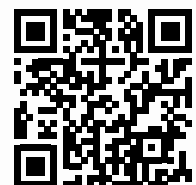




Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan **Evaluation Report**

2021



Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land the Cabrogal people of the Darug Nation. We also pay our respects to Elders, past and present and emerging.

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Led by CORE Community Services & Fairfield City Council



Executive Summary

The Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan (FCSAP) was a place-based initiative developed within the Fairfield LGA in 2016, and implemented from 2017 to 2020. It was designed in response to the influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees into Australia over this period, over ten thousand of whom settled within the LGA.

The FCSAP sought to bring together service providers and other stakeholders in the settlement sector to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants. It sought to do so by:

1. improving collaboration between service providers and with the government departments that funded them.
2. identifying and addressing gaps in service provision, and
3. enhancing the ability of local actors to shape broader policy and programs through advocacy

The Edmund Rice Centre was contracted to evaluate the FCSAP. Our evaluation concludes that the plan was largely successful in achieving its objectives. We find that the **key achievements** of the FCSAP were to

1. **facilitate a large number of collaborative projects and initiatives within the Fairfield LGA**, building on the LGA's long traditions of collaborative work
2. **significantly expand capacity within the LGA to address structural issues through highly effective advocacy**, both in the form of formal public advocacy and more informal channels of influence opened up by the FCSAP itself.

We also found that there were several challenges that emerged in the delivery of the FCSAP that were not entirely satisfactorily resolved. These were:

3. **Difficulties engaging with refugee led-community organisations and community leaders as partners in facilitating settlement outcomes.** This was a stated aim of the FCSAP but did not really eventuate as hoped, largely due to lack of resourcing. It is important to note service provision to individual refugee clients, was often sophisticated and effective. However, collaboration with refugee-led community organisations and community leaders in designing and implementing settlement support could have been enhanced
4. **Difficulties monitoring and effectively evaluating progress**, which we ascribe to lack of consensus amongst participating organisations about the purpose of and mechanisms for tracking progress. These complicated the production and limited the effectiveness of the FCSAP's Progress Report. This document was, however, still effective in publicising the settlement initiatives being undertaken, maintaining momentum on the FCSAP and making clear the need for an extension of the Action Plan.

Executive Summary cont'd

In accounting for these findings, we identified **three factors key to understanding why the FCSAP worked well, which also suggest how it could have worked better. These are:**

- 1. Resourcing.** One of the key organisations involved with the FCSAP (CORE Community Services) created and resourced a dedicated role to help manage the plan. This was a crucial investment in the Action Plan without which it probably would not have gone anywhere. Otherwise, however, the plan was not significantly resourced and many of its shortcomings can be put down simply to this.
- 2. Buy-in at the leadership level.** Several organisational leaders, most prominently the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, (though perhaps more importantly also senior middle managers at CORE Community Services and Fairfield Council) became important advocates of the FCSAP. Many other organisational leaders within the LGA supported the initiative more indirectly by assenting to their organisations' involvement with the Plan. At the same time, some of the challenges encountered by the plan had to do with its origins amongst front-line workers and the somewhat belated and hesitant ways it was backed by organisational leaders.
- 3. Inter-Agency Social Capital.** Fairfield LGA has a long and unique tradition of inter-agential collaboration and actively maintains an informal network of service providers working across various agencies who know, trust and respect one another. This network is a key factor that facilitates collaborative enterprises like the FCSAP. Of course, this network also has its limits in terms of agencies that are not well integrated within it, and these limitations also played a role in some of the challenges encountered by the FCSAP.

On the basis of these findings, we recommend the following:

- 1. That the FCSAP be adopted more widely as a model for place-based settlement support** due to its overall effectiveness
- 2. That in future some settlement funding be set aside for place-based initiatives like the FCSAP,** because settlement is highly geographically concentrated and funding arrangements should reflect the way some localities disproportionately bear the burden of supporting new arrivals.
- 3. That community engagement be more fully integrated in future settlement work, both in Fairfield and elsewhere,** as community leaders and ethnic-specific organisations can be effective partners in designing, delivering and evaluating settlement support.
- 4. That engagement with senior leadership figures be more deliberately structured into future initiatives,** perhaps using as a model the involvement of Professor Peter Shergold, the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, and the Joint Partnership Working Group in the FCSAP.
- 5. That mechanisms for managing collaboration be given explicit attention in designing future initiatives,** as the mechanisms devised to this end during the operation of the FCSAP were only partially effective.

Background Information

The Syrian-Iraqi refugee intake and Fairfield LGA

In September, 2015, in response to ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, the Australian government announced the creation of 12,000 new places in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (RHP) which resettles refugees in Australia. Visas to fill these new places were granted over the course of 2016 and 2017. These new places complemented the 'regular' intake of refugees through the HSP, which stood at around 13,750 in 2015-16 and has since risen to 18,750.

These increases to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program facilitated a larger-than-usual influx of refugee entrants into Australia starting in 2016.

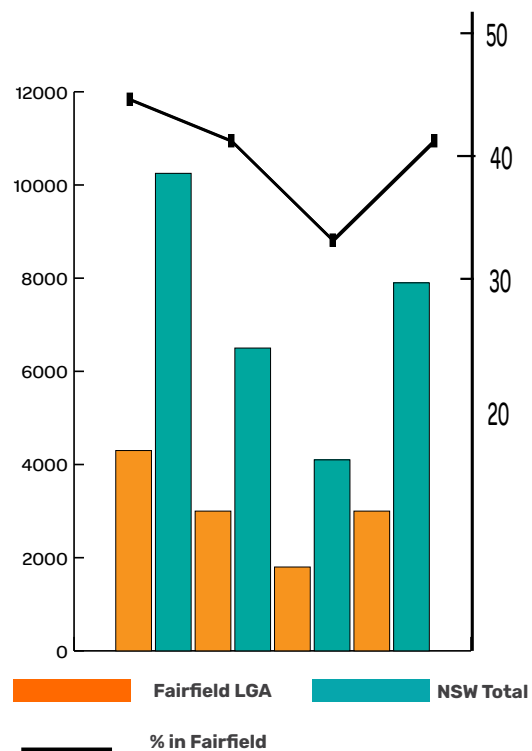
These refugees did not disperse evenly across Australia, however, but tended, as other waves of migrants had before them, to seek out areas inhabited by relatives or others from similar ethnic or religious backgrounds. The fact that many of these refugees were admitted on sponsored 202 visas exaggerated this trend, as they naturally tended to settle near their sponsors, many of whom resided within or near the Fairfield LGA.

Consequently, **a large share of these new arrivals settled in the Fairfield Local Government Area.** The Fairfield LGA has long attracted a disproportionate share of the state's humanitarian entrants. Cabramatta (which is within the LGA) famously became the centre of the Vietnamese refugee community in the mid-70s and the LGA has continued to attract numerous humanitarian entrants since. For example, over the five-year period from 2009 to 2014, Fairfield settled over 5,000 humanitarian entrants, which made up over 20% of the total humanitarian intake settled in NSW over those years. In fact, Fairfield had the largest intake of refugees of any LGA in the country over this time-period. Many of these new migrants stay in Fairfield, which as a consequence has become one of the most multicultural cities in Australia. Almost 60% of the city's population was born overseas and a language other than

English is spoken at home in over 75% of households.

However, the **influx starting in 2016 was large even by Fairfield's standards** both in terms of absolute numbers and as a share of Australia's total intake. In 2016 alone, 4,579 refugees settled in Fairfield, an astonishing 45% of all those coming to NSW in that year. **Over the course of the period 2016-2019, 11,836 humanitarian entrants came to Fairfield, or 41% of the entire NSW intake.**

Humanitarian Entrants settling in NSW and Fairfield, 2016-2019



The concentration of the Syrian-Iraqi refugee intake within the LGA was not fully anticipated by state and federal agencies. **As it became apparent many of these new migrants would be settling disproportionately in Fairfield, it fell to local agencies within the LGA to co-ordinate a response to the influx of new arrivals.** In mid-2016, various government and non-government agencies started participating in a working group led by CORE Community

Services and Fairfield City Council to discuss a proactive, place-based response to the arrival of a large number of vulnerable migrants with complex needs. **The Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan (FCSAP) emerged from these discussions as a framework to improve settlement outcomes for these new humanitarian arrivals within the LGA.**

A Fairfield City Settlement Symposium was held in November, 2016 with a view to identifying key settlement challenges for newly-arrived refugees and workshopping solutions, as

well as identifying services, projects and programs that could effectively meet the needs of refugees and vulnerable migrants. These discussions became the basis of the Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan, the development of which was spearheaded by Fairfield City Council and CORE Community Services with the support of a Working Group drawn from symposium participants. **The FCSAP was launched in June 2017 and set out a series of initiatives to be undertaken over a two-year period (July 2017-June 2019,) a time-frame later extended to mid-2020**

The NSW settlement framework and Fairfield LGA

The increased intake of refugees from Syria and Iraq was accompanied by a substantial investment in settlement support by the NSW government. In mid-2016, the State government announced a \$146 million commitment over four years, supplemented in mid-2017 by a further \$22 million for a targeted Refuge Employment Support Program. This increased funding was accompanied by a greater concern with effective co-ordination between services. In 2016, Professor Peter Shergold was appointed the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement and tasked with co-ordinating the state's response to humanitarian arrivals. This endeavour was mainly undertaken through the Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement, which brought together leaders from government and non-government organisations to direct and strengthen the service sector's response to settlement issues.

The concentration of refugees in Fairfield was not fully anticipated at the time of the allocation of the additional funds, **however, and little allowance was made for supporting Fairfield LGA specifically in resettling refugees.** The additional funding allocated to settlement services and mainstream services that were identified as engaging with newly-arriving refugees (such as health services, the justice system and schools) of course tended to 'follow' individual refugees wherever they went. However, other mainstream

services operating within the local community (Neighbourhood centres, for instance) were initially not identified as impacted by the need to facilitate settlement. As a consequence, they experienced an influx of high-need refugee clients with no corresponding increase in funding. Moreover, no resources were allocated to the co-ordination of settlement at the local level, with service co-ordination initially occurring only at state level, through the Joint Partnership Working Group convened by the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement. The lack of locally-targeted funding forms an important background to the FCSAP which, as a consequence, relied principally on in-kind support from working group members (many of whom were themselves, however, recipients of additional funding.)

However, Prof Peter Shergold, in his capacity as Coordinator General, took an active interest in the FCSAP, helping to launch the initiative and maintaining an active interest in it for the duration of its implementation. This facilitated the involvement of Multicultural NSW in the initiative after it was launched (both in terms of practical support and greater financial support) and fostered an increased awareness of the role of Fairfield as an important Settlement City within the NSW settlement framework. As we shall argue more fully later, the increased 'visibility' of Fairfield in the settlement sector was in fact one of the main achievements of the FCSAP.

The Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan

Aims of the FCSAP

The overarching aim of the FCSAP was to improve settlement outcomes for refugees and other vulnerable migrants living in the Fairfield LGA.

To accomplish this, the FCSAP sought to:

- 1) enhance existing service provision, largely through greater collaboration and co-operation with local service-providers and other stakeholders.
- 2) Identify service gaps and problems for humanitarian entrants in the LGA
- 3) Increase the capacity of local stakeholders to shape wider settlement policy and programs through advocacy and increased visibility for Fairfield as a Settlement City

It is primarily in reference to these aims that the efficacy of the FCSAP has been evaluated.

Structure of the FCSAP

The FCSAP was divided up into eight 'action areas.' These emerged out of the Settlement Symposium held in Fairfield in 2016 and subsequent discussion within the Settlement Action Plan Working Group. These were as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Action Area 1: Safe and Responsible Communities concerned refugees' ability to engage with legal and police systems and their understandings of their rights and responsibilities under Australian law. Domestic violence emerged as a major theme in this action area.</p> | <p>Action Area 2: Physical and Mental Health and Well-being was concerned primarily with facilitating refugee access to health advice and the Australian health system, and addressing barriers to accessing these.</p> | <p>Action Area 3: People with a Disability was concerned mainly with facilitating refugee access to support systems available to people with disabilities.</p> |
| <p>Action Area 4: Meaningful Engagement, Skills Development, Education and Integration within Local Communities was in essence concerned with the complex issue of refugee employment and facilitating access to paid work through education, work experience, qualification recognition and other programs.</p> | <p>Action Area 5: Volunteerism in Relation to Supporting Newly Arrived Refugee, Humanitarian Entrant and Other Vulnerable Migrant Communities was primarily concerned with coordination and recognition of local volunteer work to support refugees.</p> | <p>Action Area 6: Information and Coordination involved coordination and communication between service providers and the refugee community to disseminate information about services and opportunities.</p> |
| <p>Action Area 7: Housing Accessibility was concerned primarily with advocacy around improving access to both short-term and long-term accommodation for humanitarian entrants.</p> | <p>Action Area 8: Evidence Based Planning and Advocacy entailed local advocacy for policy changes and additional resourcing in areas of need. Refugee interactions with the Jobactive system and resourcing of domestic violence support emerged as particular areas of focus.</p> | |

Each action area was further broken down into ‘actions’ which usually articulated quite broadly framed objectives. So, for example, within the employment-focused Action Area 4, we find actions items like ‘Increase access to support for entrepreneurial activity,’ and ‘Increase access to work experience opportunities.’ For each action there were one or more proposed ‘outputs’ which were usually specific programs or initiatives through which these broad ‘actions’ were to be realised. Against each output, the action plan listed the hoped-for outcome and a lead agency responsible for the delivery of the output (though in practice most of the outputs involved some degree of cross-agency collaboration.)

The actual governance of the Action Plan was a somewhat complex endeavour. The FCSAP Working Group, which had helped develop the Action Plan, was also the body formally tasked with overseeing its development and delivery. It consisted of a somewhat fluid number of local and state government agencies and was chaired by a secretariat consisting of CORE Community Services, Fairfield Council and Multicultural NSW. A Community Advisory Group was also planned but not realised, largely due to resource constraints.

Key agencies that participated in the Action Plan and the Working Group included:

- Assyrian Resource Centre
- Services Australia (Centrelink)
- Lebanese Muslim Association
- Legal Aid NSW
- Multicultural NSW
- Navitas English
- NSW Department of Education (incl. Fairfield IEC)
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- NSW Police
- NSW Health (SWS Local Health District)
- NSW Refugee Health Service
- NSW STARTTS
- Settlement Services International
- The Smith Family
- TAFE NSW
- Woodville Alliance

It should be noted that not all of the agencies listed above were equally active over the life of the FCSAP – some were mainly involved early on, with involvement decreasing as time went on, while others joined the FCSAP at a later time. Not all the above-named groups participated in this evaluation, though we had an opportunity to speak with representatives from the majority of them.

The only paid staff member specifically engaged to facilitate the Action Plan was the FCSAP coordinator, who occupied a part-time role and was funded by CORE CS, through the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program. It was originally envisaged that the working group and various ‘lead agencies’ would oversee the action plan as a whole and actively monitor progress in the various ‘action areas.’ However, in practice, most of the work of monitoring and reporting on the action plan and its various action areas fell to the coordinator.

Governance of the FCSAP

The Working Group overseeing the Action Plan met on a quarterly basis to discuss progress and issues arising from the various aspects of the action plan. These meetings were normally preceded by meetings of the secretariat which set out an agenda for the working group meeting. Between these meetings, the coordinator engaged in various monitoring activities and represented the FCSAP at the meetings of the various inter-agency forums which are a long-standing feature of Fairfield social service provision, and whose work overlapped to some degree with that of the FCSAP (such groups as the Fairfield Multicultural Interagency and the Fairfield Domestic Violence Committee.)

For many of the agencies involved in the FCSAP, their participation in the Action Plan was limited to activities within the particular action area most pertinent to their broader remit. So, for example, the NSW Police and Department of Justice were primarily involved with Action Area 1 concerning legal matters; the activities of NSW Refugee Health were focused mainly on Action Areas 2 and 3 concerning health and wellbeing, and so on.

The Plan originally envisaged a decentralised governance model whereby designated Working Group members would co-ordinate action items within their given Action Area. This did not prove viable in practice, however. While meetings of the Working Group and a workshop hosted by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet in May 2018 provided some initial structure in the early days of the FCSAP, the Action Plan was ultimately held together as a coherent initiative mainly through the activities of the coordinator, who was appointed in mid-2018. This coordinator subsequently monitored progress across the various action areas and reported back to the working group, including through the mechanism of a detailed progress report which was published in early 2019. This document helped both record what had been accomplished and made recommendations for additions or alterations to the agenda set out in the original Action Plan documents.

Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

This evaluation was commissioned by the three organisations that comprised the secretariat which effectively managed the FCSAP: CORE Community Services, Fairfield Council and Multicultural NSW. CORE Community Services is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation that provides a variety of social services across south-western Sydney. CORE was the primary overseeing agency for the evaluation, having also held primary responsibility for co-ordinating the plan during its existence.

The evaluation was conducted by the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education (ERC.) The ERC is a non-governmental research and advocacy organization that was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1996. ERC conducts rights-based programs including people-centred research, community education, community empowerment and advocacy by focusing on three areas: the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum; and the rights of the peoples of the Pacific, especially those struggling for climate justice. ERC's aim is to raise awareness that leads to social action and policy change in favour of the poor and excluded in Australia and internationally.

Methodology

Research for the evaluation of the FCSAP was undertaken by the Edmund Rice Centre after the conclusion of the Action Plan, roughly from August to December, 2020. **The main sources of data were focus groups and interviews with key participants in the Action Plan, most of whom were service providers who participated in the working group or were members of the secretariat.** Three focus groups were undertaken, which were topically organised around the various action areas, and a further eight interviews conducted.

This qualitative research was complemented by analysis of the various documents produced in the course of the action plan and other background desk research. These included the original 2017 Action Plan document setting out the goals and action areas, a terms of reference document outlining the proposed organisational structure of the Action Plan, the 2019 progress report, the updated action plan based on this report, and documentation from various other events and initiatives associated with the Action Plan.

We also consulted academic and policy literature pertinent to issues addressed by the various action areas to allow us to assess how the various initiatives undertaken compared to best practice guidelines. We also spent some time investigating other local place-based initiatives to gain some appreciation

of the difficulties and possibilities inherent in these kinds of projects. This evaluation is not comparative in scope, however, so these other initiatives are not discussed in what follows but only inform our findings implicitly. Most of this background research preceded focus groups and interviews so as to allow us to conduct a better-informed discussion with participants.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted in a deliberately open-ended and semi-structured manner, to allow themes and reflections to emerge from the experience of key participants rather than imposing a *a priori* and outside standards on the evaluative process. To the extent that we imposed a 'framing' on our discussion with participants to structure discussion, we used the framework set out within the original Action Plan document. That is, **we set out to evaluate the FCSAP mainly in reference to the aims and objectives laid out in the original Action Plan.** The question of whether those aims and objectives were, in fact, the best ones to pursue in these circumstances is therefore somewhat outside the purview of this evaluation.

Limitations

The key limitation of this evaluation is that we did not consult any members of the refugee community as part of our research.

This obviously is a fairly serious limitation in that **it is therefore impossible to say anything very definite about how much impact the action plan itself had on the target community on whose behalf it was undertaken.** This was a limitation established by the organisations which commissioned the evaluation, and arose out of the constrained budget and timeframe within which the evaluation had to be undertaken.

Given that the aim of the action plan was ultimately to improve settlement outcomes for recently-arrived refugees, the absence of feedback from refugees themselves is obviously problematic. Admittedly, most refugees would probably have had little awareness of the Action plan as an organisational structure and its aims to improve collaboration between service-providers. However, they would certainly have had pertinent observations and ideas about the settlement process more generally, including the effectiveness of the settlement programs delivered as part of the FCSAP.

To compensate somewhat for the absence of the voices of refugees themselves in this evaluation, we drew on other research that does take into account refugee voices, and thus helps ground our evaluation in the experiences of refugees themselves.

The Edmund Rice Centre has itself recently produced a report on the settlement experiences of Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrants and we drew on the data collected as part of that research – much of which came from in-depth qualitative interviews with members of refugee communities within the Fairfield LGA. We further consulted the Fairfield-specific data published as part of the Australian Research Council Linkage project, Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia, which also involved extensive qualitative interviews with recently-arrived

refugees. Our findings and recommendations are thus partly informed by the perspective of the refugee community on settlement service provision that emerges from these other data sources.

The other major limitation of the evaluation lies in the selection process for participants, which tended to be biased towards those who were active and enthusiastic participants in the FCSAP. It was necessary to engage CORE Community Services (a key convenor and sponsor of the FCSAP) and the former FCSAP coordinator to identify and recruit informants for both focus groups and interviews. This meant that, in practice, we tended to hear from people who valued their ongoing relationships with the Action Plan and CORE, and who also felt enough commitment to the FCSAP to contribute some of their scarce time to participating in an evaluation of it.

This meant that we tended to only talk to those settlement service providers whose experiences with the FCSAP were broadly positive. Those who were unpersuaded by the Action Plan were more likely to signal this by not responding to invitations for interviews or focus groups, or indeed simply by not participating actively in the Action Plan in the first place. Several major settlement organisations were, in fact, only involved in a limited way in the FCSAP, in spite of efforts by the coordinator and others to engage with them. It unfortunately remains somewhat unclear why this was the case. However, as we discuss in more detail below, we found that active involvement in the FCSAP tended to be based on a pre-existing participation in an informal network between individual service providers within the LGA. It is likely that non-participating organisations were simply not strongly connected to this network or became disconnected from it as individual staff members moved to other roles.

Findings & Discussions

Summary of findings

The service providers and other participants to whom we spoke generally had positive feedback about the action plan as a mechanism for facilitating partnership and collaboration between services, and as a means to identify and address gaps in service provision. They also reported it enabled more effective place-based advocacy to higher levels of government and other stakeholders. **In reference, then, to the three aims set out in the original action plan documents (increasing collaboration, identifying gaps and facilitating advocacy) the action plan was on the whole seen to be quite successful.**

In this section, we begin by highlighting some of the achievements of the Action Plan. Due to the range of activities covered by the FCSAP, an exhaustive overview of all the various projects included under its umbrella would be very cumbersome. Instead, we draw on a limited number of case studies to illustrate the kinds of collaborative work made possible by the action plan. **This is followed by some remarks about the challenges encountered in implementing the FCSAP,** focusing particularly **on difficulties fostering community engagement and the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation** as the plan progressed.

We conclude this section with some discussion of the factors that contributed to both the positive outcomes and limitations of the FCSAP. These constitute, on the one hand, **the crucial ingredients of a successful place-based initiative** and, on the other, areas where further **investment of effort would be rewarded**, both for organisations within Fairfield and those looking to apply this model in other localities.

Achievements

Achievements: Increased Collaboration

As stated earlier, **many of the initiatives outlined in the action plan were collaborative in nature, involving more than one of the agencies who participated in the FCSAP.**

In many cases, the actual initiative or program was mostly run by one organisation and others were involved in a more peripheral manner, often by identifying and referring participants or promoting the initiative to their clients. For instance, Fairfield City Council ran a Refugee Work Experience Pilot program which involved recruiting suitable refugee candidates into two-week placements in various roles in Council. The actual recruitment and workplace support were performed by Council staff but Nativas English helped identify and refer suitable participants through their Skills



Pictured: Business Breakfast

for Education and Employment program. From Navitas's point of view, being able to provide clients with access to such opportunities bolstered the usefulness of their own program. To take another example of this kind of collaboration, information sessions were delivered by NSW Refugee Health Services to help refugees better navigate the health system as part of the FCSAP. NSW Refugee Health Services delivered the actual sessions but a variety of other agencies 'hosted' these presentations by incorporating them into existing AMEP classes and settlement support groups.

Other instances of collaboration were more truly inter-agency partnerships towards a shared common objective that no agency could achieve on its own.

The Business Breakfast, aimed at promoting refugees as potential employees to local businesses, was co-organised by CORE Community Services, STARTTS, Assyrian Resource Centre and TAFE NSW, amongst others. The various expos organised as part of the FCSAP (a law expo in 2018 and the annual 'pathways to employment' expo) likewise, of course, constitute true collaborations. Another important example of this kind of collaboration was the advocacy work done as part of the FCSAP. The 'Not Working' report (published by Fairfield Multicultural Interagency and Refugee Council of Australia with the support of Fairfield City Council, and discussed in more detail below) was based on a survey conceived and administered by a variety of agencies that participated in the Action Plan (including CORE Community Services, Assyrian Resource Centre, Navitas English College, Mission Australia Adult English Migrant Program Pathway Advisors and Settlement Services International.) Administering a survey to 102 respondents (often involving translation work) would have been beyond the capacity of any one organisation and, while the research expertise of the Refugee Council was of course pivotal to the final report, the project as a whole represented a truly collaborative effort.

They go to SSI, they go to English Classes, they go on an excursion ... and they're getting the same messages consistently. This consistent message in a variety of settings means that if an individual does not engage with a service after first hearing about it they are building up the confidence to access the service when they are ready - maybe after 6 months of seeing familiar faces and hearing similar messages they built their confidence to go talk to an English teacher or see the police

Our relationships have developed to a degree to not just help clients but maintain a really warm referral mechanism between us. I think we work ... Fairfield is one of the unique places where when another colleague sees your name they attend to your client straight away because they'll see the complexity of referring that client

Our advocacy is more compelling for business if different stakeholders and relevant partners present to the business community as a coherent team who work together.

We feel it works best if we get other services or other partners involved to highlight that weakness in the area [of need.] Because it shows its not that particular service but is affecting other areas.

Focus group participants were generally keen to stress the many benefits of working together in these ways. Beyond the obvious benefits in terms of more effective delivery of individual programs or the capacity to pool resources to realise bigger projects, a number of other positive outcomes were mentioned. One such benefit identified by participants was that **ongoing collaboration tends to result in a consistency in messaging** (and even personnel) across the various contexts in which refugees come into contact with service providers. Communicating consistent advice across agencies about, for example, the best pathways to seek assistance in specific situations (when encountering a legal problem or experiencing domestic violence, for example) helps refugees develop confidence in accessing services or asking for help, whereas conflicting or unclear advice can lead to confusion and disengagement from services. There are also benefits for **service providers, who by working together develop ongoing relationships that facilitate further collaboration and contribute to 'warm' referral mechanisms in their everyday work with clients.** These allow refugees to more easily access complex systems and lessen the problems of feeling 'passed around' between services or not understanding how to leverage formal assistance to achieve desired outcomes. Others noted that **engagement with external stakeholders (the business community, for example, or state and federal government agencies) is also empowered when local service providers and agencies present a united front rather than acting in isolation.**

Achievements: Addressing Gaps and Engaging in Advocacy

Service providers talked about the FCSAP as a useful mechanism for making refinements to existing service delivery. This largely took place through conversations about how to tackle specific issues that occur across multiple agencies and, from there, the development of projects aimed at addressing these. So, for instance, difficulties around engaging refugees on sensitive topics like domestic violence had clearly led to a great deal of cross-agency discussion and innovation around how to present such material in a non-threatening manner; from organising 'family days' where such material was available but not foregrounded to the creation of informational material framed around refugees' own aspirations – 'healthy relationships' in this instance.

However, many of the most urgent 'gaps' identified by service providers really lay outside of their own specific remits, and the issue of addressing these was therefore closely tied to engaging in advocacy around the larger issues faced within the community. It is here the FCSAP really quite dramatically increased the capacity of the sector to make its concerns heard. To illustrate the role the FCASP played in this process, we focus here on two case studies – the 'Not Working' report and the campaign for better Domestic Violence resourcing in the Fairfield LGA.

The Not Working report, as has already been mentioned, was a collaboration between several agencies within the Fairfield LGA and the Refugee Council of Australia. The report, published in 2017, described the experiences of refugees with the Jobactive system and was quite critical of both the inadequate form of assistance Jobactive providers supplied and the ways they engaged with refugee clients.



There is a lot more openness – there was an issue with clients being pulled out from AMEP [English] classes and we're not hearing that anymore ... There's more collaboration between us and our counterparts in Jobactive. And most importantly the department who attends and gives more insight into what we're expecting from Jobactive.

The idea for the report emerged from a growing anecdotal awareness amongst various settlement service providers within the LGA that many refugees were experiencing difficulties with their Jobactive providers, and a shared feeling that documenting these in a more rigorous way was the first step to addressing them. Members of the Fairfield Multicultural Interagency worked together to design and administer a survey, and then partnered with Refugee Council to turn this data into a compelling and quite damning report. This was quickly picked up by the media and brought to the attention of figures within the relevant federal department (currently DESE – Department of Education, Skills and Employment,) all of which put enormous pressure on Jobactive providers themselves to engage with the sector and its concerns.

The FCSAP was instrumental not only as a framework for the initial collaboration that brought the report into being but also in terms of providing mechanisms through which Jobactive providers could engage with the settlement sector in the wake of the report.

An Employment and Community Services Forum now meets quarterly and is attended by Jobactive providers, DESE and local service providers engaged in the refugee employment issues. Service providers report positive outcomes from this Forum, such as more collaboration with Jobactive providers, more frequent referrals to their own services and generally more receptiveness to their concerns. Moreover, there are currently proposals to roll out regional councils on employment modelled on this forum for other areas.

Whether the experience of refugees with the Jobactive system has improved as a result of all this is more elusive.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that, while Jobactive providers still struggle to actually help refugees into employment, some of the more egregious problems flagged in the Not Working report (around how refugees were being treated) are much less commonly experienced now. The arguments of the Not Working report are moreover now frequently cited as part of a broader national conversation about the Jobactive system and the communities it is failing to assist into work.

The Not Working report was impressively successful but our focus group participants also noted that this **kind of very public, highly adversarial advocacy is actually fairly uncommon in the Fairfield LGA**. Concerns about jeopardising funding or existing relationships are often a barrier to this approach. Community workers and service providers also often lack the time and expertise to engage in complex research projects and feel a certain trepidation about engaging with media. For these reasons, it is more common to use more informal channels to more quietly advocate for change.

Domestic Violence was a common theme ... but it was hard at times to pinpoint the specific issue ... we needed to drill down to the specific problem that we could change - where is the policy tweak we need to make? It was hard at times to get there ... but in the end, it was really about the number of caseworkers and when they identified that as the key issue it was so much easier for us to know how to go about having the right conversations

I was really shocked in a good way that when this report got out. Actually, a Minister responded ... the department was responsive, they called up all the Jobactive providers they were funding and they got them into a room and we were there in that room. It was amazing to see that response - I've never seen anything like it.

One good example of this more informal style of advocacy is the work done through the FCSAP to highlight the under-resourcing of domestic violence services in the Fairfield LGA. The need for additional case management services for victims of domestic violence has been a long-standing issue in the LGA - with local case managers reporting demand well in excess of what they are funded to provide, and limited availability of services without restrictive criteria. The original Action Plan

document envisaged issuing a discussion paper to highlight this and other needs in the DV space. However, this action item stalled and was abandoned as impractical. The Working Group instead choose to highlight the issue to Prof. Shergold privately during a Working Group meeting he attended. At this event, a DV case manager delivered a presentation describing the issue and Prof. Shergold was, in his capacity as NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, then able to raise these concerns in governmental forums not easily accessible to Fairfield's local service providers and community workers. The LGA has subsequently been allocated additional temporary domestic violence case management funding as part of the Covid-19 response and service providers are hopeful that this will in time become

permanent. Obviously, it is impossible to show that this particular advocacy work led specifically to that outcome but the feeling amongst FCSAP participants was that this had been an effective way to communicate the issue 'upwards' to decision-makers.

It is important to note that there was more to this process than the mere good fortune of having a widely respected senior civil servant take an interest in settlement issues arising within of the LGA. **The Settlement Action Plan itself served as a bridge between local 'on-the-ground' realities faced by individual service providers and the more abstracted managerial role of the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement.** As well as helping draw attention to Fairfield as a settlement city, the FCSAP created an institutional framework (the quarterly Working Group meeting) that enabled a senior bureaucrat like Shergold to engage constructively with local service providers. Moreover, as was discussed above, a staff member from Multicultural NSW participated actively in the FCSAP. Their role was in part to assist with the identification and 'escalation' of these kinds of systemic issues that couldn't be resolved at the local level. This included the creation of an escalation template to help Working Group members put together a clear, compelling case for systemic intervention, which could then be taken to the appropriate forums. Bridging the world of front-line service providers and the world of policy-makers did not happen automatically or necessarily all that effortlessly. Indeed, this work of 'making visible' local concerns in a way that could translate into policy interventions was an important achievement of the FCSAP.

Challenges

Challenges: Engaging the community

In contrast to the successes of the FCSAP in terms of connecting service providers to each other and to higher levels of government, **it has been more difficult to build meaningful connections to representatives from the refugee communities the action plan was designed to assist.** To be clear, this is not a critique of service provision to individual clients. There is much evidence of service providers engaging successfully and thoughtfully with refugees as individual clients; the tailored delivery of domestic violence information cited earlier being a good example. However, **efforts to engage with the refugee community as a partner in settlement through connections to community, ethnic and religious organisations have been more limited.**

To their credit, **the designers of the Action Plan saw the value of such community engagement and hoped the Plan would foster it.** As mentioned earlier, a Community Advisory Group was envisaged as part of the governance structure of the plan, and several of the Plan's action areas sketched out an ambitious program of community engagement, including formal collaboration between service providers, on the one hand, and religious and other community groups, on the other.

However, little in fact came of these aspects of the Action Plan. The Community Advisory Group was never formed, largely for lack of time (but this of course also speaks to it being seen as somewhat low priority.) Furthermore, Action Area 6, which most explicitly set out a community engagement agenda was also one of the action areas where not much progress had been made by the time of the Progress Report. It is also true that even Action Area 6 largely imagined refugee community groups as a minor partner in settlement – involved mostly in disseminating information about programs and services provided by Action Plan partners. However, refugee community organisations (both religious and ethnic groups) and networks of well-connected community leaders can of course be much more than simply a means to advertise services. Such groups are often themselves engaged in efforts to support settlement and could be approached as both organisational partners and as sources of valuable on-the-ground information about emerging issues in the refugee community. Encouragingly, leading agencies involved in the FCSAP have acknowledged this gap and their response to Covid-19 has seen renewed efforts to engage with refugee-led community groups around a range of issues arising from the pandemic.

This area of difficulty extends in another way to Action Area 5, which concerned promoting voluntaristic efforts assist the refugee community. This, too, was an action area in which little progress was made, in part due to difficulties recruiting agencies with the right kind of expertise to address the action items. This action area was also held back, however, by something of a misconception about the kinds of voluntaristic work taking place on behalf of the refugee community.

As we know from refugees' own accounts of their experiences, there is a vast volunteer effort dedicated to helping them settle and start new lives in Australia. This volunteerism, however, mainly occurs informally within their own communities rather than through formal organisations. This was especially true for Syrian-Iraqi humanitarian entrants, many of whom were admitted into Australia on sponsored Visas, which meant they already had connections within the local community. As we know from other research (data from which is cited below) it is these community connections that perform much of the 'volunteer' work of helping with settlement. This in turn means that the project of engaging with voluntary efforts to assist refugees is really just the project of engaging with the refugee community looked at from a slightly different perspective.

Honestly ... the case manager was of use to all us, but I mostly relied on my friends. I had friends who came here ... 15 years ago and I have another friends who helped me When the case manager sees, when I ask for something, she finds me an interpreter or they may organize an appointment, but when you call a friend or relative, they immediately attend.

-Refugee Interview, Settlement Experiences of Syrian & Iraqi Refugees, p. 34

My brother. He did all that stuff for us. When I was in Lebanon, my brother, he called me from Australia, 'I found a big house for you, and is very, very good for you'. And when I came to Australia I came here straight away from the airport.

-Refugee Interview, Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia (Refugee Settlement Snapshot 2018: Fairfield, NSW,) p.8

What really happens is they ask for a lot but then when we set up a program, we hardly end up getting the numbers to run the program.

As the above quotes suggest, **there is much that refugee communities can do to complement formal service provision. Relatives, friends and community groups can offer a more immediate, intimate and holistic form of assistance than service providers are often able to do,** constrained as they are by the limitations of the casework and case management models in which they operate. At the same time, service providers can usefully complement community efforts by disseminating information about programs and opportunities, by assisting with problems that are not commonly encountered by the broader community and require special expertise (for instance, legal matters) or where the intimacy of community networks becomes potentially problematic (domestic violence being an obvious example.)

Aside from these benefits, more engagement with the community might help bridge the distance and disconnect between service providers and clients that can sometimes makes settlement service provision challenging. Service providers in our focus groups at times articulated frustration with under-utilisation of or disengagement from services, while data

from other research suggests that refugees often end up feeling alienated from service providers whom they can (often unfairly) perceive as not really invested in helping them or capable of understanding their situation.

This last point, illustrated in the above quotes, ought by no means to be exaggerated. In fact, in our conversations with them, **service providers universally displayed high levels of empathy and understanding for the situation refugees find themselves in, and individual programs were often tailored to their needs in very thoughtful ways.** There existed a number of initiatives within the FCSAP that sought to meet refugees half-way and were clearly informed by Fairfield's long history as a settlement city, as well as by a deep appreciation for the lived experience of refugee clients. Some initiatives were co-designed with the groups whom they were aimed at, and many of those that were not were still envisaged with their particular needs in mind rather than in accordance with one-size-fits-all, top-down logic.

The point is rather that great benefits could result from a greater and more systematic focus on community engagement, both in terms of services better tailored to client needs but also, and perhaps more importantly, through greater buy-in from the refugee community for those services. When service providers are disconnected from the communities they serve, it is easy for them to become distant, mysterious entities that seem irrelevant to the concerns of humanitarian entrants. This then deprives refugees of the assistance they actually need and could in fact be getting. From the service provider's point of view, it also intensifies the already considerable difficulties of providing assistance to a disadvantaged group. **The FCSAP has put the project of connecting with refugee-led community groups on the sector's agenda, and service providers in the Fairfield LGA have a wealth of experience with refugees to leverage in building such connections. Engaging more fully with this task is all that is needed now, and the benefits could be very considerable.**

Challenges: Monitoring and Evaluation

The second challenge which made itself felt as the FCSAP was being implemented had a slightly more technical character. **Monitoring and evaluation of the action plan proved complex and unwieldy, and it was difficult to come to an agreement about the format and ultimate purpose of this work. This tended to limit the effectiveness of the formal evaluation processes,** which did not entirely capture practitioners' own informal but highly sophisticated evaluations of the effectiveness of their various initiatives. This was not, by and large, due to the actual design of the Action Plan, whose breakdown of tasks into broad actions and specific outputs had a commendable clarity that would have lent itself well both to tracking what was being done and assessing how well it was fulfilling the broader aims of the action and action area.

In spite of these sound design features, monitoring the progress of the diffuse and complex Action Plan was a cumbersome task. It was one which largely fell to the FCSAP Coordinator, and which they carried out with commendable dedication. The FCSAP Progress

Report, the major outcome of this effort, is a rich document which goes into considerable detail about the action plan and its various initiatives, and which was invaluable to us while working on the present evaluation. Though the progress report was generally seen as a useful document by those whom we spoke to, they also highlighted some challenges encountered in the production of it.

One issue was that collecting and processing the copious amounts of data the progress report required turned into a cumbersome and very time-consuming endeavour, complicated by differing ideas about methodology and outcome. There was little agreement amongst participating agencies on shared measures of progress, as each agency monitored its own activities in ways mandated by its own funding and KPIs. There was also little shared commitment to the importance of consistent measures of progress, which manifested as a reluctance to take on the extra work of reporting to a FCSAP-specific set of metrics. This made collecting the data difficult and interpreting it in a useful way even more so.

There was also not much consensus about the actual purpose of the progress report.

The final document as a consequence reads like a mix between, on the one hand, an internal evaluation undertaken in order to identify problems and recommend changes and, on the other, a document designed to promote the positive work happening within the Fairfield LGA to a broader public. The issue with this is that the final report was too detailed to function effectively as a promotional document but insufficiently rigorous to function effectively as a mechanism for 'correcting course' midway through the initiative.

As a consequence of these various issues, the progress report was less effective than it could have been.

While it helped raise the profile of the good work being done in the LGA under the banner of the Action Plan, as a feedback mechanism for service providers, it seemed not to have had a strong impact. In talking to various groups of service providers involved in the FCSAP, there was not a strong sense that the issues and emerging gaps raised in the progress report had as a matter of fact been addressed after its circulation. Furthermore, those actions areas identified in the progress report as somewhat neglected were in many cases still characterised by lack of progress at the time of the final evaluation.

This is not to say the projects undertaken as part of the FCSAP were in fact not evaluated

effectively, only that this seemed to take place through more informal evaluation mechanisms.

In our conversations with them, service providers spoke freely and thoughtfully about what was and wasn't working in their various efforts, and readily described adjustments and changes in strategy with reference to specific actions and action items. This informal, conversational evaluation of their own activities was, however, only partially captured by the progress report.

Undoubtedly, however, the coordinator's work in monitoring helped keep partner agencies accountable to one another in following through on their original commitments. It also helped sustain a sense of collective endeavour amongst participating agencies and sustain collaborative momentum. Crucially, the progress report also made clear that it would be valuable to extent the Action Plan for another year, and informed the agenda for this extension.

Finally, the progress report, diffuse thought it sometimes is, remains a useful record of various initiatives undertaken as part of the FCSAP and is valuable as a snapshot of co-ordinated settlement service provision in one of Australia's major settlement cities during a major refugee influx. However, future endeavours of this kind would benefit from the various partner agencies involved agreeing on some shared and more easily monitored benchmarks of progress.

Discussion: Factors Contributing to Achievements and Challenges

We conclude our findings with some remarks about the **factors that influenced both the achievements and challenges we've identified above**. Three factors seem to us paramount in understanding both the achievements and limitations of the FCSAP:

- 1) The resourcing of the Plan
- 2) Commitment to the Plan at the level of organisational leadership
- 3) The pre-existing social capital present within the Fairfield LGA service provider community

Resourcing of the FCSAP

A key contributing factor to the success of the FCSAP was the resourcing of the plan. Significant resources were dedicated by Fairfield City Council, CORE Community Services and other service-providers to the development of the original plan, which itself set into motion many collaborative initiatives across the LGA. Furthermore, the decision of CORE Community Services to invest resources in creating a dedicated coordinator role to help manage the plan was pivotal to maintaining momentum in the implementation phase. Without such a firm commitment to the Action Plan by one of the major agencies in the Fairfield LGA there is a high likelihood the Action Plan would have ended up as just a well-meaning document with no concrete effect. By helping convene and set the agenda for the Working Group, attending the meetings of Fairfield various interagencies as a representative of the plan and, of course, monitoring progress and keeping the various action plan partners accountable for their original commitments, the coordinator sustained the action plan as a visible and meaningful framework for settlement services within the LGA.

This is not to minimise the in-kind support provided by other members of the FCSAP – particularly Fairfield Council and, to a lesser extent, Multicultural NSW – who took on some of the responsibility for implementing the plan by way of their membership of the secretariat. However, **the coordinator role in particular created a strong sense of someone having ‘ownership’ of the initiative, as well as the time and responsibility to keep the plan as a whole in motion.**

Having said that, **resourcing also stands out as a key limitation of the FCSAP. Initial funding applications to resource the project having been unsuccessful, the Action Plan was essentially an unfunded initiative, apart from the coordinator role that was established half-way through the Plan’s initial timeframe.** That role, moreover, was as a part-time one and

the coordinator reflected in hindsight that there simply wasn’t time enough to do everything in the available time – including such important responsibilities as convening a community advisory committee.

The lack of dedicated resourcing for the action plan also had an impact on the kinds of actions that were planned and undertaken. **Because there was no funding available specifically for FCSAP-related activities, all the proposed activities had to be items that could be justified in terms of the funding priorities and KPIs of the various partner agencies.** This also contributed to the need for the FCSAP to, as much as possible, not create ‘extra’ work for participants which, as we’ve seen, was part of what made monitoring and evaluation challenging.

This also meant that there was not as many opportunities for members of the FCSAP to create initiatives or programs tailored specifically to the priorities of the FCSAP or the emerging needs of recently arrived refugees. The lack of dedicated resources also tended to limit the scale and scope of the various initiatives that were undertaken, most of which were ultimately delivered only to a tiny proportion of the refugee community.

One senior organisational leader we talked to expressed their regrets that they had not realised early enough that the action plan would require more resources and worked harder to secure a more meaningful sum of money to support its work. They remarked that they thought the settlement action plan set an outstanding agenda for place-based settlement and was an excellent model for how to carry out this agenda. However, the lack of serious funding simply meant only a very limited program could actually be carried out, compared to the need in the community. We are inclined to agree with this assessment. What these comments also help illustrate is that the **lack of resourcing reflects not just an absence of money but, more actively, a decision not to allocate funding.**

To a certain extent, such decisions were simply the product of the failure to initially realise that there would have to be ongoing investment in the plan in the implementation phase. By contrast, the initial design of the plan was in fact relatively well-supported by multiple organisations, spearheaded by Fairfield City Council and CORE Community Services. As mentioned above, initially it was hoped that responsibility for implementation and co-ordination across would

be distributed across the various organisations associated with the Plan. However, once the need for a coordinator became apparent (and especially once the plan was extended in view of the good work it was accomplishing and the amount of work yet needing to be done) there were opportunities to reassess levels of resourcing that were, unfortunately, not well taken advantage of.

Leadership buy-in and the FCSAP

The FCSAP was, in many ways, an initiative created by service providers directly engaged with conceiving and delivering programs. The Working Groups convened to design and implement the Action Plan were largely comprised of front-line staff in the various organisations which participated in the Action Plan. We spoke to relatively few informants in management and leadership positions and those we did consult had a much more distant relationship to the Settlement Action Plan than front-line workers. **None the less, managerial and leadership support for an initiative of this kind stood out to us as crucial to its ultimate success.**

As the comments in the preceding discussion of resourcing already suggest, **managerial decisions are intimately connected to questions of resourcing and, with firmer support at the leadership level, more funding may have been available.** CORE Community Services committed funding to hire a coordinator because their Multicultural Communities manager was convinced of the importance of the project and advocated internally for the resources to make it happen. As mentioned earlier, another senior figure expressed regret in hindsight that they had not done more in this regard.

The CORE manager who advocated funding the FCSAP explained that the decision to commit resources to a project like this has risks attached to it that managers are understandably wary of. To commit resources is in a way to take a gamble on the project working out as promised, and being to 'blame' if it does not. In-kind support of staff time is seen as being 'safer' and easier to justify, and this is indeed how most of the various FCSAP partner organisations contributed to the project. This 'softer' and perhaps more tentative support from managers was still important, however, and without it the FCSAP would have failed. The various front-line workers obviously had to have their supervisors' backing to contribute their time and energies to a project that was not directly related to their core responsibilities.

Leadership has an importance beyond just issues of funding, however. As one senior figure put it to us, **organisational leaders can function as 'champions' for initiatives like this – while not directly responsible for the initiative themselves, they can be important advocates for it and step in at key strategic moments to facilitate outcomes or circumvent barriers** that are insurmountable for front-line staff. One example of this that we've already discussed is Professor Peter Shergold's involvement in the FCSAP. His contribution was two-fold: both as a highly visible public figure increasing the Action Plan's visibility to other parts of the sector, but also as an internal advocate who was able to take the Working Group's concerns to forums they themselves had no direct access to.

While leadership was obviously forthcoming in some respects, the lack of senior involvement at the level of the decision-making body which oversaw the Action Plan seems to have contributed to some of the problems faced by the FCSAP. Or, to be more accurate, it seems like some of the issues we've raised so far might have benefited from managerial interventions at key moments. For instance, the issues faced in regard to monitoring and evaluation seem in part to do with the fact that these are traditionally managerial functions about which front-line workers have relatively little say. In some ways, the issue of how to meet the reporting needs of the various organisations and also monitor a collaborative initiative like the FCSAP seems like a question which might have benefited from a little more managerial input.

The Action Plan was quite instrumental in bringing so many stakeholders and organizations together. Not that these organizations have not been working together before; they have to a large extent ... in my new role I work across NSW [and] my experience in Fairfield is quite unique in terms of how things get done on the ground ... in terms of partnerships, collaboration, effective relationships.

To give another example, we have already raised the point that some of the major players in the settlement sector seemed not to be engaged as fully with the FCSAP as one might have expected or as might have been desirable. When we raised this with the coordinator they explained that they had tried quite hard, and without much success, to reach out to those organisations. Often, they explained, without having a personal connection to someone within the relevant organisation, it was impossible to get replies to their inquiries. Here, again, is a place where an organisational 'ambassador' in a more senior role might have had more luck than a relatively junior staff member on a temporary contract. Managers can be better positioned to make the required inroads to unfamiliar organisations, in large part because they have the authority to speak on behalf of their own organisations in a way that front-line staff often do not.

It would not necessarily have been appropriate for managers from the various partner organisations to have been regular attendees of the Working Group. However, some mechanism to involve them in and keep them abreast of its work might have facilitated their involvement when that seemed appropriate or helpful. The pattern of Prof. Shergold's involvement (he was invited to attend a meeting of the working group and heard presentations around key issues) might here serve as a useful model for how organisational leaders can be involved when that might be appropriate without burdening them with the day-to-day details of implementing a complex initiative of this kind.

I have seen a massive change in the 25 years I've been working in this area, in this LGA ... I think that's a credit to all the people that are working together. I think the most effective thing that has happened in this LGA is that we work collaboratively. Everyone comes to the party when they need to and sets aside anything else.

Inter-agency Social Capital

One final factor that stood out to us as a major component of the achievements of the FCSAP are the unusually strong relationships between service providers in the Fairfield LGA. These form a kind of accumulated social capital of trust and familiarity that the FCSAP was able to leverage to achieve its ends. This informal network largely predates the Settlement Action Plan and is based on a long-standing local culture of inter-agency collaboration and co-operation within the LGA. Many of the service providers mentioned this explicitly as a factor in facilitating the ambitious inter-agency collaborative agenda of the FCSAP. In fact, the trust, respect and personal warmth between members of the various organisations was also a striking feature of focus groups conducted for this evaluation, even in the somewhat stilted context of a Microsoft Teams meeting.



Even more than organisational leadership, **this well-developed social network and the long-standing collaborative habits within Fairfield LGA helped make the FCSAP a success by building on habits of co-operation between people who already knew and trusted each other.** Clearly, pre-existing collaborative experience helped with the design of cross-agency initiatives and programs, especially in the absence of funding dedicated to this purpose. Furthermore, as we discussed earlier, these connections helped facilitate such everyday aspects of the work as referring clients to other services.

Perhaps most importantly, the **FCSAP coordinator remarked on their reliance on this network in securing support for their work in following up on progress with action items and keeping agencies committed to the Action Plan more broadly.** Because they were part of an ongoing set of trust-based collaborative relationships, it was a relatively simple matter to ask other members of the network to document activities that had been undertaken. When an organisation 'dropped out' of the network (usually due to the person who was known within the LGA network moving to another role) it became noticeably harder to get this kind of information, whether due to caginess about how such 'internal' information would be used or simply because requests for assistance were ignored.

This at the same time illustrates how reliance on the social network of service providers contributed to some of the challenges encountered as part of the Action Plan. In particular, **this network of relationships is quite fragile and very vulnerable to the organisational turnover that is all but inevitable in a sector with such precarious funding arrangements. However, deliberate efforts are made within the LGA to maintain the continuity of the network as people come and go.** Both the FCSAP coordinator and their counterpart at Fairfield Council (both of whom came into their roles as the action plan was already getting underway) described to us how during their first weeks on the job their predecessor quite systematically took them around to various other agencies and inter-agency forums in order to introduce them to the people they'd be working with.

Inevitably, there are still gaps in this informal network and these obviously limit the scope of effective collaboration. None the less, the network helps bring together a core group of organisations within the LGA, who are then able to use more formal mechanisms like the FCSAP to engage with stakeholders outside of their normal sphere of operations, such as state and federal government bodies or business groups. The slow, largely unacknowledged and unrewarded work of building and maintaining this network was therefore a crucial foundation for the plan's accomplishments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan was devised on the run, in response to an unforeseen influx of humanitarian entrants into the LGA. It was implemented with the barest minimum of funding and relatively limited support from powerful stakeholders in the sector. On top of this, the community it aimed to assist is notoriously difficult for providers to engage with due to the multiple complex barriers they face in accessing services. None the less, the **FCSAP achieved many of its goals and served as a foundation for a great many excellent initiatives. In particular, it was a very successful way to organise formal collaborations between Fairfield's already well-connected service providers, and to extend the reach of their influence through advocacy to higher levels of government and other stakeholders**, such as business groups. Those responsible for designing and implementing this plan are to be congratulated on the good results of their work. We commend it more broadly as a successful model for how to co-ordinate settlement work at a local government level.

In terms of building on what has been achieved here, the main area of unrealised potential within the FCSAP was its lack of engagement with the refugee community. Considering the wealth of benefits that have already resulted from the connections the FCSAP has nurtured amongst service providers, and also between them and other stakeholder groups, it seems an obvious next step to also build connections to the refugee community and refugee-led organisations. The task has already been put on the agenda by the FCSAP but it remains as yet to be fully realised. As formal collaborations between services and other groups multiply, however, it will be necessary to find shared ways to evaluate the work being undertaken that is not beholden to any one organisation's key performance indicators.

Recommendation 1: That the FCSAP be adopted more widely as a model for place-based settlement support

The majority of Australia's humanitarian entrants settle in a small handful of LGAs. Therefore, it makes sense for these LGAs to develop and maintain place-based approaches to addressing their needs. The FCSAP is a good model for what such place-based approaches can look like, both in terms of its agenda and structure. The FCSAP could also be a useful model for those regional localities who see attracting refugee communities as a potentially beneficial growth strategy, but who lack the expertise in supporting settlement that Fairfield's service providers enjoy due to the LGA having been a settlement city for such a long time.

Recommendation 2: That some settlement funding be set aside for place-based initiatives

There is currently a disconnect between the way communities of humanitarian entrants (and migrants more broadly) tend to cluster in certain specific areas, and the way funding for settlement services (and mainstream services that are impacted by settlement patterns, such as support services associated with education, health, housing, libraries, community amenities, etc.) is often directed quite broadly. **While both the federal and state governments have been relatively generous in financing settlement support, it would be worthwhile targeting some of this funding specifically to localities where settlement is most concentrated.** The Settlement Database (currently maintained by the Department of Home Affairs) has long collected data on the destinations of new arrivals broken down by LGA, making it a simple task to identify both Australia's major and emerging settlement cities. This data could be used by both governments and community organisations to identify major settlement areas and allocate resources accordingly. Of course, this funding could easily be made subject to tender in the usual manner, so that organisations contemplating place-based initiatives could proactively apply for such funding.

Recommendation 3: That community engagement be more fully integrated in future settlement work, both in Fairfield and elsewhere

As we said above, the FCSAP's relative dearth of engagement with refugee community organisations strikes us as its major shortcoming. Community organisations and leaders have an important role to play in supporting settlement and can be a useful bridge between service providers and the broader community, if they are properly included in initiatives such as this.

Sharing of information and resources in both directions would improve the efficacy of assistance both groups are able to provide humanitarian entrants. Community leaders would reap the benefits of the knowledge service providers have about how the 'system' works and how to work the system – where the opportunities are and how to access them. On the other hand, service providers would benefit from the intimate understanding community leaders have of the needs of their community, and from their ability to facilitate community engagement with services and initiatives.

Building these relationships and the trust to make them effective takes time and effort, however, and needs to be taken seriously and adequately resourced. Furthermore, once these relationships are established, community leaders and organisations need to have a 'seat at the table' in planning and governance contexts. Ideally, they should not just be tucked away in an 'advisory' group that is locked out of decision-making processes, as sometimes does happen. The engagement needs to be genuine and genuinely collaborative if it is to yield the benefits we have discussed.

Recommendation 4: That engagement with leadership figures be more explicitly structured in to future initiatives

We have discussed already that the FCSAP both relied on and was at times hampered by limitations in how organisational leaders engaged with its work. We recommend, in light of this, that strategies for inviting participation and greater buy-in from senior organisational figures be developed for future endeavours. The participation of Peter Shergold in the initiative could, in fact, serve as a useful model for how this might work. Periodically 'hosting' senior figures at meetings of the inter-agential group charged with devising and managing a project of this kind would help them see the value of the work and keep abreast of emerging issues that they could help resolve. Such invitations could, of course, be strategic in nature – inviting figures whose particular organisations or roles are identified as having a special significance to an issue or area, and presenting to them in ways that facilitate desired outcomes.

Recommendation 5: That mechanisms for managing collaboration be given explicit attention in designing future initiatives

As collaborative projects become more common and ambitious in scope within the Fairfield LGA (as is clearly the hope expressed by many service providers) some thought will have to be given to how to collectively manage and monitor these projects. The creation of the FCSAP coordinator role and their work in monitoring the FCSAP was an important initiative without which the action plan may well have petered out without much effect. Yet this placed a lot of responsibility for the plan in the hands of one person and one organisation in a way that then made monitoring progress burdensome, complex and somewhat ineffective, in spite of the stellar work of the coordinator themselves.

To address these kinds of issues, it would be worth while giving some further thought to questions of monitoring and governance at the stage of project design. The FCSAP was well-designed from the point of view of setting out an agenda but the question of how to manage responsibility for progress and outcomes was somewhat neglected at the planning stage. Unfortunately, the ad-hoc solutions to these issues devised as the plan progressed (the creation of the coordinator role, the production of the progress report, etc.) did not introduce sufficient clarity into these processes. It was a good deal better than nothing and certainly helped maintain momentum on the various action areas. However, more discussion and agreement around how progress would be monitored from day one would undoubtedly have made for more effective collaboration.

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Further details about the inception of the FCSAP are available in the actual Action Plan document: Fairfield City Council and CORE Community Services, Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan, 7-15.

This perceived misallocation of resources was frequently publicly criticized at the time by the Fairfield Mayor. For Example: 'Fairfield Mayor appeals for increased support for resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees' Daily Telegraph, Feb 21, 2017. <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/fairfield-advance/fairfield-mayor-appeals-for-increased-support-for-resettlement-of-syrian-and-iraqi-refugees/news-story/ab5248e77c1af22065e3206999f60b2d>

This summary is based on the Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan, 11-35 which also contains more detail on these matters.

Settlement Action Plan terms of reference and interviews with members of the secretariat.

Farhad Arian et. al., Settlement

Experience of Syrian & Iraqi Refugees: Opportunities, challenges & the way forward (2019.) https://www.erc.org.au/settlement_experience_research_erc

See especially Refugee settlement snapshot 2018: Fairfield

<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/centre-business-and-social-innovation/research/projects/settlement-outcomes-refugee-families-australia>

Fairfield City Council, Refugee Work Experience Pilot Project (RWEPP) Evaluation (Draft document kindly provided by Fairfield Council's Social Planning and Advocacy Officer)

Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan Progress Report 2019, 23

This observation is based on both conversations with service providers as part of this research and interviews with refugees as part of a research project currently being conducted by the Edmund Rice Centre.

See, for example, recent government publications such as: Peter Shergold, Kerrin Benson and Margaret Piper Investing in Refugees; Investing in Australia: The findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and

Humanitarian Entrants in Australia (2019) and The Department of Jobs and Small Business, I want to Work: Employment Services 2020 Report.

Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan issues brief 15.10.19 (document provided by CORE Community Services)

This report was funded by CORE Community Services, Fairfield City Council and Multicultural NSW

Disclaimer

This observation is based on both conversations with service providers as part of this research and interviews with refugees as part of a research project currently being conducted by the Edmund Rice Centre.

The document must be attributed as:

Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan: Evaluation Report, 2021.

The document is produced by CORE Community Services in collaboration with Multicultural NSW and Fairfield City Council along with Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan representatives.

Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan

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