esteem" and "a lack of self-confidence" in the African background students. Most teachers were very concerned that racism had a "high impact" on their students and that it had a considerable "effect on their learning".

Even though the majority of respondents reported that their students experienced racism from both within the school and from the wider community, there were a few teachers who claimed there was no such prejudice evident in their schools. These teachers saw the reason for this absence was because their schools were either "a specialist school" (usually meaning that they had specialist ESL programs) or that they were "multicultural" and that the ethos of the school was one of inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

Fortunately schools and community groups are developing innovative programs to address racism and bullying. These included changing attitudes, implementing specific anti-racist programs, providing organised activities to reduce the barriers between and within groups of students, and teaching coping strategies.

While teachers noted that changing people's attitude towards African background students was very important, it was also very difficult. As one teacher expressed it,

"if you keep trying and keep talking and someone doesn't want to talk to you, what can you do?" These teachers, however, do persist in trying to change the culture of the school to be more welcoming of their students. Some suggested that this process can be promoted by having formal anti-racism or bullying programs and noted that "Friendly kids/ friendly classroom" was a useful resource. In some schools, a committee is charged with managing the "Bullying" program. All of these approaches stress the importance of "awareness of the impact of racism" and "education" about how to eliminate it, both from "the behaviour of mainstream children and the African background students" themselves. Unfortunately and perhaps more seriously, some teachers suggested that there was evidence of "implicit racism even by the teachers and EAs (ethnic teaching assistants)" in schools, and that this too needs to be addressed. Further, it was suggested that "bullying and racism 'programs'" should be "introduced before they are required". That is, they should be pre-emptive. In addition, teachers suggested that racism needs to be addressed by "explicitly teaching them (the students)" about racism in order to promote a change in attitude. However, it was also acknowledged that the school may seem to be successful in changing students' attitudes, but the influence of the "home" and wider community means that they just as quickly "change back" or revert to previous attitudes.

Other teachers suggested that schools needed to sponsor programs "to assist with combining students". That is, these teachers saw a need for programs which encouraged the different groups of children or adolescents in the school to work and socialise together more harmoniously.

The groups of African background and Aboriginal students are of particular concern in regard to inter-group harmony. Some of the informal programs developed at school level included lunchtime programs centred on the students' interests, sports events and the like. For example, some programs have been developed that are designed to break down the barriers between Aboriginal and African background youth. Some of these were community based and others initiated by schools. In one case, an IEC teacher was taking a "low key" approach and organising small scale activities involving the students from her class and Aboriginal students she knew well in mainstream classes. During one such event the African background girls plaited the Aboriginal girls' hair during a lunch break. The teacher said that this had "broken down pre-conceptions and barriers" and the "Aboriginal students found that their African background peers are good fun. They enjoy themselves and are fun to be with". At another government school, a teacher organised for the local police to come to the classroom to talk about community policing. Through this activity the students had the opportunity to meet police in a neutral situation and discuss their issues.

Other suggestions put forward by the teachers in this study included teaching African students "coping" strategies. As one of the survey respondents put it:

> The worst racism faced is outside the school by our society. The most important thing we can do in schools is to instil techniques to deal with it and also confidence in their (the students') own worth.

Unfortunately there were few details about how this might be achieved.

Some adolescent students suggested that there was nothing that could be done about the racism so it may be better to "Have our own school! So people can't tease us. Just African children by ourselves." However, this suggestion was not readily accepted by all in the group as some saw that this would just attract derision such as is experienced by schools in disadvantaged areas.

At a community level, there is a program being developed by a group comprised of staff from the West Coast TAFE, the Community for Children NGO and Aboriginal YWs. This group is developing strategies, including community events, to try to improve the relationship between the Aboriginal and African background youth in the northern suburbs of Perth.

Having suggested that there are ways to address racism and support students to cope with it when it persists, most of the participants in the study supported the idea that there should be "zero tolerance for racism".

Social needs related to identity

It is generally understood that migrants, and particularly refugees, face many issues related to their sense of identity. Much of our sense of self is constructed from the social and cultural environment in which we live. It is understandable then that when people move to very different and largely unfamiliar environments they must learn new ways of being, thinking and doing, and because of this their sense of self is threatened. Some children can be torn between the culture of their caregivers/home country and that of the new country (Earnest, Housen and Gillieatt, 2007). This conflict is especially problematic for adolescents who are already facing considerable challenges in establishing an identity separate from being children on one hand and adults on the other (Phinney, Lochner and Murphy, 1990). Phinney et al. suggest that refugee experiences can rob children of the protective factors that assist them in dealing with these kinds of identity issues. This is because refugee experiences threaten family cohesion, parents' psychological health, and, individuals' capacities to cope with difficulties. Further these problems often occur where there is a lack of peer and community support.

The participants in this study raised a number of issues related to identity. Some of the teachers expressed concern that the African background students who had high levels of illiteracy are experiencing difficulties in terms of their identity. For example, while not being able to read and write was accepted almost as the norm in their war-torn home countries, this is not the case in Australia where literacy is expected of everyone. This is a particularly concerning issue for adolescents given the high levels of literacy demanded by mainstream schooling and the very large gaps these students have to bridge in terms of their academic performance. It is clear that this poses a serious challenge to their sense of self-efficacy and identity.

> There is no shame in illiteracy in their country but it is shameful in Australia (culture). And this is problematic because all of a sudden they feel looked down upon because they are illiterate.

In light of the barriers these students face in being able to succeed in mainstream education in Australia, it is hardly surprising that they identify with individuals who generally spurn educational achievement. Some adolescent African students

identified with black Americans such as rappers and singers. This is similar to findings in other studies (e.g., Earnest et al., 2007; Hewson, 2006). Some teachers expressed a concern that this type of identification was not supportive of a positive attitude to education.

> They (adolescent students) need to feel safe, needy for a sense of belonging, in clothing they identify with Black Rappers. They think it's going to be accepted. They access music and the lyrics. And soccer. They emulate it, they've worked out that it's a way to belong—but they are just mimicking it- they don't actually 'get it'.

It is interesting to note, however, that none of the students who contributed to this study spoke of identifying with these counter culture figures. Rather, they expressed commitment to their education and had very high expectations for what they could achieve. Many aimed at working in the service professions, hoping to complete university degrees so that they could return to their home countries and serve their people as doctors, lawyers and teachers.

Another aspect of identity for the African refugees as a whole is that surrounding the issue of race. The tension between Aboriginal and African background students, as discussed elsewhere in this report, is also related to identity. That is, these groups of students are both identified as "black" Australians and this is creating difficulties.

> Another issue is who is a black Australian now. There is a tension between Aboriginal and African students –almost of a "pecking order" and the African students are seen as a threat to the Aboriginal students as they are "blacker"

A study investigating the settlement of Somali refugees in New Zealand (Guerin & Guerin, 2002) told the following story about a similar situation between a Maori girl and her Somali peer.

> "A young school-aged girl interviewed by us about harassment at school said that she was told once by a Maori child (indigenous people of New Zealand who usually have brown skin), 'You're black, really black.' Her clever reply was, 'I happen to like that colour!'"

Familial needs

In this section the African background students' familial needs which impact on their schooling are discussed. These concern the relationship between school personnel and members of students' families; family structures and practices; and, adjusting to a new culture. Also considered are the difficulties encountered by African refugee families in relation to housing and financial management. Finally, some of the ways schools have responded to their students' familial needs are discussed.

Relationship with students' families

Teachers involved in this study spoke of the importance of the relationship they have with their students' families which, in turn, influences their relationship with their students. Teachers said that they "Need time and resources to form relationships with the family" who "Need to be involved and consulted constantly at each stage of the

education process" including about "the progress of the students and the need for their (caregiver) support".

The positive rapport that occurs with family involvement in education is also seen to influence how well the child achieves. Some teachers claimed that "the family has a huge impact which depends on the economic, language and academic ability of the adult carers".

School personnel also spoke of the value of knowing about the child's home background so that they could provide appropriate support at school. This view was expressed by a Deputy Principal in a primary IEC:

> Some families are really struggling - each member of the family is struggling. If you consider the child as being its whole family then we are just at the tip of the iceberg when we see the child in the IEC. We put priority on helping the whole family; valuing the family as having a huge influence on education.

Some school personnel reported that they had very positive relationships with their students' families. They described these families as "supportive" and "interested in the progress of their children" despite "education being very different". Some even saw the families as treating "school as a priority even though dealing with their own issues". Others recognised the efforts family members were making to "learn English themselves".

On the other hand, there were teachers who described less positive relationships with their students' families. These teachers described situations where there had been misunderstandings such as when parents were offended by "slights (real or imagined) to family members, those living in their original country and Australia - also to deceased family members." Others reported that their students' parents "did not participate in school activities and were very isolated from the mainstream (school and, thus culture)".

Some EEAs expressed concern that caregivers' involvement in their children's education was restricted because they did not understand the "rules in this country. They need to understand what is different here. Parents have a new language, a new culture". One survey respondent expressed the view that "Families seem to be a little afraid of school, and have difficulty adjusting to the fact that parents (not the school) are accountable for the kids' behaviour". Therefore it could be that what is viewed on one hand as reluctance or a lack of interest may on the other be due to fear and unfamiliarity.

<u>The influence of family structures and practices on schooling</u>
Participants in the study identified how some African background family structures were impacting on children's schooling. It was also reported that many African background children have families greatly affected by the trauma of cross-generational war, loss of family members, difficult life circumstances in camps and the social and cultural disruption of the refugee experience. Thus the teacher participants indicated that these families require a great deal of additional support.

The political and social circumstances encountered by these refugees have meant that some students are in blended families and others with adults who are relatives, some

of whom are little known to the children. In the focus groups teachers talked about "families being cobbled together to get more points (to be able to gain refugee status)" while others described how families desperate to get their children out of the refugee camp would give them to relatives who were being resettled in a new country so they would be able to "escape" or "have an opportunity for a new life". Some of the students living in these types of family situations are very unhappy, as described by an ethnic teaching assistant:

> Individuals are sometimes in a very unhappy situation. An unhappy environment – they are with extended relatives - some don't want them. (They are) not well cared for or liked even. (They are) slaves in the household.

In the case of older students in such situations some have been "kicked out" to fend for themselves. For instance, one adolescent participant reported that, "My auntie kicked me out but the school helped me to go to a women's shelter".

Many students are in households with no adult males so that "females have bigger responsibilities than expected to care for younger members of the family". Many teachers saw this as an "unfair load" that partly explained why some of these women were not able to be actively involved in their children's schooling.

Another reason for the lack of involvement of caregivers in education was provided by a member of the Sudanese community who described how many people in her community had "been sitting in a refugee camp for twenty years waiting for something to happen. They have no skills; they don't know how to help themselves". She suggested that this made it very difficult for caregivers to seek any involvement in the broader community. This view was shared by many involved in the study who suggested that those who have come through refugee camps are dealing with a "learned dependence" which makes adjustment to a new culture very difficult.

Another teacher reported that she only had two students "who have a parent; the others are with sisters or brothers or other people's (students') sisters or brothers." Many adolescents and some primary-aged students have a great deal of family responsibility as a result of these circumstances. One of the mainstream teachers described how one of her year seven students had previously lived only with his father and had a lot of household and wider community responsibilities because his father could not speak any English. This student was very excited when his father remarried because this meant he would have someone to care for him again:

> ____(student) says mum was killed and dad got remarried and his new wife has now come to Australia with her three children. He's excited with his new mum, brothers and sisters. A lot of the burden is now gone for him because (as he says) 'mum is looking after us now'.

There is such a wide range of family structures that another teacher involved in the study challenged the use of the term "family", suggesting that in reference to recently arrived African background students "kinship groups seem to be a better term".

The teacher participants also reported that there were high levels of "dysfunction" in some of the African refugee families. Some teachers suggested that this needs to be

taken into account when dealing with the students. For example one teacher described how when she began to discipline a student she noticed the student's reaction and decided to let the matter rest. She did so in recognition that the student came from a very difficult home situation and an understanding that allowances needed to be made for that:

> The student is carrying an enormous load; mum has mental health problems. I noticed the way I was speaking to her (the student). I thought hmm she just needs some space today. There's extreme dysfunction in their setups.

Social and cultural differences

In addition to the relationship with, and the structure of, families there were a number of social and cultural differences that appear to impact on the children's schooling. Caregivers, EEAs, teachers and students noted that these differences included such things as the relationship between parents and children, child rearing practices, social behaviours in the family, expectations about school, and, gender roles. This section concludes with some cautionary comments about the diversity that exists within the African background group and their need to maintain access to their cultural heritage.

There was a widely held view among the participants in this study that the interactions between caregivers and their children in many African background families is very different from what occurs for other students in our schools. For instance, EEAs, YWs and community members all spoke about how differently affection is expressed by African parents and their children compared to other Australian families. As one survey respondent indicated:

> Seems to be such a different family life- not much interaction between parent and child.

The participants suggested that this may be due to the different beliefs that are held about the nature of family relationships. They also believed that the heavy responsibilities that many parents, particularly mothers, have for caring for large families with little or no support from a husband or extended family mean they have little time or energy to respond to individual children. One of the EEAs who is very involved in the community described the situation in the following way:

> The parents are used to an extended family – not just Mum and Dad and children – lots of help from the family – a big family - six, maybe seven or eight or ten children. They are told that many people die on the war so you must have many children to save our country. It is a cultural thing. The children replace the dead from the war. In Australia, lots of children and mother stressed with no family to help and mum too busy – not part of the culture to look after the children like in Australia. Look after yourself (children), look after younger one (older children look after their younger siblings). Really different to here.

Other researchers (Guerin & Guerin, 2002; Robinson, 2006) provide support for these suggestions, indicating that different parenting styles have been strongly influenced by the circumstances prevailing in war-torn countries and refugee camps. These include mothers having to walk a long way to fetch water and food. It also includes

the mothers being forced to rely on their older children to care for infants. Further, the high mortality rate in such circumstances influences mothers' attachment to their children. It is suggested that while these types of parenting behaviours are normal in such circumstances, they cause maladaptation in the new country. This is also reflected in the way children respond to the parenting they receive once they have settled in Australia.

Teachers also noted the different ways that problems in African refugee families are dealt with compared what is usually done in mainstream Australian culture. For instance, a teacher described how when African background children are in trouble in their immediate family, they move to live with a relative.

> When the heat is on in one place, you just go to the next. This is cultural. So if they are in trouble here in one place, they have another place to go. Not deal with it.

Some teachers believe that this type of arrangement can mean that children are not used to dealing with issues or taking responsibility for resolving conflict.

Another key social and cultural difference that was contributing to the difficulties of these students related to the concept of sharing. Officers who worked in a migrant resource centre noted that:

> The refugee children don't know what toys are; they fight to keep stuff, they don't share.

Some participants in the study suggested that many of the African background children find it difficult to share because they are not used to having individual possessions. Joint ownership of property by families in Africa, coupled with the lack of private possessions in refugee camps, means that these children have little experience of individual ownership. Therefore, when they do acquire possessions they are reluctant to share them. It was also noted that many of these children have suffered severe deprivation in refugee camps, including the lack of access to food and water. Such experiences lead children to fear for the long term availability of goods, and therefore, to want immediate gratification. It also results in their lack of trust, particularly with regard to belief about whether or not there will be enough for everyone. The following exchange between two teachers in a focus group illustrates one of the many impacts this type of behaviour has in schools:

> Teacher 1:   We used to give out individual stationary packs. So we changed that to communal packs. They can't manage individual possessions. They kept taking each others' and causing disruption.
> Teacher 2:   (The children are) very possessive.

Teachers in secondary schools also reported that they often dealt with issues related to students taking one another's possessions. This was especially the case with items like multi-rider tickets where the owners were not readily identifiable.

Another social and cultural difference relates to the child rearing practices of African background families. In particular, it relates to the issue of discipline that is used in

the home and how this can create difficulties for managing behaviour in the school context. Caregivers, EEAs, YWs, adolescents, teachers and school administrators all identified that many caregivers were experiencing problems with discipline. There was a view that because the traditional method of discipline, namely corporal punishment, was not acceptable in Australia the caregivers "feel powerless" in managing the behaviour of their children. Therefore, the teachers recommended that "parents need to be taught about discipline", and alternative ways of providing discipline.

In some cases this cultural difference led teachers to believe that caregivers do not support the school in applying discipline. However, in other schools this lack of support is seen as being the result of a lack of knowledge and so they have provided culturally sensitive training in behaviour management and other parenting skills. These courses allow parents to develop a wider repertoire of strategies and to share approaches that work for them with others.

A further related issue concerns differences regarding acceptable behaviour. This appears to be especially the case in primary schools. Participants in the study described how the African background children had previously been used to a great deal of freedom. They had generally also come from situations where they were very active physically. However, in Australian schools they have much less freedom and few opportunities to make decisions about what they would like to do. Further, their movements are controlled and they are expected to sit for long periods of time. Even when they do move it is expected to be done in a quiet and orderly manner. One of the EEAs described how these changes in expectations impact on the students:

> The children miss Africa - older children the most - it's difficult for them to get used to the new ways - too different - they sit at a desk for six hours and they never picked up a pencil before.

There are good reasons why these behaviours are expected in schools, however, some teachers and EEAs recognise that the students are placed under undue pressure when adjusting to these expectations. They recommend that the students be given a period of adjustment during which they are not punished for non-compliance. The following conversation between teachers in a focus group describes a view commonly held by ESL specialists working in the area. Similar views were expressed by EEAs:

> Teacher 1: In the media there is the constant complaint of Australia's sedentary lifestyle but the African students would want to run around all day.
>
> Teacher 2: They aren't 'free' when they come here, we don't let them go out to the park on their own; school is restrictive- sit up, don't run, don't bounce your ball, etc. This contrasts with life in the camp and their home country.
>
> Teacher 3: Moving to Australia means a huge shift in their lifestyle. At night they could go out, here we stay home and watch TV.
>
> Teacher 4: Every interaction with an adult at school: don't do this do that, wear your hat.
>
> Teacher 5: An African kid scaled a tree; I didn't freak out; I stayed calm and asked what are you doing? He obviously had the skills to climb a tree;

he was after bark to start their fire. Another teacher may have freaked out.

Teacher 4: We sanitize our own kids. How can these CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) kids stand this sanitization?

Teacher 2: They just switch off, when they first start at school they don't talk much, then child called _____ said he didn't like it here. "I want to go back to Africa because I was free; I could run and play." Another child said: "I don't listen because she (one of the teachers) shouts at me."

Teacher 6: By the end of the day you forget what you are saying to the kids and you are negative to them.

Teacher 7: You've got all your norms in place.

Teacher 1: I snapped at a child for going into my cupboard and then I was aghast that this child didn't realise that he shouldn't do that. Then I told myself, well, if they steal a book, it means they really liked the book, so hey what's the harm in that?

Teacher 6: We take for granted that they know all this stuff, we just yell at them.

Teacher 1: It's about cultural difference; here time is money, in refugee camps time is totally boring and time is endless.

Teachers in this study felt that in some cases African background students were "in trouble more because they were more readily noticed" and are more exuberant than their Australian born peers. EEAs concurred and together they called for more understanding of the students. They also call for greater tolerance of African background behaviour, especially when they are new to the schooling system.

No only do these differences impact on students in the school context, they also affect the relationship between some of the caregivers and their children. For example, one of the EEAs recounted an incident where a child was obviously upset when his mother chastised him for climbing a tree –it was something he had done all his life.

One day a boy, _____; his mother was late coming to the school to pick him up so he climbed a tree to wait for his mother – it was safe there, no one can see him. This is what he did in his country. His mother come and couldn't find him and then she looked up and saw him. She was angry, she shouted at him – 'African monkey get out of there!' So child was very confused – why is this wrong?

Some of the teacher participants expressed concern about how the African parents manage their children's routines at home. These concerns included such things as the parents not setting suitable bed times, having inadequate hygiene routines, not providing adequate or appropriate meals, and, not monitoring their children's access to media. For example, it seemed to some teachers that their students "don't seem to have a bed time, (but) stay up all night watching movies and come to school to sleep". There was also concern that families did not have "showering and meal routines". Others worried that their students were accessing unsuitable reading material and television programs meant for much older readers and viewers. A further issue was the degree of freedom young people were given at home. On one hand, there were reports that the children were very restricted in their movements in Australia because their caregivers' fear for their safety in a new environment. In this case, the children were reported to be very unhappy with their loss of freedom. On the other hand, some children were reported to be given freedom which was seen by teachers to be greater

than was suitable for their age and maturity. These children were seen to be "wild" and "wilful" and to "have difficulty accepting adult authority, rules and the regulation of their behaviour".

There were also participants in this study who recognised that caregivers were struggling to deal with the changes they faced in relation to the different cultural expectations about raising children. Additionally, the parents and caregivers were often dealing with children who were very unhappy about the behavioural changes being forced upon them. One of the members of a Sudanese community expressed the issue in the following way:

> African children play outside. They have lots of freedom. Now in Australia lots of rules so there a problem with parents. Parents have a new role in a new country but don't know how (to fulfil that role). Their children fight with them and parents struggle with their new role. They don't know the new culture.

As discussed in earlier parts of this report, the stark difference between the way that parents and teachers interact with African background children may lead to conflict in the home. In particular, teachers, EEAs and community members suggested that caregivers express their affection for their children in different ways than do mainstream Australian parents. Moreover, community members suggested that in their community showing overt affection to children was viewed as becoming "westernised". In contrast, children find their teachers do give them individual attention and express affection, setting up an unfortunate confusion which can lead to misconceptions about "love". The following is the way one of the community members described this situation:

> The children see "love" in school and everywhere (wider culture) and no "love" of the same at home. They need trust and love in a new culture to feel safe. But it makes them think there's no love at home. They are confused – love and affection at school but not the same at home. So wrong thinking (expectation).

Teachers also recognised this as a dilemma: They understand that children may confuse the individual attention and care given by a teacher for "love", and in turn, this may set up expectations about how their parents should behave. Teachers were asking themselves "are we doing the right thing at school? Are we raising expectations in the children and causing problems for their parents? Should we be helping the parents rather than individual children?"

Differing perceptions about how schooling should occur were also reported by many of the participants, and as such it is clear that this cultural difference has an impact on the students' education. Caregivers expressed concern about the type of "teaching" that occurred in Australian schools. In their view, formal processes and rote learning of "facts" are the most important aspects of education and these contrast sharply with the constructivist, outcomes-based approaches they see in Australian schools. In some cases, caregivers spoke of Australian approaches as "too soft" and as encouraging their children to have "low expectations" and "to be lazy". Some teachers believed that the African parents see education as being completely up to the school and that the teachers, as trained professionals, should control all of the learning at school. Further, it is clear the caregivers have high expectations for their children. Thus it seems that

African background parents do not have an understanding of the types of partnerships promoted in Australian schools, nor do they have "realistic expectations" about what can be achieved.

Differences in gender roles within the family and wider society are a further area of potential cultural differences for African background families. The different expectations held for male and female children in these families may contrast with the roles expected in schools in Australia. For instance, the adolescent participants reported that in their culture women were not generally allowed to go to school, and when they did, they left by the age of fourteen to be married. Also in their country of origin men were more likely to be employed because they were the ones that had to accumulate sufficient wealth to be able to marry and support a family. The following extract taken from a focus group of adolescents from a range of African countries describes these cultural differences:

> Student 1: Especially here in Australia, they consider the age (of students in school). In Africa, women aren't allowed to go to school. Men- year 12 and year 9.
> Student 2: No, everyone can go.
> Student 1: If you are fourteen you get married. What about marriage?
> Student 2: You've got to have it all set up; job (referring to males).
> Student 1: In Africa marriage is different; you have to pay. Especially for boys you have to work harder.
> Student 3: A guy wanted the younger girl but the father misunderstood.
> In Nigeria you have to have a house, money, cars (to get married).
> Student 1: They pay in cows or in money.
> Student 2: I don't know why they sell people.
> Student 1: Because they raised you and you have to pay; you go to another family and you will work so they have to pay.

For some male students, life in Australia has brought many changes, such as assisting with tasks that previously were considered strictly "women's work". For example, one of the teachers reported how one of her adolescent male students now assisted his aunt, "One boy was culturally forbidden to help in the kitchen—you'll be seen as a woman if you cook. Now in Australia he says 'I help my auntie.'"

Some school personnel also felt there was an issue with the amount of child care and housework girls were expected to do at home. In some cases, this work meant they were unable to do homework. For example, one teacher reported how a student did not complete her homework because of her responsibilities at home and when her parents found out she was punished. The teacher involved noted that this made them reluctant to report issues such as not completing work to parents:

> _____ (female student) was up late cooking and cleaning, and then we would say why haven't you done your homework? When her mum found out she beat her.

In other situations, teachers reported that parents had the attitude that it did not matter if some students completed their work because, according to the teacher they thought, "'She's only a girl' so it doesn't matter if she does her homework or not".

Therefore, the different roles subscribed according to gender in African background families have implications for the way schools communicate with caregivers. Teachers reported that in some families, even where communication is directed to the mother of the child, male members of the family respond. In one such case, the step-father was seen to make all the decisions:

> Culturally, she (year seven female student) doesn't have a voice in the family - the stepfather rules the roost entirely. Notes will come from the father but it's actually the mother who wrote them. That's nothing out of the ordinary—it's normal. She (student) asked me - am I going to _____ (secondary school) or not? Because her step-father wouldn't tell her what was going to happen to her.

As has been discussed earlier in this report, there are many homes where there are no men which means that the mother has to take on new roles in the family. Some of the female participants in this study are in this position, and they reported that they had found this very difficult. At the same time, it also provided them with opportunities such as undertaking paid work and subsequently they had greater control over their own lives. Despite the benefits of these new roles, these cultural and social differences present a further adjustment burden for these people.

In contrast, where there are men in the family, and the women become more involved in the broader community such as through programs in their children's schools, they are influenced by the new culture. In some cases, this can cause conflicts in the family. This, in turn, impacts on the way the children are being raised, particularly in relation to routines and discipline. An example of this emerged during an interview with an EEA and with a YW who were assisting with parenting classes:

> EEA 1: Women are dealing with the situation all by themselves because the fathers aren't there (at the parenting sessions). It would be good to get the men to come so that the mum gets support from their partner. The mum's are doing their own thing with the kids.
>
> Researcher: Do you think that causes conflict at home?
>
> EEA 1: Well, I know that some of the mums won't even tell their husbands what they are doing.
>
> YW: It will lead to inconsistencies between mum and dad.

It should be noted that in discussing "African background families" it is important to recognise that this generic term disguises the diversity within and between the different cultural, linguistic, social and religious groups the term is representing. These diverse groups of peoples are being classified together as "African" because they come from the same continent. Some argue that is as useful as putting all of Europe together. Similarly, while many have had migration experiences in common, there are individual differences that should not be ignored. The cultural diversity that exists between families was recognised by the participants in this study, as shown by the following extracts:

> Every family situation is different. You can't make any assumptions at all.

> Many students come from the Kakauma refugee camp. But the Dinka who went through Sudan and those who went through Kenya, they are hugely different.

> Depending on where they come from - their world view is different.

> There is also the desert population versus the city population.

As well as recognising this diversity, there is a need to recognise how important it is for migrants to hold on to, and have access to, their cultural heritage. As the NGO worker interviewed for this study suggests, agencies need to take account of cultural maintenance needs when providing interventions. She noted that some families believe that as a consequence of migration, they need to "take on the Australian culture" at the expense of their own.

> Anecdotally, they think they need to drop their culture in order to take on the Australian culture but we say don't do that! We try to support them to maintain their culture and traditions.

There is a necessity for the group as a whole to maintain cultural identity, but it is especially the case for children because a cultural identity is important for self esteem and confidence which are essential if these children are to achieve educationally.

Family adjustment to a new culture
One of the major concerns raised by participants in the study is the way families are adjusting to their new cultural circumstances. The concern relates to the ways in which families cope with the demands of a literate society, how they manage the changing role of children, and, how they manage housing and financial problems.

The difficulties experienced by African background families who have low levels of education and therefore low literacy proficiency was raised by many participants in the study. This has an impact on many aspects of their lives in Australia, but particularly on their children's education. Illiteracy made it very difficult for parents to communicate with the school or to assist in their children's schooling. As one participant described it, in the home country "illiteracy had not been problematic whereas in Australia it caused shame and embarrassment".

Such feelings of shame reduce the willingness of already reluctant parents to become involved in their children's schooling. It also makes it difficult for them to negotiate the complex and unfamiliar society in which they now find themselves.

At the same time, however, the African refugee children are learning English and gaining knowledge about the new culture and society, and do so more rapidly than many of their parents/caregivers. As a consequence some children have taken on new roles in their family, particularly when their caregivers are illiterate. The literate child often has a greater degree of involvement in situations normally seen as the province of adults – such as dealing with institutions and people outside their families. In turn this means that the power relationship between these young people and their parents has changed. The traditional authority of the parents is challenged and there is a loss of respect. This was reported by a primary teacher:

> The children start to get the power in the family because they understand the system, and they need to not exploit their family but to help them.

Other teachers described how some adolescents have enormous levels of power in their family. This includes making decisions about the budget. In some cases their spending decisions show that they are making poor choices such as buying: " '50 cent' T-shirt and designer jeans (which) are more important to a 14 year old than three healthy meals each day".

Not only do many students have additional power in the family but they also have "heavy responsibilities". Many are seen by teachers to have been asked to "bear the worries of adults". The contrast between their role at home and the role they must play in school can cause problems for some students, particularly adolescents. (This matter is discussed in more detail in a later section of this report.)

Teachers also recognised that family circumstances can make a considerable difference to the lives of their students. For instance, some families have access to financial assistance from other family members, while others do not:

> Even though they come from same area, they have different experiences. Most are born in Sudan. But for some their aunty or uncle work in America and they get money from them and they can go to school. One boy is well educated because his relatives sent money and helped them. But the rest of that group have no relatives so they have no chance to go to school. In a refugee camp for 30 years and the kids arrived here at 18....It's the quality of that experience - if you could get any education, specially selected. There's such a range of factors that impact on them.

It was clear from the interviews and questionnaire responses that many teachers recognise these differences, and so they adjust their teaching programs to take account of the experiences and expectations of their students.

There are a range of housing issues for African background families including a lack of familiarity with the types of housing provided in Australia, and related to this are problems that occur with overcrowding. The lack of familiarity results in families having difficulty managing the maintenance or care of their home. In turn, this can lead to failure to meet rental conditions and also has hygiene and health implications. Overcrowding has implications for education, particularly as younger members have difficulty finding a quiet place to study.

The main reason for this overcrowding is the high cost of rent in Perth. Some families manage these high costs by sharing accommodation. For others it occurs because large families can only afford small houses. Affordable larger homes tend only to be available further from the city, meaning that access to services is difficult and transport costs are higher.

A further difficulty for some families concerns the issue of safety in their homes. In some of the areas where they live (in the cheaper rental localities) there is a serious problem with racism and some students reported being harassed in their home.

Because of the high rental costs there is considerable financial pressure on families. The consequence of this is that adolescents often have to do more work at home while their parents work longer hours. Alternatively they may have to leave school to get a

job in order to contribute to the family funds. Some adolescents stay at school but work part time which adds to the pressure on them, especially as they are already struggling with the "large gaps" in their schooling. There are also adolescents who are living independently and the financial pressures on them are often even more severe. They have to find the money for rent, for their daily needs, for transport and to meet their own education costs. Thus for these students it is a daily struggle to stay at school.

In addition to the financial difficulties related to rental costs, there are other financial issues for African background families. These include their reduced capacity to find work. Many adolescent participants in the study reported that they and their parents wanted to work, but they could not find a job. Further, when jobs were available they tended to be menial and poorly paid. The impediments for them finding work included their low levels of English language competence and lack of qualifications. Further, when they did have qualifications, they were often not accepted in Australia.

Teacher participants reported that money was not always available for school related expenses. In response to this, the adolescents and community members suggested that schools should let families know well in advance how much money will be needed so they can "save up" for the expense. Further, EEAs reported that caregivers did not always understand why some of the money was collected. For instance, the parents/caregivers do not understand the role of excursions in schools and nor do they know why "little bits of paper" requesting money were being sent home. As one caregiver expressed it:

> Excursion thing, where is the money going? A small piece of paper? Why do we have to pay that money? The school is asking for money all the time. Small money but it's too much. Instead of this money everyday, why not put it in the school fees instead of always asking for little bits of money because we don't have it.
> There is a lot of help here (in the IEC) for the money but in mainstream you have to pay. I've got many kids and two or three kids need that money. It is hard for the parents.

In some schools, the situation of these caregivers was understood and special provision was made for them. For instance one caregiver described how the school her children attended made a special arrangement so she could pay in instalments. This mother also expresses her dilemma – she can little afford the additional payments for special events at school, but she does not want her children to miss out:

> I think the Principal understands that I am a single mum and that I have lots of kids so sometimes they let me pay half and then half later. Sometimes they help me. The kids will feel really bad if they don't get to go. You can't let them sit there while all the other kids go.

The pressure to send money back to their families still in Africa also impacts on many aspects of refugees' lives in Australia, including their children's schooling. It increases financial pressures which are already high and forces older children into the workforce before they have completed their schooling. Even where some older students were living independently of their families in Australia, there was an expectation that they would still send money back to Africa. Where this happens, the

financial pressure is forcing high school students to work part time as well as attend school, do homework, care for themselves and sometimes even younger siblings. These young people reported that this created a great deal of pressure on them.

> I want to bring my family over and I don't know how to do it to get them over here. I have to work and save money. It is very hard.

Some study participants noted that these financial difficulties were further compounded by the African adults' lack of experience with managing money. This is not surprising given their background experiences of life in a refugee camp where bans are placed on all commercial activities. This "forced dependence" did not prepare people well for life in a complex society. For some families there is the added burden of relying on children when interacting in the community because of poor English language skills. This reliance includes when they are shopping, and in some cases this leads to money being spent unwisely. One of the survey respondents put it this way:

> Families often have no budgeting skills; children sometimes control shopping because of their English language skills – buy expensive, fashionable clothes and food with poor nutritional value.

In a discussion about families' ability to manage money one teacher described the situation where families' phones were disconnected because of large bills. This was seen as due to the much higher prices charged for such services in Australia, than was the case in Africa.

> They (family members) phoned home heaps—but their phones got cut off because they have $2,000 phone bills. Mobile phone bills are also a big problem.

The unfortunate consequences of these situations is that communication for African background families is severely compromised.

<u>School responses to students' familial needs</u>
As with other areas of student need, schools have developed a range of responses to provide support and assistance to students and their families. Where practical, there have been changes made to the school curriculum to better accommodate the different background of the students. In addition, many schools are providing support to their students' families to address their problems.

Many teachers in this study reported that this cohort of children challenged the way they teach. They spoke about having to make considerable changes in the content and delivery of the curriculum. Many spoke about going "back to basics" and of having to plan for much more active learning than had been the case with other groups of newly-arrived refugee students. One of the teachers in a primary IEC focus group described these changes in the following way:

> They (first cohort of African background students) could not cope with the four walls and what we were doing - with how we were teaching. So we threw everything out. We started from scratch—teaching and learning; social and emotional stuff— we redid and reintroduced the things that the kids needed.

Experienced teachers described how they had "gone back" to the methodologies and content they had used with the Vietnamese and Cambodian children in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, many less experienced teachers remarked that they "would not have coped" without the assistance of their more experienced colleagues. The ESL approaches included developing the students' understandings of core concepts and language (at the word, sentence and text level) related to topics such as the body, clothing, food, health (hygiene), colour, number, shopping, money, the school and the classroom. The teachers also placed an emphasis on oral language skills, including those needed for interpersonal communication and "learning how to learn skills".

The participants also recognise that caregivers need additional support to understand and adjust to an unfamiliar education system. As one teacher remarked, "Families are dealing with their own trauma and coming to terms with a new culture. They need lots of support to understand the school system." Although school communities provide some programs to address this need, it was suggested that more needed to be done in the community as well.

A common way the school community assisted caregivers was to run information sessions. In these sessions, the Deputy Principal or a teacher explained the structure of the school system with the assistance of interpreters. Caregivers also had the opportunity to ask questions and talk about their individual concerns. In the following excerpt the Deputy Principal of an IEC explains the content of one of these sessions.

> I explained the whole process (of the IEC); what phase 1 and 2 mean, the skills expected; what mainstream means. In Year 5, in Africa - you (the student) have to pass a test to go to the next level. I told them about the Behaviour Management Policy- what we do instead of smacking the kids; the time-outs and things like that.

Information sessions like this involve contacting the parents individually by phone with the assistance of an interpreter (as many do not read), organising transport and providing child care or a child-friendly environment. In some instances, these types of activities involve applying for grants or special funding. Consequently, the Deputy Principals indicated that organising events like these takes up a considerable amount of their time.

In some schools, although the teachers recognised how important it was for caregivers to understand the schooling system in Australia and for them to be involved in their children's education, they did not see it as part of their role to provide such assistance. So that while they claimed:

> I think it will solve more than half of the problems by educating parents about their role in their child's life, education, health. It's a very big issue...

They also suggested that "the kids have to educate the parents".

Despite this, parenting classes are being run in the community and in some of the primary IECs. The content of these school-based classes included how parents could support their children in their schooling, issues about homework, behaviour

management strategies and health issues such as nutrition and hygiene. In these sessions there were also opportunities for discussion about cultural and social issues, and about their concern regarding the process of negotiating a new school system. In community programs parents were taught how to use common appliances, to prepare healthy food for their children, to manage money, and, to access community based services.

Similarly, high schools provided information sessions for their students and their families. As has been noted already these students may be living independently and/or they may be responsible for the care of younger siblings and other family members. In some instances, sessions were run in collaboration with a local TAFE college. Topics include the role of the police, safe driving practices, restraining children in a car, and, healthy living including information about diet and hygiene.

Many schools offer other assistance to students and their families on a needs basis. This assistance includes: arrangements to help caregivers meet the costs of schooling (e.g., excursion and extra curricula activity costs, such as swimming lessons), clothing and food donations for families living in difficult circumstances, and, informal help to access community services, housing and other types of support.

Although much is being done to support African refugee children and their families, many of the people involved in this study acknowledged that there was still much that needed to be done. As a teacher working with these families said:

> DIMIA has not thought through how they provide for families. It's not that they need more money. I'm not only dealing with kids here, but illiterate parents who are unable and unprepared and therefore cannot support their own children. It's one thing (for the government) to bring them over, but another thing to support and care for them.

The tension between students' personal and educational needs

Many of the teachers in the focus groups expressed concern about meeting the children's emotional needs while being mindful of the high level of their academic needs. This was particularly the case for ESL specialist teachers. As has been discussed, these African refugee students have very high levels of both emotional and educational needs. It is, therefore, understandable that there is tension around these often competing needs, especially in the first years of settlement in a new country.

The teachers identified a number of reasons why they feel torn when trying to meet these two types of student needs. The reasons included conflicts around setting priorities, pressure to meet system standards, time constraints, and, their awareness of mainstream demands.

In the present political climate the measure of a teacher's effectiveness tends to be their students' achievement of learning outcomes as mandated by the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998; and similar documents in other states). While most teachers have a concern for the welfare of their students, ESL teachers have a long tradition of analysing student needs before planning learning programs for

them. This analysis does not only include their educational, linguistic and communicative needs but also those related to their cultural, social, familial, emotional and physical needs. This broader set of priorities can cause conflict for the teachers because they understand that their students will not be able to learn effectively without attention to this wider range of needs. This view is reflected in studies of refugee students' adjustment to schooling and learning achievement.

A focus group in one IEC described what happened in their centre when the African background children first arrived. They spoke about the much higher levels of need by these children and how they had to first meet these social and emotional needs before their learning programs could be effective. They also noted that if they focussed on the social and emotional needs initially they were able to attend to the academic needs later with greater effectiveness. Thus their teaching priorities changed in response to their students' needs:

> Initial focus was social and emotional needs because kids' learning wasn't taking place. We went back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and started there. We were really concerned about our teaching and learning because the pendulum changes social and emotional high and academic low then evens out and then swings.

The tension created by these competing demands is exacerbated in a system where standards of student achievement do not necessarily take into account their background experiences or indeed their "starting points". This is a problem particularly with refugee populations whose background experiences can vary very widely. In the case of African background students, the factors of severe trauma, deprivation, and limited access to formal schooling have a marked impact on their capacity to achieve 'standard' outcomes. Most student cohorts before this African refugee group were able to achieve at least level 4 on the Bandscales (McKay, 1993) in a year or less, but few students in the current group are able to achieve above a level 2, even after eighteen months to two years in an IEC.

Commonwealth New Arrival funding provides six months of intensive English assistance to all newly-arrived migrant and refugee children regardless of their background circumstances. In WA those children with access to an Intensive English Centre are able to attend for up to a year. This is extended for students with limited schooling. Although there have been some concessions for this group of African background students, there is still considerable pressure to move the children to mainstream contexts as soon as possible. This pressure increases the difficulties for teachers managing the students' competing needs.

ESL teachers, particularly those working with older students, are acutely aware of the demands the students will face in mainstream contexts and of the wide gap between their current levels of achievement and what will be expected of them. Again this adds to the difficulties they face when prioritising student needs and planning suitable interventions to meet these needs. A group of the teachers participating in a focus group described how they worried about the choices they needed to make:

> Teacher 1: Teachers do feel that pressure and they do worry. We nurture them when they arrive and have to teach them certain things to get them ready.

Teacher 2: Getting students to communicate so we can get to know them.

Teacher 3: There's an urgency to teach literacy and numeracy but the system has to acknowledge that kids from extreme backgrounds can't be pushed to do literacy and numeracy. But we have to consider that emotional development because if they don't get it here, they're not going to get it otherwise.

Teacher 1: In upper primary there is curriculum pressure.

Such concerns were also expressed in other focus groups and in the survey responses from all teachers (both mainstream and ESL):

The social wellbeing of the students needs to be focused on more. Teachers have to be more focused on this. But there is a critical tension between the social and the academic. These students need lots of support and modelling and they need help with independent learning (skills).

Needs Analysis: Concluding remarks

The findings of this part of the study support those identified in the literature review. In particular the study found that African refugee students have significant 'other' needs in addition to their educational needs, including social and psychological *needs*. A major theme emerging both from this study and from the available literature is the very high level of literacy and numeracy needs *of* these students. African refugee students have usually had little or no *previous* education and are often not literate in their native language making it more difficult for them to learn a second language and integrate with mainstream students, even after two years in an Intensive English Centre (IEC).

Another strong theme of the findings is the need for these students to have additional time to learn the required level of English language skills and background understanding (including cultural knowledge) to an age appropriate standard in order for them to cope with the demands of the mainstream curriculum. It was suggested that the mainstream curriculum needs *to be adapted* to take into account the specific high needs of the African students. This could be done through the application of a "needs analysis" as occurs in ESL teaching, and, if necessary the development of Individual Education Plans (IEP). However, *the situation* is complicated by the fact that there appears to be an inadequate level of resources, both in terms of financial and physical support, not only for the students themselves but for the families as a whole and for those responsible for their education.

The study also found that the social issues associated with behavioural problems, and, psychological issues associated with being in a refugee camp, also affected the *students'* ability to learn and to integrate into mainstream schooling. Adolescent students were further affected by peer pressure and the inability to fit in. Some were also adversely affected by increased pressures at home, such as taking responsibility for siblings or being the 'man of the house' when the father or appropriate male role model is absent. A number of the participants felt that it was important for programs to be developed through which families and communities could be involved in the education and schooling of the African refugee students, as well as to assist with the social and psychological adjustments.

Educational Issues

The participants in this study raised many issues concerning the education of school aged refugee children, and these are discussed in this next section of the report. The most prominent issues appeared to centre on the area of language, including both the learning of English, the consequence of low English proficiency, and, the maintenance of the students' home language and culture. Other issues relate to the general mainstream schooling of these students and the support that is needed for this to occur. In addition, specific teaching issues were also raised by the participants, including how to address the high level of need of these students, particularly with respect to adapting the curriculum. Next the future prospects and expectations pertaining to these students are discussed, followed by the relationship between the children's homes and the school. The final issue outlined in this section relates to education policy development.

Language issues

Importance of learning English

In this study there was a consistent recognition given to the importance of learning English, not only by the African children and adolescents, but also by their parents and caregivers. The participants in this research acknowledged that until a sufficient level of English language is acquired this group of migrants will remain vulnerable, and in addition, the younger members will continue to have extremely high levels of educational need.

Many of the teacher participants described how low levels of English language competence have a serious impact on students' progress in school. Further, they indicated that this affected the students' development, not only in the English learning area, but also across all aspects of the curriculum. At the same time they acknowledged that this impact varied according to the age and background of the child (including factors such as their first language and their culture). Generally, this group of students was seen as requiring more time and support in order to achieve age appropriate outcomes, and in fact, to learn English in the first place.

Part of the reason this group has difficulty in developing English proficiency is the vast distance between English and the first language of these students (Corder, 1981; Ringbom, 1987). It is well recognised that speakers of languages such as German, French and Italian will find it an easier task to learn English (because of the shared "root" of these languages) than will those who speak a language that does not share a common heritage. The languages spoken by African students, such as Amharic, Rundi and Dinka, are vastly different to English at all levels (i.e., phonologically, syntactically, semantically and pragmatically) and so the task of learning English is very challenging (see Appendix D for a list of languages spoken in the countries from where the African refugees originate). In addition, many of these students do not have a literate base to their own first language (L1) and this makes the cognitive and linguistic demands of learning English seem even greater. Even where students have some literacy in their first language the form, orientation and direction of their L1

script is so different there is still a long way for them to travel in their acquisition of written English.

Teachers recognised that acquiring the English language competency expected in school is particularly challenging for those with home languages that are mainly oral. These students were seen to experience greater difficulty understanding the concept of writing and reading and in learning to be literate in an unfamiliar language. As one teacher noted:

> My experience demonstrates that students fluent in Dinka only, take longer to develop in their writing skills, this can be due to the fact that Dinka language has no script.

And another wrote:

> Many of the African (particularly Sudanese) languages are orally based - students have little comprehension of reading and writing.

Many teachers also reported that these students had "conceptual gaps" and had a "lack of knowledge of vocabulary". Therefore, teachers believed that these students require more time and intense support to develop literacy skills.

In addition, the teachers suggested that language differences affect students' confidence and self-expression. It was also claimed that the difficulties the children experience in expressing themselves in English can lead to a loss of motivation and interest in learning. One teacher responding to the survey expressed it this way:

> (Difficulties with learning English) can result in lack of confidence and hinders self expression. Can also lead to lack of motivation and disinterest.

Some teachers noted ways in which students can be supported while they learn English. They suggested that access to communication in the students' first language through interpreters and/or ethnic education assistants (EEAs) is particularly helpful while their English competency is low. However, as one teacher noted in a survey response, these assistants may need additional training to enhance their effectiveness in doing this type of work.

> Necessity for interpreters and ethnic assistants. Quality of ethnic assistants is high but need more training.

Language and culture are intrinsically linked. It is perhaps for this reason that many of the teacher participants suggested that everyone who works with the African refugee children should have an understanding of their cultural and language background in order to provide effective support. Similarly it is vital that the African students learn about the culture of school and the wider community in Australia because this supports their learning of English and contributes to their academic potential.

In addition to these suggestions, the participants also indicated that teachers should know about the differences between the students' L1s and English. However, as noted by one of the survey respondents, this may be very difficult to achieve.

> To make explicit the differences in language [between] SAE and first language, teachers need to be more aware of the syntactic structures and conventions of first language (very difficult I know).

Clearly there is a need for professional development for teachers in these areas.

In addition to increasing awareness (of both the teachers and students) about language and cultural differences, it was also suggested that English language proficiency can be developed when learning programs are meaningful, engaging and age appropriate. The difficulty with implementing this is the level of resources and expertise required: Currently many teachers feel there are not sufficient levels of either. Again this indicates the need for targeted professional development for teachers, but also a consideration by policy makers about the level of resources provided to schools that are educating students with an African background.

Liz is a secondary teacher working with a group of adolescent African refugee students in a large metropolitan school. Liz was keen to use communicative approaches to language teaching in her classroom but found that the students had a lot of difficulty collaborating in learning activities and also relied on her to resolve their frequent disputes. Liz decided to work with the students to develop a set of principles that would guide their behaviour towards one another in the classroom. These guidelines were refined to include only four principles and she and the students prepared charts so that these could be displayed in the classroom. Following that process, when disputes occurred Liz would guide the students to apply the relevant principle and so resolve the issue. Over time the students took more responsibility for resolving their interpersonal issues without reference to their teacher. In turn, the collaborative learning activities became more enjoyable and effective.

The consequences of low levels of English proficiency

It was clear from the data collected that there are some serious and 'high impact' consequences related to the low levels of English proficiency of African students and their parents/caregivers. These consequences include social, emotional, as well as educational issues. Overall, the low level of English competence heightens the vulnerability of this cohort.

One example of the vulnerability of African students was given by a teacher who described what happened when a child with limited control of English was involved in a playground incident. This narrative serves to demonstrate the consequences of poor communication:

> One of the IEC children was blamed by a mainstream child for "stomping" on his head. I got involved when the parents of the mainstream child complained about his behaviour. I was told the child had admitted he had "stomped" on the other child's head and I had to discipline him. But, when I described what he had done, he said, "What? How would I climb up his body and jump on his head?" I explained that the child had been on the ground. The IEC child still denied he had "stomped on his head". When asked why he had told the mainstream teacher he had, he said he did not understand what she had said to him and was scared of her and just wanted to get away from the situation. He thought if he agreed with what she said to him, she would let him go.

At the end of this story, another teacher shook her head and remarked, "They are powerless!"

Some IEC teachers stated that they felt their students' rights are not protected and they lack the ability to control what happens because of their low levels of English. This is also applies to the students' families. Therefore the teachers see that advocacy is part of their role as an ESL specialist. The teachers fulfil this role, even though at times it may bring them into conflict with other members of staff. These issues are illustrated in the following discussion between some of the teachers:

Teacher 1:	The IEC kids don't have language, cunning, manipulation of system and the mainstream teachers and kids can always end up blaming the IEC kids. They don't give the children a chance to tell their stories when things happen. They just assume they are to blame.
Teacher 2:	Their (African students) parents don't complain and they don't have a voice. Only strong parents get listened to.
Teacher 3:	We (the IEC teachers) are the advocates of the students and then that causes dissention among the ranks for the teachers. You could get away with murder with these kids, and nobody would know.

Adolescent students are also aware that their lack of English ability has an impact on their lives. For them it has implications beyond school. These students may have high levels of family responsibility including having to mediate or interpret for other family members in community transactions. They may also be living independently and/or caring for younger siblings. This requires that they communicate in complex situations including with medical personnel, welfare agencies, government departments and the like. This places enormous demands on them when their English language skills and cultural and social knowledge are still at quite low levels. As one secondary school student who lives independently remarked:

> I don't understand a lot because of (my) English (ability).

It was also clear from the participants' responses that the low levels of English language competence present major problems for many parents and caregivers in trying to find employment, communicating with schools, and in accessing services.

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One group of parents described themselves through an interpreter as having "big difficulty in speaking English" saying:

> We would love to work, but we don't have enough English. And then the money Centrelink gives us is not enough. We want to get employed.

Teachers and school administrators also described their difficulty in communicating with parents. Because of the parents' poor English speaking and listening skills, oral communication was problematic. It was made even more difficult because of a shortage of interpreters. In addition, effective written communication was almost impossible because many parents/caregivers are not able to read, and for those that can, translation of correspondence into their home language is exorbitant. One Deputy Principal described the difficulties in the following way:

> It is really hard to communicate with the parents. I am at my wit's end trying to let parents know about things that are happening. I can't possibly send home letters in each language for lack of translators but even if I did, the parents/caregivers might not even be able to read it anyway.

For the parents/caregivers many problems are created by their lack of English language skills and this is compounded by the other difficulties they experience as newly-arrived refugees. For example, in one of the focus groups a Sudanese refugee described the situation facing one of the grandmothers in her community. The family did not know her actual age and because it was not culturally important they entered 40 years old (despite being nearer to 60) on her application for entry into Australia hoping that this lower age would increase her chance of being accepted as a refugee. On her arrival into Australia, and despite being in poor health, she was required to obtain work. She went to a doctor hoping to obtain a medical exemption and to get treatment for her illness. However, because of her difficulties communicating in English, she signed a paper stating she was fit to work and did not receive the medical treatment she required.

A number of schools are taking it upon themselves to teach English language skills to the parents/caregivers of their students. In some cases these schools apply for grants or collaborate with community organisations in order to provide this service. As these classes usually include child minding, they are especially valuable for parents with young children who cannot access other programs (where child care is not provided). In one such program, students studying Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) at Edith Cowan University conduct six-week English language courses for parents/caregivers at selected primary schools. These types of programs are highly valued by parents who see them as a "big help from the school". Even so, with the lack of continuity and permanency of such programs these innovative programs can only be viewed as stop-gap measures.

Whilst the parents/caregivers are very conscious of their own need to acquire English, they are more concerned that their children learn the English language as quickly as possible. For some of the parents/caregivers this relates to their high expectations for their children. They expect that with the ready access to education in Australia their children can gain entry to professions such as medicine and law which are so highly

valued in their culture. One member of the community, who has been in Australia for some time, talked about this situation in the following way:

> They think their children can do anything here so they push them to be a doctor. But when they come here and they start schooling in the middle, it's really hard. They need to be able to do something. As a parent, I just accept what my kids want to do. They start in the middle and they can't get there. What the parents expect from the children is unrealistic. After three months if they can't speak English, the parents are angry and they push them.

<u>Maintaining the home language</u>

In addition to the general consensus that learning English is very important, there was also a strong feeling amongst the parents/caregivers (it was not discussed by any other participants) that the home language should be maintained. As one mother put it, "we want them (our children)" to "hold onto their own language". The parents/caregivers gave examples of how language maintenance might be achieved and also some reasons why this can be difficult. Some also expressed concern about the increasing difficulty of maintaining the home language for their younger children.

It is somewhat surprising that teachers did not also discuss the importance of L1 maintenance, particularly with regard to its contribution to second language learning. The Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1993 and elsewhere) describes the principle whereby a learner can only be as good in their second language as they are in their first. Thus home language maintenance is vital not only for social, emotional and familial reasons, but also because of its link to successful second language acquisition. This is not to say that teachers are unaware of the influence of L1 on second language learning, but the fact that it was mentioned only by the parents/caregivers may suggest it is not considered 'core' educational business or that it is outside the parameters of everyone else involved in the education and support of African students. Again this indicates that professional development is needed, not only for ESL specialists but for all those involved with African refugees.

Some parents/caregivers suggested that the way to maintain their "own" language was to speak it in the home and for many this was not a difficult aim to achieve because "when they (our children) come back home after school they speak their own language". These parents/caregivers not only actively encouraged the use of the family's home language, but also taught their children to read and write in it. For others this was not an option because "we only talk our own language, not read or write it". Several other African languages have only recently developed a written form and because of this, written forms are not yet widely known nor supported by published material and hence parents have difficulty teaching their children to read and write in their home language.

There were some parents/caregivers who noted that their children were increasingly using English when they played together at home and they were concerned that this would threaten the long term use of the home language. One mother, whose family has been in Australia for several years and whose children are now attending local mainstream schools, recounted how she tries to counter this by only speaking to the children in the home language even though she speaks English very well. This strategy is, however, compromised as the children usually respond in English. She

also has them talk to family members still in their home country on the phone. In this way, she tries to give them a real purpose for continuing to use their home language.

> When my kids play together they talk in English. I keep talking to them in our language but the kids answer in English. When I phone home I let them talk so they have to speak our language.

Other parents/caregivers expressed a high level of concern that the younger children in their families were not learning the home language to the same degree that their older siblings had. In most cases, this was largely due to the influence of older brothers and sisters speaking mainly in English at home. Given that these older children have a very active role in the care of younger siblings, their influence is considerable. For instance, one mother noted that her youngest child had "lost her language because her brothers and sisters speak English to her". This mother was "very worried because I am trying to get her to learn our language but it is not good."

In these types of situations, the development of young children's home language may be arrested at an early age and their primary language may become English. Where their parents/caregivers do not develop competency in English, as may be the case where mothers are prevented from attending classes because of child care and home duties, this has serious implications for intergenerational communication.

Maintaining culture

Concern was expressed not only about the loss of the home language, but also about the loss or change of culture. The influence on behaviour of such things as American and Australian television and music was noted. The consequences of these behavioural changes on discipline were also discussed by the participants.

While the adolescent students involved in this study did not speak about the loss of their home language, they did note "a big problem with loss of culture". They perceived that young people their own age were "copying" behaviours they saw on American and Australian television such as swearing. They also indicated that many young people were increasingly listening to music that is not part of their cultural heritage.

> They copy Australian and American TV, music, like by swearing.

The issue of copying American culture and language was also mentioned by a number of teachers. The impact of this goes beyond the linguistic and cultural: This adoption of another's culture (described by Rampton, 1995 as "crossing") influences social, educational and familial outcomes.

The adolescents also noted that some other young people "did not respect the old people" and some "did not listen to their parents". Further, they expressed concern that some youth "drink and smoke and others drive a car with no licence". One of the Deputy Principals at an Intensive Language Centre confirmed that these were serious issues for some of the African families. Girls smoking, drinking and dressing inappropriately was also viewed with concern by some of the female students. One of the students expressed her concerns in the following way:

They (youth) do not respect the old people; girls drinking and smoking. They wear short skirts - bad clothes. The old people complain. They (young people) do not respect their parents and they get drunk. They don't listen to their parents; (they) drive a car - no licence.

The students spoke about how adults in their community were worried about the youth, wondering what would happen to them. In one of the focus groups there was a very long discussion about this issue. This included concern for the future of African youth who were adopting behaviours not appropriate in their culture. They also made strong associations between the undesirable behaviour of some of their peers and their moral welfare. For example, when one student described how girls dress in revealing clothes another said,

Yes. Parents worry. What will be next? (Will) They be street girls? They (parents) do not know what to do. They want their children to follow African rules. They tell them, 'Listen' but they do not.

These concerns also relate to the issue of discipline. The adolescents noted that some young people were disobedient and behaved badly, and their parents felt they had no control. This feeling was exacerbated by cultural differences in that African parents customarily relied on corporal punishment to discipline their children, but in Australia they had been told that is inappropriate. The students reported that some parents were afraid to discipline their children in case they phoned the police to report them.

Some parents afraid to tell (correct) their children. The children will telephone to the police. They used to hit the children but now (they are) too scared. They don't know what else to do.

One student related an incident that had involved his cousin:

My cousin had a fight with the older people in his family. He yelled at them and when they not give him money, he broke the window. Then he burned the mattress and took money for drugs.

The students reported that older people in their communities think that these young people are like "animals" and they ask themselves, "Why we come here? Bad things happen to us. Children have drugs and go on the street." The students explained that for their community it is serious when such incidents happen as the elders are held responsible for the behaviour of members in their family. Therefore, when young people behave in culturally inappropriate ways it reflects very poorly on the whole family.

Mainstream educational issues

Western Australian schools have a long history of providing education to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including those who are still in the process of acquiring English as an additional language. However, this study suggests that despite this long experience the recently arrived African students are posing a number of extra challenges. Participants in the study indicated that much more support was needed to assist mainstream teachers to meet the challenges. This

includes providing specialist ESL assistance, better access to interpreters, and, additional professional development for teachers.

ESL support in the mainstream

Access to additional ESL specialist teacher support in mainstream schools is seen by some teachers as a way to address the high level of need of the African refugee students. One of the EEAs suggested a model whereby a teacher who has had contact with the children in the Intensive English Centre (IEC) then works with the teachers in the mainstream schools until the children have settled into their new school and until their teachers are confident in managing their learning.

> Some mainstream schools need ESL support from an IEC teacher and she can push the mainstream teachers to be aware of their (the African background children's) needs.

In other situations where there was already ESL support in the school, there was a view that there needed to be an increased level of support in order to cater for these particular children's needs. This was especially the case where the children had low levels of literacy. IEC teachers reported that these children, despite spending extra time in the IEC, are being exited from the ESL classes and placed in mainstream classes with language skills at a much lower level than has been the case for previous cohorts.

Access to interpreters

There are two aspects relating to the issue of access to interpreters that are problematic for mainstream schools: The first is that there is a shortage of interpreters for some language groups and the second is that some schools do not actually offer this service to parents/caregivers. For example, one of the parents described how when one of her sons was having difficulties with a teacher at a local secondary school she attended a meeting at the school about the situation but was not offered an interpreter.

> Parent: I went to the school to talk to the teacher.
> Interviewer: Were you offered an interpreter?
> Parent: No. ....And one mother I know told me her kids have a hard time but they have an ESL person but they have to pay her. And she (the ESL person) is there once a week and she seems to understand her (the mother).

This lack of provision of interpreters is of serious concern given the importance of effective communication when the people involved are from such different cultures and have such high levels of need.

Deputy Principals, IEC teachers and parents/caregivers mentioned that some mainstream schools did not know how to organise for an on-site interpreter and nor did they use the telephone interpreter service. The consequences of this have both an immediate impact on students and their families and also makes the task of students transitioning from the IEC to a mainstream even more difficult.

<u>Professional development for mainstream teachers</u>
A strong recommendation emerging from this study is that mainstream teachers should undertake professional development to support them in meeting the particular needs of African students. As previously noted, these students are exiting the IECs with language skills at a much lower level (as indicated on the Bandscale levels) than has previously been the case, and consequently, the demands on the mainstream teachers are greater. It is clear that teachers need information about the range of cultural and social backgrounds of these children so that they may more effectively meet their needs. These suggestions were supported in the sentiments expressed by some parents/caregivers. Similarly EEAs commented that they had seen the effectiveness of the cultural training undertaken by the IECs and indicated that this would be beneficial for mainstream teachers, too.

EEA 1: I know that at _____ (name of IEC) there are lots of cultural training PDs (professional development sessions), but I don't (know) about other schools.

EEA 2: It would be good for mainstream teachers to get these PDs because they are getting these kids in their school.

EEA 1: I know that what our school is doing is really good and that would be really good for mainstream.

Specialist ESL staff in IECs expressed concern for the mainstream teachers who are currently and/or will in the future be teaching the African refugee students. Their concern is that they do not want those teachers to go through the same difficulties they experienced when this cohort first arrived. They recounted how they had tried to alert people to the difficulties so that some action could be taken to provide additional training and support for their mainstream colleagues. The IEC teachers were anxious that the mainstream schools would not simply be "reactive", but rather would already have in place the support structures necessary for these students, their families and for the teachers concerned. They reported that despite their advocacy little had been done and that as a result there was "a looming crisis" within many of the schools which are now enrolling their exiting IEC students. In fact the crisis has already begun. Specialist ESL Cell teachers who work alongside mainstream teachers with these students are appealing to the IECs for assistance.

Teacher 1: They really are in crisis - the cell teachers - and they were all quite distressed - trying to cope with the different cohort coming through and their level and -

Teacher 2: -the scary thing is that we saw this happening three years ago and we tried to let people know, and there was nothing done.

Teacher 1: We were keen to not be reactive but then we were being that. Then we turned it around.

<u>District and central office support</u>
Several ESL teachers in the study identified central office personnel as providing support to them in the form of additional staffing and funding for projects. There was also appreciation expressed about the development of the new report forms and the ESL/ESD Progress Maps. Others expressed gratitude about the professional development in First Steps, on Socio-Psychological Educational Resource (SPER)

Centres, and, Curriculum Materials Information Services (CMIS) that they had received.

However, a number of teachers working both in mainstream and in ESL contexts indicated that the lack of support from district and central officers was a concern. Although some claimed there was "absolutely nothing" available in terms of support, others said that there were some officers available to talk to. Even so there was a general feeling expressed that the special needs of this cohort of students were not being addressed. One teacher described the level of support available as being "only the normal support relating to all ESL students". Another responded to the questionnaire in the following way:

> None - this is a big problem for us if we have a delicate matter to attend to, e.g. possible abuse/ effects of circumcision (girls) or prior rape/ torture, medical problems. Truancy in the boys- we need a social worker to visit the household.

Even so, teachers did express appreciation for the support, resources and "good PD (available) at the ESL Resource Centre". There was particular mention of the valuable information that has been compiled by staff at this centre including notes about the cultural and language background of the students, and about the conditions in the Kakuma Refugee Camp.

There was some criticism about the professional development course "ESL in the Mainstream", for example:

> Everything that they taught us (in the ESL in the Mainstream Course) is what we would do with our weak kids anyway—would have liked to have more information about where these kids are coming from not strategies. I think this is the problem—we don't know where these kids are coming from.

In addition to the concern about the general lack of expertise and support available from central and district office staff, it was also mentioned that much of the compulsory professional development organised by these staff (e.g. Making Consistent Judgements) was not relevant for IEC teachers. Further, they felt that no effort was made to include them. They were very annoyed that their students, and, their students' needs and achievements were largely ignored regardless of how many ESL teachers were involved in the particular professional development sessions.

> Often feel very little (support), especially when sent to compulsory PD on Making Consistent Judgements when they don't acknowledge the work of our students.

Teaching issues

Teachers involved in this study raised a number of issues related to their work with the African background students in their classes. These issues were concerned with responding to the students' high levels of need and the provision of a relevant curriculum.

Responding to students' high levels of need

Many teachers involved with the study described the impact of teaching African background students. While that impact is on-going they recounted how the first two years were particularly challenging for them.

> I was at ___ (IEC) when the African students first came. It was quite difficult when they first came. We had to put in enormous effort from all directions.

The previous large cohort of refugee students was from the former Yugoslavia, and although they had been traumatised by war, their schooling had not been interrupted and most were literate in Serbo-Croatian. While the conflict had certainly impacted on these students and their families, it was not trans-generational in the way of the African experience. Further, this new African cohort has had to spend long periods of time in refugee camps prior to their arrival in Australia. As a consequence many of the African students have been severely traumatised and, not surprisingly, have high levels of need. However this was a situation that many teachers were ill prepared for.

> It's criminal what they did to the teachers, throwing these students with limited schooling on them, without giving the teachers training.

This impact was felt more severely by inexperienced teachers who remarked that they were "all floundering" and said that they had to rely on their more experienced colleagues to support them. Whilst this is perhaps normal practice, it does sound a warning for education: Many ESL teachers are nearing retirement age and WA education will soon lose a wealth of experience and expertise. This does not bode well for the future support of 'high' need groups.

The ESL teachers found the students' limited schooling backgrounds particularly difficult to manage. While this is a complex issue for primary school teachers, it is even more so at the secondary school levels where few teachers have training in teaching early literacy (including knowledge, skills and understandings).

> Forty to fifty percent of our students are limited schooling and this has a huge impact on us - our workload, our emotional stress. It's very different dealing with this cohort. They struggle to learn, they have many problems and they don't have independent learning strategies. It's very hard on us.

There are also many behavioural issues related to this cohort that contribute to the "high stress working environment" of the teachers involved. As an experienced ESL officer noted, "Teachers found it quite hard, a lot of the teachers ended up going part-time as a means of coping". Despite this, the teachers recognised that the behavioural difficulties of this cohort were the result of the trauma the students have experienced, their different cultural backgrounds, and, their lack of familiarity with the school context.

> The African students were perceived as being difficult for teachers. This was because they hadn't been to school before and they had been in refugee camps. It was harder for them to settle. They used violence.

There was a view, however, that although the pressure on teachers remains high, things are improving. ESL teachers are now better informed and have begun to develop some effective strategies. Additionally, the composition of IEC classes is beginning to change with new and different refugee migrant groups now coming into the IECs. Fortunately these new groups generally have lower levels of need which is serving to reduce the pressure on teachers.

> In the last 6-12 months it has been easier because the teachers are more informed. Teachers find it easier when the class is mixed. If it's 90% African it's hard.

While many IEC teachers are coping better with the demands placed upon them, they remain concerned for the African students as they move into the mainstream. As noted previously, ESL teachers are particularly concerned that students and their teachers are appropriately supported within the mainstream.

Providing a relevant curriculum

The challenge of providing a relevant curriculum for African students has been mentioned in other parts of this report, however this section will focus on the difficulties this presents for teachers.

IEC teachers noted that because of the structure of the centres in which they work, they were not as pressured by the demands of the mainstream curriculum in the same way as other teachers. Although they still felt accountable for the outcomes that the students achieved, the use of ESL appropriate measures such as the Bandscales or the new draft ESL/ESD Progress Maps have made this less problematic for them. However, they did feel concerned that once their students moved into mainstream classes they would not necessarily be provided with an appropriate curriculum. Similarly they are concerned that once in the mainstream these students' achievements may not be measured and judged in ways that take into account their background and level of educational need. An unfortunate consequence of this for IEC teachers is that they feel pressured to "push" their students, even though many believed that this did not have a positive effect.

Lisa works with adolescent African background refugee students who have very low levels of literacy. She has found it challenging to find teaching and learning materials that are age appropriate and motivating but not too difficult for her students. As one way to address this problem, she decided to try to motivate her students by providing real life tasks for them. These "rich tasks" are designed with the students and respond to an immediate need. For instance, some of the students wanted to apply to McDonalds, KFC and other types of businesses for part time jobs so Lisa and the students developed a learning program to meet this need. Through this program, Lisa was able to teach a range of fundamental literacy skills in a meaningful context. The students also gained valuable life skills and cultural and social knowledge.

Teachers reported that they lacked suitable resources to provide the learning support that these students need. This was particularly the case for those students from limited schooling backgrounds in the upper primary and secondary levels of schooling. In particular the teachers noted a lack of suitable reading materials and methods for use with these students. Appropriate materials for other learning areas such as science, mathematics and society and environment were also seen as inadequate. Secondary teachers suggested that the students needed primary level materials, but that they were cognizant that these may be perceived by the students as "babyish". On the other hand, primary IEC teachers remarked that they had been surprised that their older students actually enjoyed some materials that they previously would have deemed "too young" for that age group. It is possible that this attitude may change once the students were in mainstream classes where the view of their age-matched peers could cause embarrassment or shame.

Some Deputy Principals of the IECs expressed disappointment with their own ability to monitor the quality of the curriculum implemented in the centres they managed. Some felt that they had to spend so much time addressing the social, emotional and familial needs of these students - "putting out fires" and "keeping the lid on the whole thing" - that they had little time left to ensure the appropriateness and quality of the curriculum. Clearly this indicates that there is a lack of support services. If support services were in place then the IEC Deputies would be able to act as curriculum mentors in the same way that their mainstream counterparts are able to do.

Future prospects

The participants in this study expressed a range of views about the future prospects of African background students currently in our schools. Students and parents/caregivers generally held high expectations of what schooling could offer, although some recognised that there were many barriers to success. In contrast, many teachers had low expectations for these students and identified a number of factors which they felt would diminish educational achievement. The participants in the study noted that knowledge of post-school options was an important factor in helping students and their families to develop realistic expectations. However, concerns about other barriers to full participation in work were also raised by both students and teachers.

Student expectations

Some students involved in this study had high expectations for their academic achievement and future employment prospects. They recognised that the Australian government was providing them with a service that was not available in their home countries:

> In my country I didn't go to school much because of the war. Now in Australia I feel like I have a future because the government is helping. In Africa the government isn't helping so (you) can't know what your future is.

Many students spoke of being committed to gain professional qualifications so that they could return to their home countries and serve the people there who they perceived as less fortunate than themselves. For instance, one group of students who

were asked about what they wanted to do when they left school responded in the following way:

Student 1:   I want to help more people in Africa. Be a doctor, help sick people and children.
Student 2:   Help African children, give them food and money.
Student 3:   Go to Africa and fix breast cancer. There are many women there (who) die from breast cancer.
Student 4:   A lawyer and go home to help the people.
Student 5:   I want to work with animals...
Student 3:   ..a vet.
Student 6:   a public servant.

Other adolescent students also spoke optimistically about their post-school options. While many aspired to a university education others wanted to train in the electrical or mechanical trade areas. Such optimism is heartening, but apparently not uncommon amongst adolescent refugees (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby, 2003, p.193)

"Despite all of the challenges facing young refugees, perhaps the most inspiring part of their psychological outlook was that of their optimism for the future. Almost all of the young people interviewed spoke positively about the future. They had endured so much already, they felt sure they could make good futures for themselves. Considering that all of the young people interviewed had identified themselves as someone who had experienced significant anxiety or depression, this view of the future demonstrates enormous courage and conviction."

Despite, this some other students worried that they would not be able to read and write well enough to be able to achieve the goals they had set themselves. Even when they can read, some students described how they "do not know what the words mean". They also talked about not knowing the "rules", that is the culturally appropriate ways of "being a student and of doing things" in Australia.

Further, students' experiences of racism seemed to be reflected in their reservations about what was possible in Australia and may also be part of the reason why so many of them aspire to return to Africa as soon as they complete their education. Some others spoke about the lack of "blacks" in various occupations indicating that it is hard to aspire to such positions.

Caregiver expectations

The students' high expectations for their education and for their future were matched by the sentiments expressed by the parents/caregivers involved in this study. In some cases, these expectations were related to cultural beliefs about the value of education. In others, like those of the adolescent students, the expectations were fuelled by a desire to contribute to the rebuilding of their home countries. Finally, scholarship students who had already been in Australia studying at university before these refugees arrived, seem to be providing role models for both the parents/caregivers and students.

In many African communities there is a cultural expectation that children who have access to school will continue on to university and ultimately join professions such as

medicine, law or academia. This is not surprising given that, in many of the home countries of these refugees, only the privileged few have access to school, and so those that do go to school, continue on to complete a university level education.

> Parent 1:   We want understanding so that the children can get something out of it later in life. We want our children to study hard and have a better future. We want them to be able to continue with their education.
>
> Parent 2:   If our children are well educated (we) want them to focus on science so (they) end up doing medicine.
>
> Parent 1:   They go to school so they can go to university. That's why they go.
>
> Parent 3:   Education is the most important; it's more of a choice for the child. It gives them a chance in life.

The belief that access to school level education almost "guaranteed" entry into university and ultimately to a profession seemed to be widespread, including the following who noted:

> When I'm with other families the expectation is that their children will go to uni. This is what we do in Africa, if the child goes to school there's the expectation that they go all the way through school.

However, there were some parents/caregivers who quite justifiably were concerned that even if a university degree was obtained, there was no guarantee that this would ensure a 'good' job.

Another factor that seemed to influence the high expectations of parents/caregivers for their children's educational outcomes was a strong desire to rebuild their war-torn homelands. This motivation was shared by the adolescent students as discussed earlier.

A Sudanese parent who had been in Australia for some years and was very active in assisting newly arrived refugee families in her community spoke about the influence of this type of motivation in the following way:

> African people have big aim for their children – those kids must be educated for a good future – then they can go back to Africa and give back to their country - help them develop. The parents want their children to be doctors, lawyers, engineers.

Finally, the high expectations of the parents/caregivers and the adolescents seem to be based to some degree on their observation of the African background scholarship students who were already studying at the various universities in Western Australia. These scholarship holders appear to be acting as role models for the refugees. Despite their circumstances being quite different to those of the recently arrived refugees, in that they had received an education in their home country, they are seen by the African community as examples of what can be achieved. As one of the community members expressed it:

> You know that in Murdoch University some 40-50 Sudanese students – they come before on scholarship. They go to school before in Sudan. The other people see this and they want it for their children.

<u>Limitations and opportunities</u>

While some students, parents/caregivers and community members acknowledged that current expectations for the outcomes of schooling may be unrealistic, most of the reservations about future prospects for these students were expressed by teachers. The teachers described how educational barriers such as low levels of literacy and numeracy would prevent adolescents from gaining more than just menial work. They also expressed concern that a lack of literacy and numeracy could lead to other social problems. However, a few new initiatives are providing some promise of more positive outcomes.

Some of the teachers and many of the EEAs expressed an understanding of the aspirations of the students and their parents/caregivers. They understood that parents wanted their children to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that an education in Australia offered them. For example:

Teacher 1:   For Nigerians, education is seen as the currency for their kids to stay here.

Teacher 2:   In most countries, with education you progress. Education gets you the money, the respect. I brought up my children like that. Get your degrees.

Some parents/caregivers also expressed reservations about the ultimate achievement of their children, not because they see their expectations as unrealistic, but because they believed that under the influence of Australian culture their children will not work hard enough.

Children have a lot of chances here. In Africa, they are suffering but here it is easy so they don't have to put in as much effort. In Africa, they might (try harder).

Overall the teachers' expectations of their students' prospects were much lower than those held by the parents/caregivers, and by the students themselves. Even when the students and parents/caregivers are told about the standards the students would need to achieve, they did not lower their aspirations.

I think they have no concept of what they could do at a tertiary level. They all think that they can be doctors. I have started to provide them with information about TAFE and uni and what standards they need to achieve - they don't get it - that they have to get to standards.

Teachers also expressed a view that the African background families do not understand the negative influence that an interrupted schooling background has on educational achievement. As one survey respondent expressed it:

Education is highly valued by most of our families but they have little understanding of the impact of interrupted education. Now their child is in a school, he will be a doctor in a few years! Totally unrealistic.

Many teachers expressed a concern for the future of these students because of their low levels of literacy and numeracy. Some thought that it would be very difficult for these students to "catch up with their peers in literacy and numeracy" especially once they were in upper primary or secondary school. This was seen to be especially the case because "it can be very difficult to rise above the disadvantages of the refugee situation". A survey respondent expressed the students' prospects in the following way:

> (Future prospects) very poor - most of my students will only be able to do menial tasks, unless they become labourers and most are too lazy or too 'mouthy' to do as they're told - but that might change. The girls would certainly be able to do check-out chick/ retail type jobs.

Some teachers expressed concerns that the difficulties these students experience could lead to social problems in the future. Some working with secondary aged students were concerned that the students might "resort to crime and end up in the juvenile justice system". One survey respondent expressed her fears in the following way:

> A major concern with such low literacy and numeracy skills. We fear the medium term impact on society will be 'gangs' of unemployable youth hanging around corners to steal little old ladies' handbags.

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> Children have a lot of chances here. In Africa, they are suffering but here it is easy so they don't have to put in as much effort. In Africa, they might (try harder).

One caregiver expressed similar concerns about the influence of what she perceived to be Australian cultural attitudes to education:

> But in Australia other people say that's (achievement in education) not important – they tell the children you can get a job anywhere - do not need education - just get a job - leave in year 10 and get any job - it is the same money. This causes fighting in some (African background) families.

It is possible that this is already having an impact. One of the teachers claimed that some African refugee students do not have particular aspirations nor do they aim very high, which contrasts to the very high expectations held by many of their parents/caregivers.

> Teacher 1: Students who have been here for three to four years don't have aspirations to be something or where they will see themselves in ten to fifteen years. They haven't thought about it; you just live for today and tomorrow.
>
> Teacher 2: Their aims are not very high: "I want to drive a bus". They don't have high goals for themselves.

Teacher 3: The children don't know what's possible.

Teacher 2: I push TAFE

Teacher 3: They have no concept of the system, what is or is not available to them, TEE or non-TEE etc.

Other teachers identified cultural awareness as a limiting factor on the students' prospects. They fear that the students' opportunities will be reduced because they do not understand the systems that operate in Australia, such as the educational pathways that are available. There is a need, therefore, to increase awareness about the various possibilities:

There are other pathways in education - just because they don't read and write in the same way as other Australian kids do; they can do other things. Maybe we need to accommodate them earlier, not year 10. Tell them about job placements, apprenticeships- that they are available.

The ESL teachers also argued that "schools need to address avenues other than academic" and to provide vocation oriented courses which will lead to TAFE. This was seen as an avenue to apprenticeships and/or to getting into the arts, drama and music industries. The teachers noted that some students had already been "successful with short training courses and (have gained) work" Some suggested this could be achieved if the parents/caregivers are also informed about their children's post school options. One of the EEAs reported how she had found it very helpful when some of the staff at her son's school had explained the choices available to him. She suggested that this type of information would be helpful to all parents.

The adolescent participants agreed, with many indicating that they needed such information. As a group, although they generally had high aspirations, there were also some who recognised they would not be able to go to university and wanted to know about alternatives. Some were interested in jobs which have a rigorous application procedure, but there seemed to be a lack of knowledge of how to go about this. For instance, this is typical of what a number of students said "I want to become police (officer) but do not know what I need to do".

Other adolescents were not sure what they wanted to do, but they were clear that they needed more information about the jobs that were available in order to make an informed choice. In some cases, the students reported only knowing about low skilled jobs like cleaning.

We don't know much about that (mining). We only know about cleaning, we don't know about mining. If they would give us some books and tell us about those (sorts of jobs).

Clearly there is a need for a greater level of career counselling and advice about post school options for these students.

However, some community people and parents/caregivers expressed concern about the stigma attached to trades by African people. This would make such an option difficult for students and their parents/caregivers to accept. As one of the EEAs noted:

> There are huge expectations of children by their parents and then when the kids don't succeed... Some of the kids that I am working with want to become labourers but parents see that work as not being very good.

Further, the different attitudes toward trades may lead to conflict in some families. This is illustrated in the following conversation between an ethnic teaching assistant and a youth worker:

> EEA: My kids' father rang my kids and he started talking about education, asked my daughter what she wants to do when she graduates. And she said she doesn't know because she's only in year 8. And he said what do you want to be a cleaner? She cried and hung up. Then he asked my son the same—are you going to uni? Then he said to me after the phone call was over, I can do what I want to do, he's not going to study for me! The kids then had a conversation among themselves and they were angry. The boy said he wants to be a builder. And he chose that course. My older son is doing an apprenticeship.
>
> YW: There's a negative stigma attached to it (trades) from back home. People don't see.
>
> EEA: So they push children to be a doctor. But when they come here and they start schooling in the middle, it's really hard. They need to be able to do something. As a parent, I just accept what my kids want to do. They start in the middle and they can't get there. What the parents expect from the children is unrealistic. After three months if they can't speak English, the parents are angry and push them. Let them get in to do the study (at TAFE) and maybe their brain will open and then later they can switch into something else.
>
> YW: Parents have high expectations of the school as well. "My child is getting a world class education, why shouldn't he be a doctor?"

It is possible that this EEA was able to value the alternative career path of TAFE because of her involvement in education. However, a few other parents also showed an acceptance for such a pathway. This expressed the view that if adolescents did not want to study it might be better if they worked.

> Sometimes we have children who don't want to learn; it is better if we can find work or something that they can do.

It is possible that an educational input to parents/caregivers may help to change this attitude, and it is clear that there is a need to do so.

Another caregiver stated that her child's happiness was the most important thing. She said he should be able to choose his own path "I would like him to do what he wants to do so that he will be happy." There were yet other parents/caregivers who did not necessarily agree their children's choice, but felt they had no power to change their decision. One such caregiver claimed that in Australia "parents had no rights once their children were eighteen, it was up to them to choose".

Many of the parents/caregivers described their desire for their children to be "making their own lives". They hoped that schools would "prepare them for life after school so they would have better life chances". The question remains, however, as to whether or not this is possible given the significant cultural, social and linguistic differences that exist for these young African people when compared to their Australian born peers.

Similarly the teachers believed that a lack of cultural understanding, both in the African community and as held by the broader Australian society, could pose a serious barrier to their students' future success. They suggested that the students would need to "adapt to Australian culture in some way" and at the same time, Australian society would need to "accept them". As one survey respondent wrote, "I feel like crawling under a stone with embarrassment at the attitude of so many here".

Despite the general level of pessimism amongst the teachers, some educational and work place initiatives are providing a degree of hope. For example, some work placement programs are providing a better chance for these students to gain work. As one teacher said, "I think the new Migrant Mentoring Program for work placements will help a lot." Even so, the same teacher continued:

> It will be very difficult unless there is some education/awareness-raising amongst employers/colleagues re: cultural differences and many social, linguistic and logistical challenges facing our students.

Some schools are actively working to give the students the knowledge to make informed choices. At one of the secondary schools involved in this study, the IEC staff worked in conjunction with library staff to implement a job orientation program where the participants learned about their own abilities, jobs available and even attended a 'Jobs Expo'.

At another school, the teachers worked together with the students to make long term plans and goals. However, not all of the students respond to this goal setting and some have left school. The teachers attribute this to the current job availability and the structure of the Humanitarian Visa Program.

> Teacher 1: They are leaving school because there is high employment, particularly now because of DIMIA- Visa 202s (humanitarian) don't get the same level of support (as those in a refugee program).
> Teacher 2: We try to get them to set goals, to engage them and give them a long term view. When they leave (school early) to get a job, it's heartbreaking.
> Teacher 3: This one student knew that she was leaving her (long term) plan and goal, for the short term goal. A NGO (non-government organisation) is offering the Aged Care short course and she went to do that. Who knows if she will get a job but she then can't get back into school.

Other survey respondents expressed similar views:

> In the current economy the future prospects of our students are much better than they would have been in eras where competition for work was much greater.

However, the pressure to earn money to survive may force students to quit education sooner than they would like.

Much of the evidence about what actually does happen to these students is, at best, anecdotal. One Deputy Principal from an IEC described how she would like to know what happens to the students who have left and also whether staying in school longer or going onto further study ultimately makes a difference in their lives. 'Tracer studies' on school aged students are rare – they are difficult and time consuming to undertake. However, because of the exceptional circumstances surrounding this cohort, it would be a worthwhile exercise to monitor how successful they are in terms of their education and employment. This is certainly an area that warrants further investigation.

Working in Australia

As was discussed earlier in relation to expectations, there is recognition that these students may face considerable barriers in trying to gain employment. Some are unable to meet requirements such as having a driver's licence, appropriate work experience or the required certification. Many students seemed to lack hope that they would be able to get jobs in sectors other than in aged care and cleaning. In one of the focus groups when the students were asked if they knew anyone who had a job, the following exchange occurred:

Student 1: My friend finished aged care and she's got a job. Most of the blacks go into aged care and cleaning.

Student 2: My mum still hasn't got a job since March and she did Aged Care.

Student 1: My friend finished from _____ (school) last year but he still hasn't found a job.

Student 3: If you finish and you are African, you only get the hard jobs - cleaning, factory work. It's hard to see black people in offices.

Student 1: Some people finish uni and still don't have a job.

Student 4: Does that mean there are no jobs in Australia? (said with sarcasm)

Another described her desire that:

the blacks don't do just aged care. I would tell them to come to school. When you come very young you have a better chance to do something better than aged care.

In addition to the problems outlined above, the adolescent students noted that there are times when experience or qualifications gained in their home country are not recognised in Australia. This view is supported by evidence in the literature. Specifically, during the 1990s only 49% of migrants arriving from non-main English speaking countries with post-school qualifications had these recognised, compared to 73% of those from English speaking countries (Tan-Quigley, 2004). In the following extract three students in senior secondary school were discussing some of the reasons why people in their communities do not have jobs:

Student 1: Even if you come with experience—hairdresser, they tell them that they have to study more.

Student 2: My mum never went to school, but she works in hospital and can do stuff. She can't even read, but she learned it.

Student 3: My mum was a doctor so she wants to go back to Africa to get a job. My mum's in TAFE now.

Despite all of the barriers to the students' success and some lack of hope, it is heartening that a number of participants still had dreams.

Links between home and school

There is broad agreement that families have an important role to play in students' education, and that this involvement should take the form of a partnership between parents and teachers. However, it is also recognised that in situations where families have diverse cultural, social, linguistic and experiential backgrounds, there can be problems with fostering such partnerships. According to the participants in this study, this is the case with the families of African refugee students. It was identified that the different expectations of parents/caregivers on one hand and teachers on the other is a major impediment to such involvement. Further, these differences in expectations can lead to misinterpretations of intent and further erode the relationship between the home and school.

An examination of the responses of parents/caregivers and the teachers demonstrates different attitudes with regard to homework and discipline. In relation to homework, the parents/caregivers, teachers and students differed in their views about its nature, value and role in education, and the respective roles of the caregiver and the teacher in managing it. There were also differences in the views of parents/caregivers, teachers, EEAs and students about what constitutes appropriate discipline and how it should be managed in schools.

Despite the diverse views, what is clear is that for parents/caregivers to be involved in their children's education, they require knowledge about the Australian school system. At present it seems that they have little understanding about the system. There is an important role here for EEAs and interpreters, but it also seems that schools and agencies working with African families need to address this deficit.

Teachers' views about parental involvement in schooling

The parents/caregivers reported that they had very different expectations about their involvement in their children's education relative to what is generally expected in Australian schools. Parents/caregivers believed that the teachers had the expertise needed to manage children's learning but that they lacked this expertise. Therefore, they did not expect to be involved in the classroom or school, although they did say they were happy to supervise their children's homework. The following response was seen as representative of this view:

(The parents' role is to) let the child sit there and do their homework. You get them to do their homework. (In Africa) you don't go to school and participate with the kids.

A community member, who had been in Australia for some years, reported that this difference caused a problem for some children, particularly when they saw the involvement of other parents in the school.

> There's a tension, sometimes parents are really busy and you don't have time for them (to respond to their children's request to come to school). There are some other parents who can drop their kids to school and take time with their kid in the classroom. But in our culture we don't do that - go into school.

Although parents/caregivers do not expect to be directly involved in their children's learning in their classroom or school, they did express a strong desire to foster a relationship with their children's school. They also suggested that better communication would assist them to support their children more effectively. In particular, they would like to know more about their children's behaviour and how they are being disciplined when it is not acceptable. They would also like to know about the work that their children are expected to do, especially if there is a homework component to it. Like all parents they also want to know about good things that their children have done. Finally, they would like to know what the school expects from them as parents.

Many parents/caregivers mentioned that they would like "regular communication between school and parent and if my child has done something wrong I want to know right away, not a long time after". Some parents were concerned that their children were "copying bad things" from other children and they wanted to know so they could correct their children because they could "make them listen, not like a teacher". Others believed that teachers were "too soft" and that if their children behaved badly then as a parent they would need to discipline them.

There was a common view among the parents/caregivers that parents should be involved in the discipline of their children if they misbehaved in school. However, parents/caregivers were also concerned about teachers' views regarding this type of involvement. In fact, the parents/caregivers found teachers' behaviour to be somewhat contradictory. It seems that the parents/caregivers see the teachers' reporting of behavioural problems as a request for action to be taken. However, when the parents/caregivers did discipline their child, the teacher then told them their actions were inappropriate.

> The teachers tell us what our children have done wrong, but if we deal with it, the teachers say 'It's all right - don't do that'.

There were also parents/caregivers who wanted more information from schools regarding the work that their children were doing. They wanted to be able to check their children's school work, especially if some aspects involved homework.

> I want to be able check my children's work - make sure that they have done their assignments.

In addition to wanting to know about specific work that needed to be completed, parents/caregivers want to know about "the progress of their children". Some parents/caregivers are concerned that their children are not "working hard".

The parents/caregivers expressed the desire to hear about positive aspects of their children's school life. They suggested that the school "Call the parents about the positive things too not only the negative things". For other parents/caregivers, there was a desire to have "constant communications on the wellbeing of the child".

Finally, whilst the parents/caregivers were aware that school staff expect them to be involved in their children's education they were not exactly sure what is expected of them. Therefore, there is a real need for schools to clearly explain their expectation in the enrolment interview which should be conducted, wherever possible and when needed, with a suitably qualified interpreter.

Teachers' views about parental involvement in schooling

There was an expectation among teachers that the African background parents/caregivers would be involved in their children's education. Therefore it was not surprising to find that many expressed disappointment that this was not happening. For instance, one secondary teacher expressed concern that "only 20% of parents showed up to an induction program for year seven and eights", while another reported that "only one parent came to the parent/ teacher interviews". This lack of involvement was not confined to secondary school, as many primary teachers also reported that they had minimal contact with parents. As one teacher noted:

> I don't have much contact with parents except for one family where two girls had issues. And to get that (involvement) I had to work a lot with dad.

Teachers also spoke about parents/caregivers being "difficult to contact" and "not responding" to school requests for them to make contact.

While teachers were concerned about the African parents/caregivers' lack of involvement in education, many of them recognised there were barriers to such participation. Teachers spoke about the parents/caregivers being "a little afraid of the school" and "feeling uncomfortable and threatened in a school environment". This would explain why parents/caregivers were perceived as being "not confident in approaching the school".

In addition to this "fear" of schools, there were other barriers preventing the parents and caregivers becoming involved in education. Some teachers described how many of the African parents have "large families and little ones at home" and live some distance from the school. As they do not have access to childcare or to transport, attending appointments or events at school is very difficult.

Teachers also recognised that families were dealing with many complex issues related to their refugee experiences such as cultural differences, grief, unemployment and housing difficulties. One of the survey respondents expressed feelings of guilt about the contrast between the concerns held by schools and the challenges faced by the children's families:

> I sometimes feel guilty that while the school is agonising over the child not knowing the alphabet, the parents are concerned with unemployment, housing, cultural issues, family members left behind in the country of origin issues.

Overwhelmingly, however, the teachers recognised the greatest barrier to parents/caregivers' involvement in schooling is communication difficulties. Some of these problems come about because of poor access to interpreters and also because the parents' phones have been cut off because of overdue accounts. However, even where interpreters are available, some teachers find it frustrating to have to rely on them. This is because of the difficulty of communicating through a third person and the added problems of arranging such meetings (including the time, organisation, transport arrangement – both for the parents and sometimes the interpreter - and expense). Given the effort and expense required, it is not surprising that some teachers are disappointed that parents do not seem to value this type of communication as highly as they do.

Parents/caregivers' knowledge of the school system

One of the prerequisites for effective parent involvement in schooling is knowledge of the school system, which allows parents to understand the involvement required and how to initiate this. However, in this study, African background parents/caregivers reported that they did not understand the structure of the school system in Australia. In some cases, this was because no one had explained it to them, while at other times it was because the explanations given could not be understood. Clearly this situation is a serious impediment to improving the involvement of African parents/caregivers.

Even though the parents and caregivers who were interviewed indicated that they do not currently know about the school system, they also suggested they are very keen to learn about it. However, once again they indicated that communication difficulties are a major obstacle to achieving this aim. The parents/caregivers reported that they found it difficult to understand information presented to them "because everyone speaks too fast" and where there is written communication they report that they "do not understand it". Further, they reported that they are unfamiliar with some of the terminology that is used and with some of the aspects of schooling that are being explained to them. An area of particular concern to the parents/caregivers is the assessment of their children's learning – an area they consider to be very important. Although the schools send material such as portfolios and school reports home, the parents/caregivers are not able to understand how to interpret them. Despite the importance of this, many reported that they had not been told about this aspect of their children's schooling. As one mother put it:

> No one has talked to me about testing or assessment. You can see the portfolios and you can see your child's progress. We know about the report from school but we want to know the system in which they are assessed.

Another concern for parents/caregivers is that there is often a teacher/parent interview that accompanies the process of school reporting. Whilst this arrangement could promote the involvement of parents and give teachers the opportunity to discuss a child's progress, it does pose a number of difficulties for the parents/caregivers. For instance, where there is no transport or day care provided they may find it very difficult to attend these meetings. In addition, they do not have the finances to be able to afford taxis and travelling with a number of small children on buses is very difficult. In some circumstances interpreters are not provided so that parents/caregivers are not able to understand the information they are given. Even

when interpreters are provided, there is no guarantee parents/caregivers will be able to understand the information conveyed because, as discussed earlier, such understanding often depends on existing knowledge of the school system. It is not surprising that under these circumstances parents/caregivers' motivation to attend these interviews is considerably reduced. One of the parents, who had been in Australia for some years, described the situation that members of her community faced:

> Parents have to go to the school to see the reports and that is sometimes hard because of arrangements such as the interpreter and taxi, etc. But we know that the IEC (Intensive English Centre) can organise it. For some mothers the English classes or sick kids sometimes get in the way. But the mainstream school won't organise that (taxis and interpreters).

Adolescents' knowledge of the school system

As some adolescent students are living independently of their families, they also need to understand the structure of the school system so they are able to make informed decisions about their current and future education. Some of the students interviewed for this study expressed concern that they did not understand the system and that this had an impact on their decision making. For instance, one student noted that she had been in Australia for some time, but still did not understand how the system for entry into TAFE worked:

> I have been here for two years and eight months but I still can't understand the education system. I don't understand the points that you have to get to go to TAFE. It's getting late. (That is, it's getting close to the time that she needs to make choices about her future education.)

When this student was asked if she could talk to someone about this matter, she replied that she could talk to her teacher. However, she also noted that it would have been better if she had "known early" what was required.

It should be noted, that in some cases the Deputy Principals of the IECs do talk to the older students about the education system and the pathways available to them. However, in some circumstances the students do not have sufficient general knowledge about the education system to understand what they are being told and in other instances they do not see the relevance of the information at the time that it is given. That is, they are not able to anticipate its importance because of their lack of understanding of the system as a whole.

Homework

Homework was an area of concern raised by all the participant groups, but it was also seen as a way to foster a positive link between home and the school. Even so the parents/caregivers and the teachers held different perceptions about the role of homework and potentially these differences could undermine the home/school relationship. Generally parents/caregivers perceived homework as essential for educational progress and as a means by which they could occupy their children meaningfully at home, which in turn, assisted them to discipline their children. This perception was accompanied by their valuing reproductive tasks and learning factual information. In contrast, the teachers spoke about the problem of assigning

meaningful homework tasks when students' literacy and numeracy levels were insufficient to allow them to complete tasks independently at home especially given that few of the parents/caregivers were able to assist with homework. The students expressed yet a third view, namely that they valued homework because it was an indication of their maturity as students. At the same time, however, they did agree with their teachers that they were limited in what they could achieve at home without assistance. A further difficulty for the students, especially the females, was the pressure of home responsibilities which made it difficult for them to find the time for homework.

Parents/caregivers consider homework as important and, as noted above, see the supervision of homework as their most important role in the education of their children. They also see homework as providing a link between school and the family, allowing parents/caregivers to see what the children are doing at school. In addition, they see it as an effective way for children to progress in their learning.

> Homework can be a link with school. Children can improve a lot (through homework). We can see what the children do at school.

In addition to assisting children's learning, parents/caregivers said that they used homework as a tool to help them discipline their children and to encourage them to organise their time well. The parents/caregivers feel that by having something important like homework to do, their children will watch less television.

> The kids are watching too much TV and don't do their homework (because the teachers are not giving enough) but homework is really important. We want the teachers to give more homework so that they (the children) have to do something. Now they just watch TV until 11 or 12 pm and then they have to go to school again the next morning.

Further, parents/caregivers feel that homework helps their children to develop good study habits which will prepare them for further education and some believe that homework inspires their children to learn. As one caregiver expressed it, "Homework makes them get used to stuff and they also get interested in education".

The parents and caregivers also seemed to have strong beliefs about the role of the teacher in preparing, giving and following up on homework tasks. These beliefs appeared to be based on their cultural views about education. They felt that teachers should assign homework which parents then supervise to completion. The view was also expressed that teachers need to follow up on homework, checking that the child has done it. If the child has not done what is required, then they believe that there should be a consequence or punishment. However, the parents/caregivers indicated that they do not see it as their role to actually help the children to do their homework. Their view is that teaching is the job of the trained professional and therefore some expressed concern if teachers appeared to expect them to help their children.

> Sometimes the teacher says why didn't you do this or that one? But sometimes the teacher gets angry with the parents because they don't help the kids.

The parents/caregivers not only found this expectation about homework different to their own, but they are also concerned that they do not have the skills to do what is asked of them. This seemed to be particularly the case for home reading tasks, a very common form of homework in Australian schools. This is how one of the Sudanese parents who has been in Australia for some time, and who often helps newly arrived families in her community, described the situation:

> In my country it's the job of teachers to teach the children and parents not do anything for the school work at home. Parents tell me they worry that they cannot help the children with the books they bring from school. You know, reading books. The children have to read but they struggle and the parent cannot help them. That's the teacher's job.

The situation was the same for the parents/caregivers with children attending secondary school. They reported that:

> "If the kids are in high school there's no way I can help them because the level is so high. It's better that my child knows what he is doing before he comes home. I have to say to him, 'I can't help you'".

Homework needs "to be carefully chosen by the classroom teacher because illiterate parents/caregivers are unable to help or support the students". Thus the parents/caregivers prefer the teachers to give homework that the children can complete on their own. That is, that the set tasks allow the children to practise what the teacher has taught. Another teacher described the problem as follows:

> "some parents really like homework; and some put pressure on their children to bring homework home (but) that due to the language spoken at home, some teachers feel it would be an added stress if children took homework home".

They also noted that homework was "only beneficial if there is someone at home who can help" and "in most cases that cannot be guaranteed". Therefore it is apparent that teachers understand that the homework needs to be achievable, "structured" and appropriate for the student.

The problems that occur with homework can have an impact on the relationship between a caregiver and their child. This is further exacerbated when the child is making faster progress in learning English than their parent/caregiver. It was suggested by experienced EEAs and youth workers that such situations can undermine a child's respect for his/her elders and for parental authority.

Despite these problems, there were some parents/caregivers who had positive feelings about homework. For instance, one explained how she was pleased with an arrangement she had made with her son's teacher regarding homework. She described how her son "had problems at school and we (his parents) were called in to discuss the situation". Before this meeting, the boy did not do his homework, but subsequently, he did. His mother indicated that he was making better progress as a result. She also understood that teachers and parents have complementary roles in

this: "It's a two way thing – the teacher gives it (homework) and the parents have to reinforce it".

Further the teachers also noted that some of the students' home lives are not conducive to doing homework. For example, these students often do not have a quiet place to study; they lack equipment at home (such as access to computers); the students (mainly the girls) also have household and child care duties beyond what is usually required of Australian born students; many need to assist their families with managing tasks, such as shopping and dealing with government agencies; others work in part time jobs to assist with the family finances; and, generally, socio-economic factors can make it hard for students to complete homework. One primary level teacher described how she felt about this issue:

> They (the children) have heaps of responsibility; often their home life is not conducive to doing homework. If they bring home reading books a little brother or sister rips the book. Have to determine who can do homework and who cannot.

In addition to these impediments, some teachers of older students recognised that they lacked the study skills to be able to manage independent tasks. They saw that the students needed to be "explicitly taught study skills" and until they had developed these it was not practical to give them homework.

A further concern for teachers was that when they did give homework and it was not completed, often for valid reasons, the students would be punished by their parents/caregivers. An NGO community worker noted that in her experience:

> "Teachers are worried about calling home if the student hadn't done their homework because they know that the parents will beat the child."

Another teacher told the following story:

> _____ (student) was up late cooking and cleaning, and then we would say, "Why haven't you done your homework?" Her mum beat her.

Further it would seem that this was not an isolated incident. It should be noted that physical punishment is considered normal in African cultures and is not viewed in the same way as it currently is in Australia.

However, the view that sending work home was not productive did pose something of a dilemma for some teachers who also recognised that their students needed to develop "good homework (independent work) habits". As a way to solve this problem some teachers suggested that students be given "study periods in the library". However, they also stressed that these sorts of tasks need to be "followed up, marked and the results recorded" if students were going to take them seriously.

Despite the concerns outlined above it still seems that adolescent students value homework. One student described how her school "give(s) us homework and lots of work and I like the fact that I have to work hard." Further, doing this type of independent work helps the students to feel mature and trusted by their teachers. This

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view was endorsed by some of the teachers who said their students, "*enjoy doing homework*" and that their "*work ethics (are) fantastic*".

However, at the same time, some students spoke about the difficulties they face when they cannot do the work. In some cases, even older siblings are unable to assist them. As one student reported, "*so they need to tell us about it (homework). If I don't know how to do it I take it to my brother and he doesn't know how to do it.*"

Discipline

Similar to the issue of homework, parents/caregivers views about discipline differed from those of the teachers. In fact, it seemed to be a source of great tension. It appears that there is a mismatch between current Australian law regarding the discipline of children and those practices commonly used in African cultures. There is also a considerable difference in opinion between parents/caregivers and teachers related to the role and management of discipline and punishment at school.

Many of the parents/caregivers expressed confusion about how to discipline their children effectively in an Australian cultural context. Traditionally they rely on corporal punishment and although this is contrary to Australian law, it is still accepted practice in many African cultures. Parents/caregivers, teachers and community service providers all expressed concern that African parents' have generally not been assisted to develop alternative strategies. A number of participants expressed a view similar to the following: Everyone tells them "*what they can't do but they don't give them any new or other strategies to discipline their kids*". As a consequence, their capacity to control their children has been reduced. In the words of a Sudanese parent, "*most African people are crying about that one (discipline). Our kids are getting out of control*".

Many parents cannot understand the Australian view of discipline and fear that the lack of customary punishment will make their children "*soft*" and unsuited to deal with the hardships of life. Further, it would seem that some parents/caregivers have interpreted the message not to hit their children as a directive not to discipline them at all. This view was indicated in a teachers' recount of a conversation she had with the caregiver of one of her students:

> The parent said, "*We come to Australia and we are told what we can't do (that), but are not told what we can do.*" The parent said he was told he can't punish his kids but I said, "*No, you just can't hit them*". He said, "*Our children, in Africa, are disciplined but here they become a problem.*"

There was a view amongst the parents/caregivers and those who worked with them, that many of them did not have discipline strategies that worked in an Australian context. It is not surprising then that they reported using homework as a way to manage their children's behaviour. The parents/caregivers said that doing homework helps the parents keep their children "*off the streets*" and to reduce their television viewing.

The problem of managing their children's behaviour effectively is a serious one for African parents/caregivers because they have the added pressure of community

expectations. That is, they lose the respect of their community if their children do not behave well. A Sudanese mother described the situation in her community:

> When the parents can't hit their children they are louder and louder shouting at them. Parents don't know what to do. Parents' rights are taken away. And they have community shame. They lose dignity – it is like you are nothing if your children do not respect you. Your children must be good and do well or it is your fault. If they are on the street it is your fault. The children do not want to learn – they have too much freedom. If they are tired they just lie down – they need a strict teacher.

While the parents/caregivers recognised that they were going to have to change the way they managed their children, they remained concerned about what they perceived to be the excessive freedom of children in Australia. For instance, some parents/caregivers expressed the following concerns about the life of adolescents in Australia:

> (Children) Walking on the street – do whatever you like in life. Parents can't say anything – children say they phone the police and parents get into trouble. In Africa this is not how we bring up our children. If our children do not do as we tell them then we are losers. That is how many African parents feel in Australia – their children do not do as they say and they (parents) are losers. Children are everything in Africa – so when they go, the future goes. "When they are like this it is hopeless." The girls have a baby and the government give them money. Boys find a job (instead of staying at school as their parents wish them to do).

The effects of this have been considerable, both within the family and in the community. Further, the families claim that their children are made aware of their rights in Australia without appropriate emphasis on their responsibilities. These parents/caregivers feel that there needs to be more talk about responsibilities. Some EEAs, who were also parents, noted that even though the school discusses these responsibilities along with the students' rights, it is the rights that are emphasised by the students at home. One said:

> "We talk about rights and responsibilities at school but when the kids go home they only talk about their rights. They come from a culture where parents have all the control, then to here. They say, 'That is my money, you have to give it to me. If you don't do that, I will call the police.' The parents have to listen to the kids, because the kids say it's my right – we don't have that in our culture."

Case workers in NGOs also noted that the young people learn the language more quickly than their parents and coupled with this, they are exposed to more information about Australian culture, government policies, social services and support agencies. They too, see that these adolescents are far more concerned with their rights than with their responsibilities. These workers noted that with "these two things together, they start to oppose their parents."

However, there were some aspects of the Australian approach to discipline which were welcomed by African background parents. For instance, one mother noted that the punishments for cultural taboos were not as severe in Australia:

> High school is different – teenagers are different in different countries. It is a different culture and they do different things. In some countries, if a girl is bad or brings shame to her family they just say kill her – no problem. But it is not like that here and that is good.

In addition to the general views about discipline, parents/caregivers also described their expectations about how schools should deal with the management of their children's behaviour. The parents/caregivers hoped for regular communication with schools about their child's behaviour and they also expressed a desire to know immediately there is a problem. It is clear that they understand that it is their role to support the school in disciplining their child. As mentioned earlier, they are concerned teachers are not strict enough and that their children are getting "soft" and "lazy" as a result. They also are worried that their children are influenced by others and this led them to do "bad things". They want to be able to correct these behaviours.

As with homework, parents/caregivers are confused about what the school expects from them regarding the discipline of their children. They say that if a teacher tells them about their child's bad behaviour then they will punish their child to support the teacher. However, when they do so, some teachers tell them that it is not what they should do.

The teachers involved in this study supported the view that discipline is a very important issue in the education of African background children and adolescents. Many teachers reported having major discipline problems which were seriously reducing the effectiveness of the learning programs in their classrooms, and causing a great deal of stress. The Deputy Principals of IECs also reported spending a "huge" amount of time dealing with behavioural issues, particularly during the first two years of teaching this cohort.

While many of these educators understood the difficulties that the parents/caregivers faced in managing their children in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment, they were concerned about the differences in approach between the home and the school. There was a strong view that parents/caregivers needed to "follow up at home" and "back up the discipline of the school". However, the implication was that parents/caregivers should do this in a way that was consistent with the approaches taken at school rather than using corporal punishment.

Some teachers noted that discipline could be more successful when they worked with the parents to better match the approaches taken at school and at home. As one secondary teacher noted:

> When I worked at (_____ IEC), I found that if you could get the mothers on side and make the consequence at school the same as the consequence at home you had more success (with discipline).

Most teachers would endorse this approach but also acknowledge that it is very time consuming, and a compromise position on the types of discipline that will be applied cannot always be reached.

While teachers were aware that parents/caregivers had an expectation that they should be informed about all aspects of the behaviour of their child, this was not deemed to be practical. In addition, Deputy Principals noted that the school usually has a policy that dictates what sorts of behaviour are serious enough to warrant the involvement of parents. Further, some teachers reported being reluctant to phone the parents about misbehaviour because they did not want the children to be disciplined twice, particularly if corporal punishment was used.

While teachers recognised that they were required to apply the school's behaviour management policy, they were worried about the impact of this on their students. Many felt that these policies were unsuitable for the African background students and were also ineffective in managing their behaviour. Further, by applying them the teachers felt that they created a very negative atmosphere in their classrooms and the school. For instance, teachers in one focus group described the impact on their students in the following way:

Teacher 1: Every interaction with an adult at school is negative: don't do this do that, wear your hat.

DP: The children are often afraid of me. When I say that I need to talk to them, I have to first say "you're not in trouble".

Teacher 3: They just switch off, when they first start at school they don't talk much, then a child called Sunday said he didn't like it here. "I want to go back to Africa because I was free I could run and play." Another child said: "I don't listen because she (one of the teachers) shouts at me."

Further, some teachers saw the students' poor behaviour to be the result of traumatic experiences and a lack of understanding of the social and cultural behaviours required. The teachers noted that the children often did not know what was expected of them and found it difficult to remember all of the "rules". Further, many of the behaviours expected were culturally based and difficult for the students to understand. They suggested that rather than punishing the students they should be given time to "settle in" and "to understand the school culture". Once that was in place, the students should be taught "acceptable" behaviours and the "social skills" they need to manage in the school environment.

Not only did teachers recognise that students need cultural knowledge to understand the behaviour required in an Australian school, but they also noted that they themselves need to know about "their students' culture and to build a rapport with them". The teachers suggested that they need to know about their students' "lives outside of school". For them, discipline will only be effective when it is based on "mutual respect" and "trust". Further, one very experienced IEC teacher noted that her students "tried her out and pushed her almost to breaking point". She said, "It was almost like they were trying to make me angry enough to reject them". After some time, she came to the conclusion that this behaviour was "testing me to make sure I was worthy of their trust". She said that she could understand this strategy because

she knew that these students had suffered considerable trauma related to war and to their lives in refugee camps, and that they had probably been let down by many adults in the past. She understood that they would be reluctant to trust an unknown adult very easily. However, with perseverance there came a point when the students were sure of her resulting in a breakthrough in their relationship, and, in turn, the behaviour improved.

However, this type of tolerance sometimes caused problems later on. The dilemma arose when the teachers were tolerant of some of the less important rule infractions or "bent the rules" but at a later date another teacher punished the student for the same behaviour. The teachers recognised that this inconsistency confused the students but were still reluctant to be "always yelling at them". This left the teachers in a very difficult situation:

> We build up a relationship with our kids, but other teachers would nail a kid for doing stuff that we might let go. We need to address what is being said to these kids all the time because it's very negative.

A further issue was the students' perceptions of "fairness". Where teachers tolerated behaviours from one student because of a range of factors, it could be viewed as "favouritism" or preferential treatment by others. Some teachers also expressed a concern that some students, like their parents, viewed the discipline applied in Australian schools as "weak and therefore not worthy of respect". One of the survey respondents spoke of both these concerns:

> There's a fine line between how many warnings can be given before other students view this as favouritism and whether our methods of discipline - talking, counselling, etc. is seen as weakness which in turn creates lack of respect.

Even though there were many behaviour management problems, teachers still noted that positive reinforcement was a powerful tool. They saw that focussing on productive behaviours helped build the students' self-esteem and reduced negative behaviours.

> They need a lot of positive reinforcement because they don't have high self esteem and the bad kids become notoriously bad. What works for me is that the smallest thing they can do merits reward.

In addition to this approach, it was also suggested that teachers should discriminate between behaviours that are related to the African background students' particular circumstances and those that are common for that age group. For instance, in one senior primary context a teacher noted that one of the students who had been "a delight" when he first arrived from an IEC had recently become "silly and immature". She described how she had asked herself, "Why is he turning revolting now?" She later concluded that "he was going through a stage of being defiant just like other kids".

Other teachers also made the point that the very "visibility" of these students, their "reputations" and their backgrounds, can lead to the assumption that they have particular behaviour problems. However, closer examination may show that what they have done is common for their age group even if the manifestation of the

behaviour is slightly different. Many teachers noted that when a group of children are doing something that contravenes school rules, then too often the "very visible African" student is the one who is noticed and reprimanded. Similarly when there is trouble between students it is sometimes assumed that the African background student is the "trouble maker because of the reputation of the group". As has been discussed before, poor communication skills in English and a lack of cultural and social knowledge can make these students very vulnerable in such situations.

In many ways, the EEAs trod a precarious middle ground between the views on discipline of the parents/caregivers and those of the teachers. While they shared some of the views of the parents/caregivers, especially with regard to the need for teachers to be "stricter with the students", they were also concerned about the impact of harsh discipline on students.

Some EEAs believed that the children sometimes take advantage of their teachers and feign sickness to escape from work. They suggested that the teachers needed to be firmer with them. The following exchange took place during an EEAs' focus group:

EEA 1: Some children in school are lazy. They need a teacher to make them work. They just go in the classroom or office and lie on the pillow. But they are not sick - they are lazy.

EEA 2: Some are sick - they come to school sick.

EEA 1: Yes, but some are lazy - in African school they must learn - here - they not learn.

EEA 3: This is a big problem for society.

On the other hand, there were EEAs who were concerned that teachers were too hard on the students, especially when they were new to the school environment. They were particularly concerned about mainstream teachers who they perceived as being less sensitive to the special needs of the African students than their IEC counterparts. They thought that some teachers "yelled at the students too much for little things" and that this negativity would not help the students to adjust to school in Australia. Some assistants suggested that the new students need to be treated differently. In this way, they would be given time to "settle in" and "get used to the rules of the school".

Further, the EEAs thought that schools needed to simplify the rules, especially for recently arrived children, recognising that the students needed time to understand the rules:

They shouldn't have so many rules and make such a fuss about rules when the children first come. The children don't understand the rules, don't understand why they need the rules.

The adolescent participants gave a range of views about discipline in school. Some had opinions similar to the parents/caregivers in that they perceived Australian schools as lacking in discipline. They were also concerned that other young people were losing respect for their own cultural values through the influence of Australian culture. Others, however, appreciated the different discipline system used in Australia, especially because "the teachers don't beat people in Australia - like in

Africa they spank us." As a result of this, these adolescent students thought that school in Australia was "good".

Like the teachers, some students expressed a concern that they were "yelled" at so frequently, although others noted that "they (teachers) don't yell for nothing". On the other hand, there were students who felt that the mainstream teachers "only see them, not the other kids, doing the wrong thing". This is consistent with some ESL teachers' view of this type of bias in schools.

Also in common with some teachers, there was a view among the adolescents that there were too many rules which were often poorly understood. The students reported getting "blue and yellow slips (notices of misdemeanours) for nothing". Some older boys complained that the school rules did not necessarily protect students. They claimed that when other students harassed you, you were meant to walk away and ignore them. However, they found that these students just continued to annoy them but if the refugee students retaliated they were the ones that got into trouble.

In both school and community contexts the students had a view that the trouble they experienced was related to their being "black". They felt that they were taunted by other students, and, then unjustly dealt with by teachers if they retaliated. For instance, older students, particularly boys, said they did fight back when provoked, but it was not them "who started it", yet despite this they were the ones who got into trouble.

Overall it is clear that there is a need for transparency regarding discipline and open communication with both students and their parents/caregivers regarding school policies. However, at the same time, it is also apparent that schools may need to exercise some discretion in the implementation of their policies, particularly with regard to newly arrived students. It is also apparent that teachers, particularly those in the mainstream, need more immediate and ongoing professional development to increase their understanding of the cultural background and unique circumstances of African refugee students.

Making a difference: programs to improve caregiver involvement
The lack of involvement of parents/caregivers in education is being addressed in some schools through the implementation of additional programs. It was noted that EEAs have a special role to play in this, as they do in improving the communication between the home and school.

Teachers in schools with EEAs recognised their very important role in facilitating parental involvement in education. The EEAs are able to facilitate two-way communication, also informing the school about the concerns and circumstances of the children's families. Not only are they are seen to be invaluable for interpreting and translating, but they also provide cultural information.

In addition to using interpreters and EEAs to facilitate communication, some schools have developed programs such as parent lunches, parent-student lunches, open days, graduation ceremonies and meetings. In order for such strategies to be successful, the

schools often need to provide additional services such as transport and child care. A teacher from one such school spoke about their program in the following way:

> We wanted to get the parents involved so last year we started a big program in as people friendly a way as possible. We provided transport, child care and lunch to get the parents into the school. Once we had the parents involved we also had parent meetings with interpreters to inform them of up and coming events like high school enrolments and graduation. This has been very useful.

Other teachers also reported finding that "parent/student lunches were a good way to break the ice and establish connections" between the parents/caregivers, students and the school staff. In another school, the teachers noted that the "first school experience" they delivered to welcome new students and their families to the school community had been very successful.

In addition to these programs designed to attract the parents/caregivers into the school, other strategies were being used to get them involved in the more formal contexts such as Parents and Citizens (P&C) Associations. There was a suggestion that this could perhaps be achieved by initially having separate representation and then as the parents/caregivers confidence developed they could be integrated into the main P&C body. Some years ago, this model was trialled successfully by Girrawheen Senior High School with a Vietnamese parent group.

Although much is being done, there were teachers who suggested that their school needed "a more active attempt to involve families". Other teachers, particularly in the survey responses, considered that schools needed to do more to involve these parents/caregivers in community and family activities such as open days and school fêtes and the like. In one case, the idea of involving the families in at least one event per term was suggested as a way to encourage the communities' on-going involvement in schooling.

In addition to this type of involvement, teachers suggested that schools need to improve their communication with the students' families. They asserted that the parents/caregivers had a right to know about their children's educational progress and needed to be assured of the vital role that they played in their schooling. In addition, teachers noted their obligation to involve the parents and "the need to consult them at every stage of the education process".

Personnel at the ESL Resource Centre in Mount Claremont also provide information about the school system as part of a settlement program. To do this, an officer regularly visits the homes of newly arrived refugee families and explains how the system works. However, it should be noted that this information mostly relates to how to enrol the school aged children in Intensive English Centres.

Programs to assist with homework
A range of parents/caregivers and teachers suggested that homework classes and/or assistance in the home for African students should be developed. Only one such formal program was reported by the participants. It involved tutors being provided to

some of the IEC students. These tutors assisted with homework, focussing particularly on building the student's literacy skills.

Policy development

A range of policy issues are highlighted throughout this report. These have included the need for improved professional development for teachers, both ESL and mainstream, the need for discretion in relation to school discipline policies, methods to engender two-way communication between schools and families, and the need for policy development with regard to support services for the families. Another persistent issue relates to the current application of the inclusivity principle of the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998). This principle is intended to ensure that all students have equal access to, and opportunities in, education. Many ESL teachers agreed with this, but also commented that inclusivity should be "about sensitivity not just inclusion. It means accommodating different backgrounds etc."

According to the ESL teacher participants the principle of inclusivity is being interpreted inappropriately in some school contexts; specifically, inclusivity is being equated to integration into mainstream contexts, regardless of the students' particular needs. Many ESL specialists felt that, in practice, such integration means that these students have to do all the adapting to the demands of mainstream. It is a case of "you can be included if you are just like us and you fit in".

> Across the system, this INCLUSION bothers me. It's put us in the situation where kids are expected to integrate. It seems that they (the system) are doing (it) just because it's a policy. When kids are at stage two, they are a part of mainstream and it seems like it is inclusion but on "our" terms not theirs.

Other teachers noted that when African background students with very high levels of educational need were integrated into mainstream contexts they too often missed out because much of the teaching was directed to the "middle of the group".

There was a further concern that the interpretation of "equal to mean the same" meant that students did not necessarily receive services according to their levels of need. As one Deputy Principal noted, "Equity of access has come to mean that every school gets the same. It's the wrong interpretation of the policy. It needs to be driven by need, not by formula."

Another Deputy Principal provided a good example where "equal" health service distribution in her school actually meant that the African background students in the IEC were disadvantaged.

> Take this health issue. These students have gut parasites, anaemia, ring worm and many other health problems. We get a nurse one day a term but she is supposed to do only 'routine' screening of sight and hearing. Their parents are supposed to do the rest. It doesn't get picked up and so then the kids can't learn. Our 'equity of access' means we get the same as what the mainstream get. But the situations are totally different. At the IEC, the nurse referred 40% of the students (for further medical care) whereas at mainstream only 5% were referred.

Teachers noted that this inequity applied to many other school services and to the way resources were distributed in schools, and to some extent, in the broader education system.

Community Services

Refugee families generally have high levels of need which require the provision of services not only by schools, but also those related to settlement, and to health and welfare. In this section of the report the perception of the participants regarding the provision of community services will be examined.

The concerns of the participants in relation to the provision of community services centred mainly on the location, structure and availability of appropriate health care. It was also identified that a lack of knowledge of where to get help and of which programs are available in the community compounded the difficulties faced by African refugees during their settlement and early years in Australia. A further issue causing difficulty, particularly for secondary aged students using public transport, was the bus ticketing system. However, as with other issues, many school communities have responded to these needs and developed a range of strategies to assist their students and their families, including "bringing the services to school".

Background

There are a range of pre-embarkation and post-arrival information sessions and support services available for all refugees who have been awarded visas to settle in Australia. The first of these sessions is offered in the refugee camps prior to departing for Australia. It involves a three day pre-embarkation training course. This course explains the federally funded Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS) and is run in conjunction with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The IHSS is the government funded system for providing support to refugees during their settlement into their new country.

Once the refugees have arrived in Australia they are assigned a compulsory case worker provided through the IHSS. This worker assists them for six months after their arrival in Australia and must be the refugees' 'first port of call' for any issues related to their settlement. In Western Australia, the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre (MMRC) has a government contract to provide these services for the north metropolitan area and the rural north, while Centacare is the lead agency for those living in the south.

After the initial six months of residence, the IHSS service ceases but The Settlement Grant Program (SGP, formerly CSSS) is available to provide ongoing assistance. Unlike the IHSS, it is a non-compulsory program giving the refugee optional access to a case worker for up to five years after arrival. At the end of that period, there are no formal, government funded settlement related services available.

Location of services

Numerous teachers, parents/caregivers and service providers involved in this study expressed concern that many refugee families are being settled in areas that are located some distance from community services and this, in turn, makes it difficult for them to access the services they need. Coupled with this problem is the fact that the housing which the African refugee families can afford to rent, suitable for their typically large families, is often located even further from such services. This situation was described by one of the officers who regularly delivers settlement talks to refugee families:

> "They (African background refugees) need big houses because of big families but often the bigger homes are further away from services that they need to access."

Further, as one of the Deputy Principals noted, "There is a housing crunch so the government puts them (African background refugees) where there is space, not where the services are." Parents/caregivers also reported that they had difficulty accessing services because they were "far away from where we live".

It could be argued that one of the most important services for refugees, particularly those with large and often young families, is education. In the early years of settlement it is especially important that children and young people access specialist English language assistance. Where the refugee families are settled without regard for the location of these services, access is a difficult and on-going issue. Children are then required to travel to and from school, often by bus. In the case of primary aged students attending government IECs, a dedicated bus service is provided in most cases. However, secondary aged students must travel to government schools on public transport, often making several connections in order to get from home to the school where the IEC is located. The advantage for secondary school students is that they are provided with bus tickets. Post-compulsory aged students must meet their transport costs themselves. A range of provisions are available for those students attending private or Catholic schools, but generally the transport costs are met by the family.

Many schools offering specialist language services are located a considerable distance from where their students live, making the delivery of services by these schools very difficult. For instance, the management of school buses is complex with constant enrolments and regular exits of students from different suburbs requiring that the bus routes be altered frequently. For Deputy Principals in secondary schools and in primary schools where there are no specialist bus services, students' transport arrangements often have "to be worked out on an individual basis"; again, a complex and time consuming task. Another issue faced by adolescent African students is the bus ticketing system. Because they are over eighteen, they are considered by the system to be adults, even though they are still attending secondary school. The following discussion in a focus group describes this situation and the impact it has on these students.

> Student 1:   (The) Bus driver (asks), "You are not a student why are you using a student card?"
>
> Student 2:   I've had the same problem.

Student 1:	I had to send someone else to buy one for me.
Student 3:	They say that I am too old to be in school even if I show them my student card.
Student 2:	They caught me, I was fined 50 dollars.
Student 4:	We aren't wearing uniforms so they don't know.
Research:	So because you are eighteen you have to pay $1.50 instead of 50c?
Students:	Yes.

However, the Deputy Principal explained that because these students are "over eighteen they also get more money from the government". Nevertheless, she also noted that they have a great deal of "responsibility in a system that they don't understand and they are dealing with family structure breakdowns and they have no support system".

In addition to getting the African refugee students to school, there is also the issue of transporting their families there as well, and as already noted this needs to occur in order for schools to be effective. Many refugee families live in areas where the public transport services are poor, and those between their homes and the school generally involve several bus changes that are difficult and time consuming. The parents/caregivers' difficulties are exacerbated if they have young pre-school children. This situation places added pressure on those schools that wish to involve the parents/caregivers in education to provide transport, usually in the form of taxis. In turn, this often requires Deputy Principals to apply for additional funding from a range of sources – another time consuming and often complex task. While most teachers see assistance with transport as an important aspect, there were a few teachers who thought that it was encouraging dependence and that more effort should be made "to teach them (parents/caregivers) to be more independent".

Also important for refugees are the services which assist them with their settlement. As described in the previous section, these services are tendered and managed by different providers in the north and south of the state, with Perth (the Swan River) as the dividing line. Access to these services appears to be problematic for refugees given that most are reliant on public transport, particularly in the early stage of their settlement when they most need the services. This situation has recently become even worse for some families living in the south metropolitan area according to one of the officers working for an IHSS funded agency. This is because Centacare, the IHSS service provider in the south, is currently moving its metropolitan office from Cannington to Gosnells. There is concern about this relocation because it will make access even more difficult for many refugee families. For instance, those families living in and around the Parkwood area have generally limited access to services, but have been able to access the support offered by Centacare in Cannington as it is relatively close. However, access will be more difficult for these families after the relocation.

Being distant from community services is compounded by the difficulty in obtaining a driver's licence in Western Australia. Firstly, there is a written test which requires both an extensive knowledge of English and the road rules. Secondly, all learner drivers must pass a practical test and they then require a minimum of twenty-five hours of driving experience supervised by a qualified driver (one with more than five years experience) before they receive their licence. These requirements are expensive and are particularly difficult for African background refugees to meet.

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Consequently, the adolescents, Deputy Principals, community members and parents/caregivers reported that driving without a licence was becoming a "huge problem in the African community". However, one of the teachers had an alternative view describing this strategy as evidence of how "resourceful" these people are in that if they need to go somewhere and they have a car, they drive, "even if it means driving without a licence". However, she acknowledged that it was a "big problem for police." Other teachers saw this situation as "an enormous problem", particularly because of the implications that it had for "road safety as many of our boy students and their older siblings know how to drive a car and think it's ok to just get in one and drive- no licence, no training, no knowledge of road rules".

A teacher who works in an IEC catering for adolescent students expressed concern that even though they offer driving courses, it is not possible for them to provide the twenty-five hours of required supervision. She and other teachers reported that they believed these young people are being disadvantaged because of their particular circumstances as newly arrived refugees. The Deputy Principal in that centre said that she was "trying to overcome the requirements of the system by getting a licence similar to the one that is given to Aboriginals because it (the requirement for supervision) disadvantages them (the African background refugees).

A further impediment to providing effective transport for African refugees as they attempt to access community services is the impact that insurance issues have had on volunteer transport services. The large increase in insurance costs, and in some cases fear of litigation, has reduced the availability of volunteer drivers who previously have assisted refugees in the settlement process. As one of the social workers noted, "The problem with litigation means that volunteers can't drive and this has also decimated the numbers of volunteers willing to help out". One of the volunteers reported that, "We aren't allowed to drive them (refugees) around in our private cars so it makes it difficult for us to help them".

The Health Care System

Another area of concern relates to the system of health care in Western Australia. A number of problems with this are having a negative impact on the welfare of refugee families and, in turn, on the education of their children. These are discussed below and include inadequate knowledge of the health care system; restricted access to appropriate and timely services; and the way that service provision is compromised when interpreters are not used.

The first obstacle to adequate health care for these families is that some parents/caregivers have almost no knowledge about basic health services. Some were reported as "not even knowing what Medicare is" let alone how to access the services that it offers. Although refugees are provided with this information when they arrive in Australia, they are not necessarily able to understand it. It was suggested by teachers that this was probably due to the "overload" of information they have to cope with at the time of their arrival.

Further, even when African background refugee families know about these services, they may not access them because the general practitioners are so busy that there is a considerable wait for an appointment. The parents/caregivers are so concerned about their sick or injured child that they go to the hospital and tolerate the very long wait to see a doctor. The following example was used by an EEA when she was reporting the widespread nature of this problem:

> That little boy who fell and hurt his lip (referring to an earlier reference to this injury): his mother will take him to hospital and wait because if they called the GP, he would say come tomorrow. But he needs to be seen right away.

The situation becomes even more difficult if the child is referred to another health provider. This creates logistical and time problems for the families which may not be understood by those providing the service. An EEA who helps newly arrived families in her community noted that many do not understand the referral system and/or how to organise an appointment with a new agency (e.g. medical specialist). There was also a perception that "you could never get an appointment", perhaps because of the different culturally determined views of time involved. As these families do not belong to private health funds and are unable to afford to pay for these services, they often have to join a very long waiting list. As one of the parents/caregivers reported:

> The appointment itself will take ages because if you don't have money you have to wait. I try to make an appointment for my son, but it's been two or three years.

When the family eventually get an appointment, some hospitals do not arrange for interpreters and as a consequence they are unable to communicate with the specialist. This means that their access to the treatment they require is seriously compromised.

Knowledge of additional services

In addition to being unaware about the health services available and how to access them, many African refugees have limited knowledge about other types of services. This was particularly the case for parents/caregivers and adolescent students in the outer metropolitan area. For instance, one of the students reported that they "don't really get help at all but just stay at home and think about it (the problem). I don't have nowhere to go (to get help)". The only agency that these students seemed to know about was Centrelink and the majority did not think that this agency was very helpful. The students noted that when they first arrived in Australia there "were lots of people to help us, but now they have gone". As described in the background section earlier, the IHSS services are only provided for the first six months after arrival. It would seem while these services are offering much needed support, they are not sufficient nor are they offered for long enough to ensure the families can manage independently when the services cease.

Those who work in the agencies delivering the IHSS services spoke about how difficult it was to ensure the refugee families were aware of the services that are available for them.

But once they (refugees) know about services, they are quick to pick it up. The hard part is getting them to know it! They don't only need to know about the services, they also need to understand the concept of them and how to use them. How do you get them to know it? I organise the community development centres and ___ (another officer) does the leadership program that looks into the community and plucks out the leaders who have 'emerged' and trains them. I recruit bilingual workers when I arrive in a new area for my community development job. These all help to spread knowledge of what is available.

Teachers also recognised that "knowledge of 'how to access' (the services) seems more important that just how close the bus stop is".

Solutions

While school personnel cannot control the provision of health and other services, they have developed some innovative solutions to the issue of access. For instance, many of the adolescent African refugees have special needs, particularly as they sometimes arrive without their parents and are in a "cobbled together family with relatives from their extended family". These students may choose, or be forced, to leave their families and care for themselves, and in some cases for younger siblings. For these adolescents, access to appropriate community services is further complicated by their age, their inexperience, their financial situations and their commitments at school. In one school with a substantial enrolment of adolescent students who fit this category, the staff have organised for agencies and organisations, such as Centrelink and nursing services, to be delivered from a building on the school site. This school also assists students to get housing, including some special student housing managed by the school.

Interestingly, although the staff at this school mentioned some of these services, it was the students who described them in more detail and expressed their gratitude for the commitment of their teachers and school in making them available. One of the students described how when her "auntie threw me out, they (the school) organised the women's refuge and then a house". Other students reported that when they are sick or have to go to the dentist that the IEC will organise a taxi for them if they cannot get there by any other means. In a different school, there is a crèche provided for those adolescents who have young children but want to continue with their education.

There are also other services organised by primary schools, such as English classes for parents/caregivers, parenting classes and additional nursing services. Some ESL teachers in this study also mentioned a project that will enable the provision of a comprehensive multi-agency service based at IECs, one in the northern suburbs and one in the south. Apparently this is an outcome of the Quirk Report which, as far as the researchers have been able to ascertain, has not been officially released. Although this project was muted to begin in 2007, it has not yet commenced.

Resources

A requirement of this study was to locate and document useful resources for teachers involved in the education of African refugee students. The following is by no means a comprehensive list, but it does provide an interesting and wide ranging set of materials. Not all the refugee stories are about the experience of those from Africa, but they may still serve as useful discussion points within a classroom.

Background reading

Davidson, N., Skull, S., Burgner, D., Kelly, P., Raman, S., Silove, D., Steel, Z., Vora, R. & Smith, M. (2004) An issue of access: Delivering equitable health care for newly arrived refugee children in Australia. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health 40* (9-10), 569-575.

Guerin, P. B., & Guerin, B. (2002). Relocating refugees in developed countries: The poverty experiences of Somali resettling in New Zealand. In K. Lyon & C. Voight-Graf (Eds.), *5th International APMRN Conference, Fiji 2002: Selected papers* (pp. 64-70). University of Wollongong: Wollongong.

Quirk, P. (2006) *Across Government Working Party on Settlement Issues for African Humanitarian Entrants.* Office of Multicultural Interests: Perth, WA.
(Note: This report has yet to be released)

Also see the following resource list:
Refugees in Literature
http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/Refugee_reso urce_list_05.doc

Collections of Refugee stories and short stories

Stories from home: young people tell their stories of settling in the Goulburn Valley. (2004). Shepparton, Vic: Cutting Edge Youth Services.

AIR! Australia IS refugees: winning essays and stories 2002. Enfield Plaza, SA: Australians against Racism.

Bowen, T. (2002). *On the map: stories of people seeking refuge in Australia.* Melbourne, Vic: Australia Council for the Arts.

Davies, H. and Rutter, J. (2001). *Kosovan journeys: refugee children tell their stories.* London: Refugee Council.

Dechian, S., Millar, H., & Sallis, E. (2004). *Dark dreams: Australian refugee stories by young writers aged 11-20 years.* Kent Town, SA.: Wakefield Press.

Goode, K. (1997). *Jumping to heaven: stories about refugee children.* Kent Town, SA.: Wakefield Press.

Rutter, J. (1998). *Why do they have to fight? Refugee children's stories from Bosnia, Kurdistan, Somalia and Sri Lanka.* London: The Refugee Council.

Refugee literature: Young Adult titles

Al-Windawi, T. (2004). *Thura's diary.* New York: Penguin.

Anderson, R. (2001). *Warlands.* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

Ashley, B. (1999). *Little Soldier.* London: Orchard Books.

Caswell, B. and An Chiem, D. P. (1997). *Only the heart.* St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press.

Catran, W. (2001) *Not raining today.* Sth Melbourne, Vic: Lothian.

Ellis, D. (2003). *Shauzia.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Ellis, D. (2002). *Parvana's journey.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Ellis, D. (2001). *Parvana.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Evans, A. (2004). *Walk in my shoes.* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

Gleeson, L.(1998) *Refuge.* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

Gleitzman, M. (2004). *Girl Underground.* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

Gleitzman, M. (2002). *Boy Overboard.* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

Hawke, R. (2004). *Soraya the storyteller.* South Melbourne, Vic: Lothian.

Heffernan, J. (2000). *More than gold.* Hunters Hill, NSW: Margaret Hamilton Books, Scholastic Australia.

Hicyilmaz, G. (2000). *Smiling for strangers.* London: Dolphin.

Laird, E. (1991). *Kiss the dust.* London: Mammoth.

Latifa (2002). *My forbidden face: growing up under the Taliban: a young woman's story.* London: Virago.

Tolbert, S. (1991) *Channeary.* Cheshire: Longman.

(NB: A unit of work based on the novel can be found in *Access Asia: Secondary teaching and learning units,* Curriculum Corp, 1996).

Tolbert, S. (2005). *Dreaming Australia.* Melbourne, Vic: Longman Press.
(NB: A unit of work based on the book can be downloaded from Steve Tolbert's website: http://www.southcom.com.au/~stolbert/#dreaming).

Zephaniah, B. (2001). *Refugee boy.* London: Bloomsbury.

Refugee literature: Junior Fiction

Baillie, A. (1985). *Little Brother.* Melbourne: Nelson.

Ho, M. (1991). *The clay marble.* New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.
(NB: Comprehensive reading/teaching guide available at
http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/clay_marble.pdf)

Kidd, D. (1989). *Onion tears.* Sydney: Collins.

Mattingley, C. (1993). *No Gun For Asmir.* Ringwood, Vic: Puffin.

Mattingley, C. (1995). *Asmir in Vienna.* Ringwood, Vic: Puffin.

Mattingley, C. (1996). *Escape from Sarajevo.* Ringwood, Vic: Puffin.

Filopovic, Z. (1993). *Zlata's diary.* Ringwood, Vic: Penguin.

Whelan, G. (1993). *Goodbye Vietnam.* New York: Random House.

Refugee Picture Books

Breckler, R. (1996). *Sweet Dried Apples: A Vietnamese Wartime Childhood.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Cha, D. (1996). *Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom.* New York, NY: Lee & Low.

Shea, P. D. (1995). *The Whispering cloth: a refugee story.* Pennsylvania: Boyd Mills.
(NB: Curriculum activities are available at http://www.pegideitzshea.com/ca-whispering.html)

Garland, S. (1993). *The Lotus seed.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
(NB: A guide to related activities is located at
http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/lotus/lotustg.htm)

Hathorn, L. (2002). *The Wishing cupboard.* South Melbourne, Vic: Lothian.
(NB: On-line activities available at:
http://www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/Wishing/Default.htm

and teachers' notes available at:
http://www.lothian.com.au/teachersnotes/thewishingcupboard.doc)

Heffernan, J. and McLean, A. (2001). *My dog*. Hunters Hill, NSW: Scholastic.
(NB: Approaches to using *My dog* can be found in Jane Connelly's article "SOSE and Literature: exploring the connections" in *Literature base*, 14:4, p.18-24)

Hoffman, M. and Littlewood, K. (2002). *The Colour of Home*. London: Frances Lincoln.

Woodruff, E. (1999). *The Memory coat*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Classroom Resources

Taking action: Human rights and refugee issues teaching resource. (2004). Parkville, Vic: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. Available at: www.survivorsvic.org.au

Temporary protection visa education kit. (2003). Melbourne: Campaign for Permanent Protection.

(1998) *Forging New Identities: Young Refugees and Minority Students Tell their Stories*. London: Minority Rights Group.

Crosbie, S. and Squires, A. (2003). *War and refugees*. East Burwood: World Vision.

Healey, J. (2000). *Refugees and illegal immigrants*. (Issues in Society Vol 128.) Balmain, NSW: The Spinney Press.

Kilner, J. (2003). *Australia and the refugee/asylum seeker issue*. Melbourne: The Age Education Unit.

Reed, M., Dunell, L. & McNicol, C. (2002). *People of concern, refugees and asylum seekers: A global issue*. Melbourne: Youth and Multicultural Affairs, Victorian Division, Australian Red Cross.

Rutter, J. (1998). *Refugees: A resource book for primary schools*. London: The Refugee Council.

Rutter, J. (2004). *Refugees: we left because we had to: a citizenship teaching resource for 11-18 year olds*. London: The Refugee Council.

Trist, S. (1998). *Refugees*. Sydney: McGraw-Hill.

Videos about refugees and refugee issues
(2005). *Journey* Man Refugee Council, UK. 15 mins.

(2004). *A Safe place*. Show Racism the Red Card Project, UK. 35mins.

(2003). *Lost boys of Sudan* Actual Films.

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(NB: Information and teaching notes available at:
http://www.lostboysfilm.com/index.html)

(2002). *Culture Club.* Moreland City College. 16 mins.

(2002). *Refugee like me.* Purple Pictures. 55 mins.

(2002). *Tale of two peoples.* Australian Arabic Council. 26 mins.

(2002). *Welcome to Kakuma.* Austcare/Centre for Refugee Research. 15 mins.

(2001). *Dying to get in: The business of people smuggling.* VEA, Bendigo, Vic. 43 mins.

(2001). *Australia's refugee dilemma.* VEA 20 mins.

(2001). *Refugees: Rebuilding shattered lives.* AusAid. 10 mins.

(2001). *Refugees: far from home.* AusAid. 8 mins.

(1999). *Australia has no winter: a refugee family story.* VEA. 55 mins.

(1998). *Mohamed Ali's Happy Day Feast* Ronin Films. 55 mins.

(1996). *Afghanistan: the road of constant battle.* VEA. 50 mins.

Resource Centres

The materials and books listed above can be located at the following resource centres:

<u>ESL Resource Centre</u>
Jacaranda Avenue
Mt Claremont, WA 6010
Tel: (08) 9383 1122

<u>Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre</u>
150 Palmerston Street,
Carlton, Vic. 3053
Tel.: (03) 93491418
Fax: (03) 93491295

Conclusions

This is a large qualitative study which involved ascertaining the needs of African refugee students by examining their perceptions and the perceptions of their families, their teachers, and others involved in their education and support. It has also involved an investigation of the services and resources that are available to them.

It is abundantly clear that this cohort have a high level of need, perhaps to an extent not seen in Australia for a number of decades. The needs of this African refugee group are both extensive and diverse, and include educational, emotional, physical, social and familial issues. Perhaps most importantly of all, and most relevant to the current study, is the need for these African refugee students to acquire English.

Many of those who have extensive experience in the field of ESL and/or of providing support to newly arrived migrants noted that the last time there was a group with such a high degree of need was during the 1980s when refugees fleeing Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge arrived in Australia from Cambodia. Like the Cambodians, the African refugees have suffered considerable trauma related to their war and refugee camp experiences. In addition, and similar to the Cambodians, many have fractured families. They also have low levels of literacy and numeracy as a consequence of receiving limited or no education before their arrival, which in turn is also related to the current conflict in their home countries. However, unlike the Cambodians, the poor levels of literacy amongst African refugees are also related to the fact that some derive from language backgrounds that were traditionally only oral, and where the languages have only recently developed a written form.

The consequence of these high levels of need is that many students are struggling academically in our schools, and also socially in our community. Although there are a number of services available to support this group, many of the African refugees do not currently have the knowledge and awareness to be able to access the appropriate services. Schools in general, and teachers in particular, are struggling with how to best meet the demands presented by these students. It would seem that the various Western Australian education systems were ill equipped and ill prepared when these students first began to arrive in our schools. Although a number of successful innovations have been employed, often at the local school level, it is very clear that there is a long way to go before the needs of these students are adequately addressed (particularly in terms of pedagogy and assessment procedures) in our schools.

There is also much that needs to be done in terms of professional development for teachers, especially with regard to increasing their cultural understanding and awareness. A great deal of work is also needed to adapt and create appropriate curriculum measures to serve the needs of these students. Further, it would seem that the level of expertise and knowledge about refugees, migrants and the process of learning a second language, particularly in education district offices, is much less than

adequate. Similarly, government agencies and other support services need to seriously consider the approaches they currently have in place for such groups. Despite all this, there are many African students who are doing surprisingly well and showing amazing levels of resilience and resourcefulness in the face of considerable adversity. Although the participants recognised the many problems African refugee students in Australia face, a number of the parents/caregivers and students expressed enormous gratitude for the opportunities that Australia presents them. It seems that, at least for some, all the "waiting in line" may yet be worth it.

Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations, written in terms of what needs to be done, that have emerged during the course of the study. However, it should be noted that these represent the views of the authors:

1. Because of the low literacy and numeracy levels of these students, consideration needs to be given to providing extra support for them – within IECs and in mainstream classrooms. This support should include practical, as well as educational assistance, and should incorporate helping the students and their families to access appropriate community support.

2. Above all else, what these students need for improved educational outcomes is time – time to adjust, time to be socialised into new ways of being, time to learn English, and time and support to develop skills that many Australians take for granted.

3. School staff members require a great deal of practical support and professional development. They need to increase their awareness of the needs, circumstances and cultural background of these students. They also require assistance to develop and familiarise themselves with appropriate methodologies and assessment procedures.

4. In addition to developing an awareness of the cultural and linguistic diversity of our students, schools need to be supported, through professional development, to better understand the principle of 'inclusivity'.

5. District office staff members also need to increase their awareness in the areas indicated above. Generally there needs to be an increase in the level of expertise relating to ESL, particularly in areas where there are high numbers of African refugee students.

6. Schools and district officers need to carefully scrutinise the professional development that is provided to schools in which ESL staff are employed, and consider the appropriateness and relevance it has to all those involved.

7. Mainstream teachers with African students in their classes need support to adapt their methodologies and assessment procedures to better cater for the diverse needs of all students.

8. There is a need for a greater level of counselling and support for African students and their families to prevent the type of social problems that are beginning to emerge.

9. There is a need for greater collaboration between various agencies to coordinate the approach and services for this cohort of refugees.

10. Finally, there is a need for more research about African refugees, the problems they encounter and the successes they experience.

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Appendix A

Focus questions

<u>Caregivers</u>

<u>Needs:</u>
What do you think the main needs are for your children?

What are the particular educational needs they have?

What are their English language needs?

What needs to be done in terms of maintaining their first language(s)?

<u>Perceptions:</u>
Do your children get enough help at school?

Do you think there is sufficient cultural support for their learning?

Do you think your child's schooling will have been sufficient to get a job after finishing schooling?

Do you understand the schooling system in Australia?

What do you know about the structure of schooling in Australia?

Do you understand the assessment procedures used here?

Do you understand "early intervention", "junior primary", "ongoing community-school links"?

<u>Expectations:</u>
What can be done to strengthen home/school links with African families?

Are there other things that you would like to see addressed?

Teachers

Needs:

What are the main needs of African students?
(Consider language and education, cultural, social-- job prospects?)

What needs to be done to support these students?
(at a school level and at a system level)

Perceptions:

How adequate/appropriate are the assessment procedures that are currently in place in WA schools?

What needs to be done to support their transition into mainstream schooling?
What do you know about what African parents expect? (of the school & the system)

How likely is it that these students will be able to easily enter the workforce after finishing school?

Expectations:

What links are there between the school and families?

What resources do you know of that are currently available?

What resources would you like to see developed that would help these students more?

Are there other things you would like to suggest about schooling African students?

Adolescent students

What things have really helped you in your schooling?

Do you get enough help? (linguistic, cultural, social, etc)

What kind of help do you get?

What kind of help do you need?

Where do you get help? (Who can help you?)

Perceptions:
What things could be done better? (at school)

Do you have any problems at school? (language, workload, understanding what to do, topics covered, bullying, teachers...)

Do you have any problems after school? (trying to get job, bullying,)

Can you suggest ways that schooling may be improved to help you better participate in Australian society?

Are there things that can be done to help your transition into the workforce?

Do you think you will be able to get a job when you finish school?

What do you think you need in terms of schooling in order to get a job after finishing school?

Do you know of any other African refugee students who finished school and got a job? Was their schooling sufficient?

Expectations:
Do you have any suggestions to make about schooling other students from Africa?

Community Members

Needs:

What services are necessary for young Africans?

What services are available in the community for young Africans?

What services are available in the community for Africans (refugees) in general?

What are the employment and training opportunities for African youth?

How easy/ likely is it for young Africans to get jobs after they finish their schooling? (what are the barriers?)

What type of needs do you have? (in terms of language & education)

Perceptions:

Are the services that are provided catering for (or meeting) the needs of young Africans?

In general what are the community relationships like with respect to African youth?

Are the services that are provided catering for the needs of young Africans?

What services are lacking?

Are the health needs of African students being adequately catered for?

Expectations:

What could be done better?

In which areas would you like to see more money & effort spent?

What are some services that need to be put in place?

Appendix B

Survey questions

<u>Participant Background Information</u>

1. Current Role: (e.g. IEC teacher, ESL support teacher, Mainstream teacher, etc.)

2. Current level of teaching (year level or phase):

3. Experience teaching African refugee students (provide a general description of number of years spent teaching students from this background):

<u>Needs and Issues</u>

We would like to invite you to comment on any of the following needs/issues which may concern you. If you need more space please use the back of the sheet, labelling your responses with the corresponding number of the item. Please note that you need not provide a comment in every space.

1. Time taken for acquiring English

2. Time needed in an IEC

3. Resourcing needs (other aspects that need to be addressed in schools e.g., staffing)

4. Issues related to the emotional trauma experienced by these students

5. The impact of language differences on education

6. Literacy needs

7. Numeracy needs

8. Student needs and the relationship of these to the curriculum

9. Transitioning to mainstream

10. Issues surrounding the relationships between IECs and mainstream host schools

11. Homework

12. Family

13. Issues concerning the links between school and family

14. Health issues

15. The impact of cultural differences on education

16. Social needs

17. Future prospects (e.g., job prospects)

18. Access to transport/services

19. Concerns you may have about discipline/ behaviour

20. Racism and its impact on these students

21. Sharing information about individual students: Issues concerning the effectiveness of communication between IECs and mainstream schools

Any other issues

Resources and Strategies

a. What useful resources have you accessed to assist you in your teaching of African students?

b. Where did you get these resources?

c. What additional resources do you think would be helpful?

d. What strategies have you found useful when teaching African students?

e. What support do you provide in your classroom for teaching African students that you think is particularly useful?

f. What suggestions would you make to teachers who are encountering African students for the first time?

g. Have you or your school developed any special programs for African students?

h. What type of support have you received from Central Office or District Office?

Appendix C

Issues and suggested solutions

The following grid outlines the issues identified in this study and some solutions that have been developed to address these. The issues are identified in the first column and the solutions identified by participants in the study as effective are noted in the second column. In the third column of the grid, there is a range of other ideas suggested by participants in a workshop (Haig & Oliver, 2007) where the findings from the study were presented.

Issue: Educational needs	Study participants' solutions	Other possibilities
Students' developmental levels Wide gap between African background students and their peers (educational, social and cultural)	Sensitive management of issues that takes account of the students' and their families' background experiences and knowledge of the Australian schooling system.	Provision of cultural and social experiences "taken for granted" by children in the host community. Attention to social and cultural aspects of all learning.
Students being aware of the gap, which may lower their self-efficacy. Some try to hide their difficulties to save face but in doing so, also miss out on receiving assistance.	Improved communication with students; appropriate curriculum that provides them with scaffolding and success. Recognition of what they have achieved with celebration of achievements. A focus on what they can do rather than on what they cannot yet do.	Appropriate curriculum – make the hidden explicit. Assessment that is SLA sensitive. Learning strategies and materials that are cognitively appropriate with adjusted language and appropriate scaffolding.
Some teachers have **placed these students with "low achievers"** seeing them as having less capacity rather than recognising the linguistic, cultural, social and experiential issues the students face.	Provision of differentiated curriculum – often with assistance of ESL specialist teacher.	Fluid groupings that allow for peer tutoring. Specialist programs for ESL needs (which are seen as different to literacy needs)
Moving between year levels Some caregivers have the perception that children are "promoted" when they do not yet know what is required for the current level. These misconceptions arise from experience in a different system where movement to the next level of education relies on demonstrated competence.	Improved communication between the school and home, including use of interpreters, parent/caregiver meetings and learning groups, one to one meetings.	

Literacy levels		
Concern that low literacy levels impact on access to curriculum. English language is the medium of instruction and the usual means to demonstrate learning outcomes.	• "Every teacher is a literacy teacher" • attention to language needs in all areas of the curriculum • explicit teaching • more time and more assistance. • use "rich tasks" to meet real life needs.	Materials and strategies that support low literacy learners to access a challenging curriculum that takes account of their cognitive development and is age appropriate.
A high proportion of African background students come from **non-literate backgrounds** and have had limited or no access to schooling.	• focus on oral language development • use relevant material • purposeful tasks • use visual aids • explicit teaching of conventions of print/reading and writing processes • programs to help students to see literacy as relevant • assistance with context – deliberate building of social and cultural knowledge • support for caregivers – address the cultural view that education is the business of experts and that caregivers do not have a role. • Acknowledgement that this process takes TIME	Development of strategies and materials that work – sharing these with other teachers.
Implications of these low levels for **adequate support.**	Recognition of limited schooling – long practised in secondary but now extended to primary. Additional time in IEC Additional ESL specialist assistance in mainstream schools (cell programs, extension of time)	Differentiated staffing. Greater use of bilingual aides.
Numeracy levels **High level of need** – even at "basic" level – lack of required background knowledge, skills and understandings.	• additional time • smaller class sizes • attention to basic skills • concrete hands on materials • specialist ESL staff to assist • primary level expertise in secondary schools	Limited schooling classes in IEC E/C primary pedagogy / expertise valued in secondary limited schooling classes
Understandings commonly "taken for granted" not known.	• explicit teaching • teaching of cultural and social knowledge required (particularly relevant to contextualised maths – [word problems] working mathematically etc)	Teaching based on needs analysis (what students know/need to know now) Read exiting report from IEC

Recognition that some students exploit **well developed memory skills** in maths.	• experience of success with basic skills. • some judicious use of rote learning for basic number facts etc	Use a broad range of strategies to ensure opportunities for success for all. Use real life experiences – hands on immersion/ engagement e.g. cooking; manipulatives in maths; problem solving in T&E. Charts – explicit teaching of mathematical language
Some students seen as **successful in mathematics** when assisted with language aspects.	• support with language aspects of maths so success can be experienced.	
Content and structure of the curriculum Recognition that different backgrounds may cause "gaps" in understandings e.g. many students struggle with symbolic representations such as maps, diagrams and graphs.	• give the students time; have flexible timetabling; take nothing for granted; use accessible language; sequence learning; adapt the curriculum • analysis of needs – take account of background factors – suit the curriculum to the students not the other way around • focus on language development – other areas can be developed later • BUT health and welfare related knowledge should be also prioritised	
Pedagogy Different ways of teaching are needed.	• scaffold/active learning • 'learning how to learn' skills are needed • emphasis on development of oral language • build basic vocabulary • role for explicit teaching • recognise that behavioural issues may arise when the work is too difficult or too "babyish"	

Culture of schooling	
Culture of schooling Many teachers recognise what a struggle it is for these students to manage learning in a new language and a new culture – but some caregivers see education in Australia as "too easy" and "not hard enough" because of different cultural beliefs.	• recognise that students, their families and communities may hold values that differ from those of the school • improve communication with caregivers – use interpreters, translated materials, modified information that takes account of cultural differences. • caregiver support groups, including assistance with language and cultural knowledge needed to adapt to life in Australia. Build in knowledge of school system.
Provision Need to provide additional support for these students and their teachers.	• additional resources with high interest/low literacy demands • use of pictorial materials • additional ESL assistance • professional development for teachers
Differences in beliefs – teachers report that students find it difficult to accommodate different worldviews – very "black and white".	• cross-cultural information – exchange of knowledge about home cultures of students and Australian mainstream culture. • support to be able to see other perspectives.

Issue: Emotional needs	Study participants' solutions	Other possibilities
Pre-migration trauma On-going war, dislocation, death and loss of family members and friends, disruption of social networks and supports, loss of homes, land and customary ways of life, living with constant fear, hunger, refugee camp conditions. (This type of experience leads to loss of sense of control, connection and meaning – McDonald 2001)	• time and support • understanding and support to address "dysfunctional" behaviours • community based programs that assist with settling in to new country	
Post-migration trauma Impact of past experiences, continued disruption, demands of learning a new language, culture and social system, difficulties in families with "cobbled together members"	• time and support • understanding and support to address "dysfunctional" behaviours • adjustment of expectations	

where there are sometimes "splits"; sometimes children are with relatives who are not familiar; there are many female family heads (which may create a special role for eldest male child); identity issues for adolescents with dramatic changes in role and status.

Impact on schooling -"poor" behaviour -Negative reactions to academic challenges -High level of needs regarding emotional health and wellbeing	• support to gain independence • predictable routines, social programs (drumming etc) • behaviour management programs • improved access to health and welfare programs – links to community • anger control programs • subsidised housing • programs that raise staff awareness .	• Youth worker to coordinate all the advocacy bodies. • Range of music programs including drumming, guitars, singing – uniting different groups, providing rich tasks for students; opportunities to perform e.g. through Kulcha • Health program and sex education program. (very successful) • Driver education and similar programs to give these students access to real life skills they can use in this community • Sport – soccer/football programs • Access to IEC psych. Is only once a week. (Not enough for the no's of students (nearly 100) • Clothing centre at school
Issue: Physical needs	**Study participants' solutions**	**Other possibilities**
Nutrition/malnutrition Unhealthy diets (knowledge and experience of caregivers limited) Severe malnutrition – particularly in some refugee camps – implications for development of babies and young children; children being perceived as "greedy" or being unwilling to share (having known insecurity and starvation difficult to trust that food will be available after that present is consumed).	• improve communication between agencies • improve access to health system – assist children and caregivers • breakfast club, canteen programs, educational programs for children and caregivers	• Mentoring / Buddies • Chaplain program – pastoral care – uniforms etc • Multicultural education/ Society Environment across school. • Retraining • Up skilling teachers
Hygiene Cleanliness – social practices – background factors – showering, washing clothes, using deodorant etc. – impact on social acceptance, control of skin diseases etc. Severe disruption	• educational programs for students and caregivers	

and the conditions in refugee camps mean that some families do not know about hygiene practices deemed acceptable in Australian culture.

Disease or illness General health status of children is poor. They are reported to suffer from high levels of mental health issues, skin diseases, hearing and vision problems, untreated asthma symptoms, headaches, intestinal worms, malaria, and vitamin deficiencies. As a result they miss school, lack concentration and have difficulty with motivation.	• improve communication between agencies to ensure access to services • locating services in the school (new project to begin in some IECs) • improved access to school nurse (through project funding) • liaison with caregivers; assistance to independent adolescents	• Inform Registrar and Administration of agencies such as on-call medical staff.

Issue: Social needs	**Study participants' solutions**	**Other possibilities**
Age appropriate placement Issue of "true age" – culturally birth dates not important and this is especially the case in a refugee camp. "Correct age" placement a problem when there are such large gaps in their education – but need to do so to cater for social needs. There needs to be a balance between educational and social needs. However, the views of teachers and caregivers differ on this matter.	• students are placed according to age or within one year of official age. • communicate with caregiver so they can understand the Australian schooling system (IECs)	Developmental Grouping 1-3, 2-4, 4-7, 4/5, 6/7 Sport/Phys Ed→ age appropriate groupings
Development of social skills Wide range of needs recognised, younger children need to learn how to play, children/adolescents need to learn socially and culturally appropriate behaviour in context of school, gender issues/cultural differences cause difficulties – especially for older males	• understanding the cultural differences, cultural clashes, • previous status/autonomy, • role of refugee camp structures. • programs to help their adjustment e.g. drumming, art therapy, drama groups. • counselling services	• Teachers need to have an assistant in the room to assist in teaching social skills • Funding → more IEC's distributed through metropolitan area • Real support for "Mainstream teacher" – more ESL teacher help in certain schools for children who are not "refugees". • Training for teachers in culturally sensitive management of whole class with different cultural groups. • Parent workshops on school activities and school in Aust.

Relationships with Australian peers	small scale activities	INTEGRATION

<table>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Australian peers
Lack of positive relationships with Australian peers
some integration – but support needed
Impediment where racism or bullying occurs
students' view of "black" – as cause of racism and other types of discrimination.
Issues of "black" identity also seen as a source of conflict between these students and Aboriginal students.</td>
<td>
• small scale activities to support integration
• collaborative education programs between IECs and mainstream host school classes
• programs to address hygiene issues
</td>
<td>
INTEGRATION
• Sport sessions
• Being vigilant and active in playground to integrate children with mainstream students
• Teach children how to play in the playground
• Buddies / Buddy
• ESL teacher and mainstream teacher fostering posture relationships, collaborating and sharing talents.
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity (particularly for adolescents)
Loss of identity, refugee experience, clashes, threat to family cohesion, loss of role models through war, changing roles in new country – clash between role and status in family versus school, influence of illiteracy, identification with rappers and Afro American singers – "poor role models", conflict between Aboriginal and African background students – issues of race and "blackness".</td>
<td>
• program involving local police
• small scale activities (e.g. with Aboriginal students)
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</table>

Issue: Familial needs	Study participants' solutions	Other possibilities
Importance of relationship between family and school positive/negative views held, recognition of the language, social and cultural barriers	• "parenting" programs – some managed by school psychologist with intercultural training, others by community groups • small scale programs to encourage the involvement of parents in education • improvement of communication with the home	• Include parents in communication sooner rather than later. • Nutrition seminar for parents • Breakfast at school • Face to face contact (informal) to remind of events • Do as much as you can at school (minimal homework)
Family structures Influenced by cross generational war, refugee experiences (e.g. separations), social and cultural dislocation of refugee camps; "cobbled together families"; adolescents "kicked out" to fend for themselves; learned dependence in refugee camps to be overcome; many students have	• understanding the demands being made on children and adolescents • assistance to caregivers e.g. deputy principals in IECs provide information and assistance for caregivers or adolescents to access services they need. • programs that support students and caregivers to become	

high levels of responsibility in large families, "dysfunction" as a result of many factors, loss of extended family and the support it offered.	more independent and also address issues (e.g. breakfast club where students assist in preparation; language programs that teach students about nutritious diets, shopping and skills to manage money).	
Social and cultural differences Relationship between members – parent and child, siblings; behaviour management strategies, child rearing practices; role of children in the family; gender issues – different expectations for male and female children; adolescent roles; recognition of diversity within African background group.	• interviews that allow schools to find out about students' backgrounds • understanding and accepting differences • including different family structures as part of curriculum • teaching cultural knowledge in an additive manner	
Social skills Notions of sharing, different codes of behaviour appropriate interaction	• understanding differences • explicit teaching of social norms of the school (with some adjustment to be more sensitive to the students) • modifying the behaviour management policy so there is time to adjust and learn new ways of behaving • improving communication of the "rules" – simplification, pictorial reminders etc.	
Cultural maintenance Social and cultural conflict – assimilation, resistance	• include "African" culture in art and music programs • encourage parents to maintain home language and culture • promote cultural diversity in school programs	

Educational Issues: Language	**Study participants' solutions**	**Other possibilities**
Importance of learning English English language competence important for children, adolescents and caregivers. They are particularly vulnerable until they have developed sufficient English. Access to curriculum depends on English as it is the medium of instruction. There are varying degrees of difficulty for students depending on their background, age, previous experience and home language but it is particularly difficult for	• understand students and their particular needs; • important role of bilingual aides – but that they also may need additional training; • understand the difference between the student's home language and English; • access to meaningful, engaging and age appropriate curriculum; • protect children's rights; • understand adolescents – impact of lack of competency in English on their lives – role in family and when	

those from illiterate backgrounds. However, all require time and support as they have conceptual gaps, difficulty with unfamiliar vocabulary (and the concepts represented by the words). All these difficulties may impact on motivation and interest in learning.	independent.	
Parents and caregivers – low levels of English cause difficulty finding employment, communicating with school and accessing services. This difficulty with learning English sometimes led to the parents losing their authority in the family as their children learnt more quickly and interacted on behalf of the parents in the broader society. **Maintaining the home language** Caregivers and adolescents noted that children increasingly used English and expressed a concern that younger children would not learn their home language sufficiently well to be able to communicate. They also feared a related loss of culture.	• provision of assistance at school often through community groups; • English classes, particularly for women with large families who have difficulty accessing other classes - sometimes in service of other learning – about school, child rearing in new culture etc • use of interpreters (not children) when interacting with parents/caregivers. • understanding the difficult circumstances of many families; • promoting children's home cultures and language in school curriculum;	Contact made with community groups especially sporting – educational Transport provided Regular newsletters (written / oral (CD/tape) which have been translated

Educational Issues: mainstream	**Study participants' solutions**	**Other possibilities**
ESL support in the mainstream There is a concern that the link between the mainstream and IEC is not sufficiently strong - so knowledge about students is not always well communicated. Caregivers, ethnic education assistants and teachers noted that increased help was needed for low literacy level students in mainstream contexts.	• transition programs that include communication between the IEC and mainstream teachers. • provision of additional ESL specialist help to mainstream teachers.	Information to school - 2007 brochure regarding visiting teacher services based at D.E.O. ESL/ESD Progress Map roll out. Cross-directorate with DET – booklet Resources Development of appropriate assessment for refugee students
Access to interpreters -shortage of interpreters -access to interpreters in mainstream schools -training for mainstream teachers so they know how to access the interpreter service and to use it effectively	• provision of free service to DET schools	Up skill mainstream teachers - visiting teachers and DEO ESL team (how to use interpreters effectively) Link with interpreters (NITA) NIATA Encourage members of community groups to become involved in schooling. Target community members with language ability for employment in IEC and cells.

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Professional development for mainstream teachers -social and cultural backgrounds -catering for higher level needs (particularly low literacy)	• some PD run through the ESL Resource Centre • access to ESL in the Mainstream (although some teachers noted that this course needs to be updated and be more specific to the needs of low literacy learners). • IEC teachers offering MS teachers support	PD offered by C.O. ESL team - Cultural awareness for school staff and local communities - ESL/ESD Progress Map - Needs of refugees
Educational Issues: The challenges	**Study participants' solutions**	**Other possibilities**
Responding to students' high levels of need especially IEC teachers – enormous effort in responding to needs in first two years – contrast to previous groups; limited schooling background particularly complex in secondary school contexts where a number of teachers noted that they needed expertise in teaching initial literacy; behavioural issues further complicated the situation. Getting easier for some IEC teachers – developed expertise and special programs that assisted the children and their families.	• ESL Resource Centre mentioned by many teachers as particularly helpful in terms of resources, advice and PD available. • programs for illiterate students • social and cultural support programs • provision of additional social and cultural support for families • knowing about background of students	
Providing a relevant curriculum IEC mitigates pressure felt in mainstream – have some freedom to focus on what they know (and research supports) the students need. Some pressure still to "push" because of the demands of MS. Lack of resources – high interest level, age appropriate but linguistically and culturally suitable;	• curriculum approaches developed (e.g. use of explicit teaching which is contextualised; visual aides, hands on approaches, focus on oral language – especially interpersonal communication skills initially) • sourcing suitable resources	- Food – Breakfast Clubs - parental education - Transport provided - Hygiene Education - Social Values

District and central office support (DET) Mixed response from participants– good specialist help - background of students/call to update ESL in the mainstream. - - concern that there was not enough PD (particularly related to social, emotional and psychological services). - concern from ESL specialists that the mainstream PD they were required to participate in was unresponsive to their needs. They are frustrated that their students' needs are not taken into account.	• ESL professional development	Additional support for families / teachers (mainstream)
Different expectations – caregivers – culturally parents do not get involved in school – they only see the children do their homework; teachers would like more involvement – can see this as a lack of interest – some attribute this to lack of transport, English classes and child care responsibilities; but caregivers do want to know about their children – they do want the school to communicate with them – they are concerned about their children's progress – about their behaviour and what the school expects of them.	Value of ethnic education assistants • contribution as interpreters • knowledge of communities and culture link to children and caregivers, able to see "both ways" • information programs for caregivers • "parenting classes" • English classes – content is cultural knowledge	Need more case workers, EEA's, youth workers, if possible psychologists etc from the cultural groups represented in this cohort of students. More knowledge of needs. Idea of meeting with parents and the school nurse to discuss health issues etc (with the use of interpreters).
Difficulties with communication – language – use of interpreters + cultural differences	• use of interpreters, including ethnic education assistants • English classes • caregiver information sessions	Involve people from church groups Network groups [for general non-sensitive or public issues only – people's privacy must be respected]
Knowledge of the school system Caregivers and teachers noted that this knowledge was necessary but difficult because of a lack of experience. Cultural views of roles also differ.	• caregiver information sessions	Newsletter – translated Three way conferences with interpreters and use pictorial charts etc to explain school curriculum and structures to parents.

Homework Difficult area as parents expect it but do not have the capacity to assist – occupy children, keep them away from influence of TV, evidence that they are willing to work hard – know they have a lot to "catch up on"; means of discipline	• schools discuss this with parents/caregivers • give revision and skills based work that does not require assistance • establish homework classes (on similar model to those available to Aboriginal students)	
Discipline Difficult because of cultural differences –different expectations; different cultural practices. They are under pressure to change but do not know about alternatives; when children are in trouble caregivers lose a lot of face in the community.	• "parenting" classes • counselling services with school psychologist • liaison with ethnic education assistants and youth workers. • working with students to develop self-discipline	• Few but consistently applied rules. • Adjusting curriculum to reduce stress and promote success. • Additional support in transition phases (entry to school/IEC; movement to mainstream; move from pre-primary to primary and from primary to secondary.)

Appendix D

Languages of African Refugee Students

The following presents a list of the languages spoken in the countries from which African refugee students originate.

Burundi
Rundi
Swahili
Rwandi (also known as
Ruanda, Kinyarwanda,
Ilkinyarwanda,
Orunyawanda,
Urunyarunanda)
Somali (Af Soomaali)

Sudan
Acheron
Acholi
Afitti
Aja
Aka
Ama
Anak
Arabic (Standard)
Arabic (Sudanese
Creole)
Arabic (Sudanese
Spoken)
Avokaya
Bai
Baka
Banda
Bari
Bedawi
Belanda
Dinka
Klswahili
Moiu
Nubian
Nuer
Zande

Eritrea
Afar (also known as
Danakil, Denkel)
Arabic (Hyazi)
Arabic (Standard)
Bedawi
Bilen
Kunama
Nara
Sato
Tigrè
Figrigna

Liberia
Bandi
Bassa
Dan
Gola
Grebo
Kisi
Klao
Kpelle
Krahn
Krumen
Loma
Mam
Manya
Mene
Sapo
Vai

Ethiopia
Aari
Afar
Alaba
Amharic
Anuak
Awngi

Bench
Berta
Burji
Dirasha
Gamo-Gofa-Dawro
Gedeo
Hadiyya
Inor
Kafa
Komso
Libido
Male
Me'en
Nuer
Afan Oromo
Sida

Republic of the Congo
Lingala
Munukutuba

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