

Refugee Action Program

The Refugee Action Program (RAP) is a Victorian Government initiative that works to strengthen and empower communities from a refugee background to achieve sustainable settlement outcomes in local communities.

Purpose

The RAP empowers communities from a refugee and humanitarian background to:

- More fully participate in and engage with their local communities;
- Access existing services;
- Identify local issues and concerns;
- Plan tailored, community-owned responses; and
- Enhance local capacity and improve settlement outcomes.

The RAP also provides a point of coordination for service providers as it enables them to better understand and address local needs of communities from a refugee background through direct collaboration with the communities.

How the RAP operates

DIRECT SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES THROUGH PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

The VMC contracts partner organisations around Victoria to deliver the RAP. These organisations directly engage with and support local communities from a refugee background to determine the best means for responding to community-identified needs and concerns.

FLEXIBLE FUNDING

A significant portion of all RAP funding (at least 25%) is ear-marked as community 'enabling funding'. These funds – which can be used for a wide range of capacity-building activities and projects that are community-identified and driven – enable communities to collaboratively determine the means and methods by which they are supported and empowered.

COLLABORATION AMONG FUNDED AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The RAP places explicit emphasis on the importance of collaboration and coordination between funded agencies and other local service providers and stakeholders. In this way, the RAP, where possible, is able to coordinate and leverage external resources to better address community needs and concerns.

CONSULTATION AND DIRECT SUPPORT

The issues to be addressed through the RAP are determined in direct consultation with communities. The RAP gradually takes shape through community discussions and culminates in the development of General and Individual Community Workplans, which are specific to the stated needs and concerns of communities. Moreover, these workplans change as community priorities and needs evolve over time.

BLUE PRINT FOR LOCAL ACTION

The community consultation and planning that occurs within the RAP provides a comprehensive mapping of local priorities, needs, concerns, stakeholders and potential responses. This information is effectively a blue print for action and partnerships, not only through the RAP but across all local organisations working with communities from a refugee background in a given area. This in turn facilitates points of connection and collaboration and enables local organisations to build on other investments. In sharing this information with local organisations and partners the RAP also reduces the need for redundant over-consultation of communities.

COMMUNITY TRANSITIONING AND SUSTAINABILITY

The RAP works to gradually build the capacity – as defined by a communities' ability to access mainstream services and plan and implement community-identified initiatives – of vulnerable communities from a refugee background to a point of sustainability. Once a community is relatively sustainable, it is transitioned out of the program (or receives less intensive support), and other, perhaps somewhat more vulnerable, newly arrived communities are engaged. This generates a cycle of more established communities transitioning out of the intensive support of the RAP and more vulnerable communities receiving direct support.

Historical context of the RAP

THE RAP IS FUNDED TO OPERATE FOR 2009-10 AND 2010-11.

The RAP evolved from the Refugee Brokerage Program (RBP), which operated from 2005-06 to 2008-09. The RAP maintains and builds upon the proven strengths of the RBP and incorporates several of the recommended improvements identified in Victoria University's 2008 evaluation of the RBP. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) managed the RBP from May 2007 until its completion in June 2009.

The RBP is the predecessor of the RAP, and is the model for the approaches currently employed by the RAP. Victoria University's 2008 evaluation of the RBP found that the program:

- Leveraged and coordinated resources across a range of service providers and other local organisations;
- Formed strategic partnerships and linkages between communities and local organisations;
- Mitigated social isolation among vulnerable people from a refugee background;
- Enabled communities to gain greater access to mainstream services; and
- Acted as a catalyst for change and increased community self-sufficiency.

The RAP maintains and builds upon these strengths.

Some quotes from community participants in the RBP

'...when we were first involved, we had no experience in how to run a community. During the process, we built on our skills and became aware of the community needs and how to tell that to others. We now have those skills.'

'One of the things that made us to love this program was that it was to meet the needs of our community. We never felt that it was something that they tried to impose on us – this is about our values and our needs.'

'It's a wonderful program because it's like giving a hook to someone to fish for himself, rather than giving him fish.'

Some achievements to date

- Provision of critical social support and community infrastructure alongside the employment of people from a refugee background in regional areas;
- A local church facilitated an application for funding to support the pastoral training of a community member to provide pastoral care to their community;
- Approximately 200 isolated women are now independently accessing a range of services through their local council following participation in the RBP;
- A community organisation was able to access Victorian Government funding to provide the necessary infrastructure to set up an office from which to run their newly formed Association;
- A range of community enterprise initiatives which provide the opportunity for people to utilise existing or new skills in a business setting;
- A women's group engaged the Islamic Women's Welfare Association to run a leadership program. The program was offered free whilst RBP funding paid for child care and the facility;
- Driver education and driving lessons for socially and geographically isolated women and other community members;
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for women are conducted through Whittlesea Community Connections, and are taught by a qualified ESL instructor on a volunteer basis;
- Local leadership training and/or mentoring support with more established communities delivered to more than 100 people from a refugee background; and
- Members of Rotary clubs have provided mentoring support to young community leaders.

For more information

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