Knowledge Translation to Support Early Learning of Refugee Children and their Families

Brief Report

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Overview

This is a brief report of a three-year research project focussed on developing understandings and resources to support current and future community hubs and centres with the settlement and early learning of refugee students and their families. The project was born out of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project that found the need to address the gaps and inequities in knowledge sharing for individuals working with refugee families in diverse contexts with diverse skills in metropolitan, regional and rural areas. Three states participated – New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria - across public and Catholic education systems and included Community Hubs Australia (CHA), Schools as Community Centres (SACC) and a privately funded centre not attached to a school. The goal was to identify knowledge, processes and practices, as well as resources on topics such as how to encourage participation of families least likely to become involved; to visualise what it is they are doing that is different, and why; to hear of other practices that they might be able to adapt; and to disseminate their work in order to make future hubs and centres successful. As such, this research aims to empower those working in hubs and centres with resources and the knowledge needed to optimize refugee children's early learning opportunities for the best start to school, with a wider goal to strengthen family integration in Australian communities. We use the term integration to mean a multi-directional process that informs both the practices and processes of institutions as well as providing cultural orientation for families so that they get the best start in life (Klarenbeek, 2021; Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

Drawing on interviews with facilitators from 21 community centres and hubs over three years, as well as state and tristate workshops, the *Knowledge Translation Framework to Support Families and Children from a Refugee Background* was developed. This framework captures the exceptional knowledge, processes and practices of staff who support family settlement, early learning and transition to school for refugee children. The framework is translated into practice through the development of multimodal resources in the form of video pods and a resource database. Dissemination also included conferences and workshops for educators and community workers for knowledge sharing and collaboration.
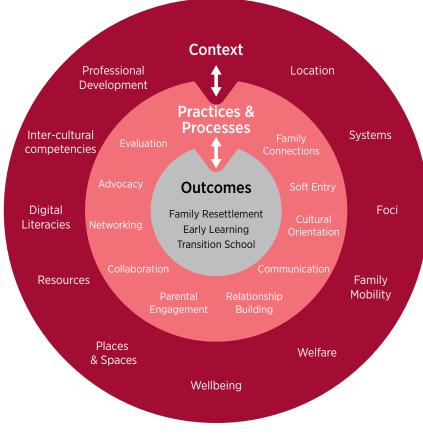
Key findings

The framework provided in this report covers the key findings that were found in support of what we have called the video pods: 'Settling Softly', which reflects the aims and the outcomes of the philosophies and practices in the centres and hubs when working with refugee families and their children. The framework has a focus on the contextual knowledge required across a range of settings in metropolitan and regional areas, as well as processes and practices to scaffold working effectively with families, key organizations, and local communities and services. In addition to these, we found interesting insights into the impact of COVID-19 and list briefly what were seen as 'enablers' in an otherwise difficult period.

- New insights into families - less stereotyped views on parenting
- Parents as volunteers, interpreters, and cultural brokers
- New communication strategies developed – app for translating newsletters verbally, use of chat apps depending on community (WeChat, Viber, etc)
- Greater family engagement in children's learning
- Appreciation for outdoor/green places and spaces
- Increased parental engagement in service utilisation
- Upskilling of digital literacies
- Enhanced networking and knowledge sharing opportunities for hub and centre facilitators.

Knowledge Translation Framework to Support Families and Children from a Refugee Background

The Knowledge Translation Framework and multimodal resources embedded topics aimed at supporting refugee families in another life transition. Central to this was children's socio-emotional development and wellbeing via play and friendships and school readiness (Fox, Southwell, Stafford, Goodhue, Jackson & Smith, 2015). The project conveyed Ian Potter's education objectives of "supporting innovative programs delivered to young children (ages 0-8) (Ian Potter Foundation, 2023) that aim to improve school readiness as measured by the Australian Early Development Census (Australian Early Development Census, 2022). The video pods and web resources provide effective strategies for educators and service providers to tailor supporting refugee children's school readiness, promote literacy and numeracy, play and friendships and parental self-efficacy and engagement in their children's education. These sustainable outcomes along with the systemic outcomes mentioned above align with the Ian Potter's other education objective of "supporting the development of evidence and shared measurement tools for the early childhood sector" (Ian Potter Foundation, 2023) as well as UN Sustainable goal 4 Quality education (United Nations Sustainable Development goals, n.d.). Learning outcomes are more likely to be achieved when educators and service providers work with families as this recognises the diversity of families and children (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2022). A more detailed framework is in the Full Report.

Knowledge Translation Framework
to support families and children from a refugee background

Figure 1: Knowledge Translation Model

Settling Softly Video Pods

The project aimed to address the gaps and inequities in knowledge sharing among stakeholders working with refugee children and their families in community centres and hubs. Specifically, its purpose was to gather established providers' knowledge of refugee children's early learning and family settlement, synthesise it into a framework, and translate the knowledge into practice via the development of multimodal resources for educators and community workers. To achieve these aims, the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Academic at Western Sydney University, provided a media-creating team led by Sam Dessen, Senior XR Creative Developer to create a series of video pods in partnership with the research team. The 7 video pods developed address knowledge sharing topics of importance as discussed by the hub and centre facilitators from the year 1 and year 2 interviews and focus groups. The purpose of these video pods was to disseminate the findings of the study to other stakeholders, and current and future centre and hub facilitators. This video pod dissemination approach, in tandem with a report/ policy recommendation approach, was adopted to ensure knowledge sharing amongst stake holders could be improved and amplified, whereby on the one hand, an individual's learning is increased from a combination of words and pictures, rather than either alone (Mayer Fiorella & Stull, 2014). On the other hand, they combine the work of professionals across a large number of geographical boundaries including Victoria, Queensland and NSW, reaching a wide audience (Florence & Betrus, 2020).

These videos have an explicit learning goal, or an intent to facilitate conceptual or procedural knowledge (Fyfield, Henderson & Phillips, 2022). To achieve this, as per instructional video guidelines, the video pods are brief, with the use of audio and visual elements that convey appropriate parts of an explanation, and the use of conversational and an enthusiastic style to enhance engagement (Brame, 2016). Drawing on these elements, the duration of each video pod was set to 3 minutes. The Settling Softly video pods also featured the hub and centre facilitators and community workers in a conversational format to enhance engagement (Guo, Kim & Rubin, 2014, p.42-3). In addition to participants, an enthusiastic and well-known media personality, Costa Georgiadis from ABCTV's Gardening Australia, was employed to introduce, connect and summarize the videos based on the team's text.

The Settling Softly video pods showcase both the research results, and the significant work being conducted in hubs and centres across NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Each video pod consists of 3 vignettes and addresses one topic. These topics were developed in ongoing consultation by the chief investigators with participants through the Knowledge Translation Framework. The video pods include: (1) Relationships Matter, (2) Communicating to Connect, (3) 'Out There' Making it work, (4) Tips for Starting School, (5) Playgroups and Learning (6) Creative Responses to Settling (7) Productive Responses to Diverse Parenting. Each video pod consists of an interview and images and videos that were self-filmed/photographed by the participants except two that were based in Sydney, which the digital team recorded. These are freely available on the project website and YouTube for wide dissemination and use.

Resource database

While resources are constantly changing, the team felt it useful to document what resources were available and where the gaps were to share among participants. Access to resources varied considerably, in part due to distance but also in terms of organizations that participants were embedded in. The database is available on the project website https://sites.google.com/view/knowledge-translation/home.

The areas that participants focused on in terms of resources were different to processes and practices contained in the framework and video pods. These are the areas where a lack of resources was the main focus of participants. They included parenting, health, cultural orientation, children transitioning to school, children, communication, challenges, gaps and suggestions, and COVID-19. The categories were also divided into mothers/carers and fathers/carers. The excel sheets are available in metropolitan, regional and rural areas and it is clear that different issues and resources frame what is there. The contents are not exhaustive but indicate what is used and what participants would like to be more readily available. It is a resource that can be copied and built on at the local level.

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