

LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMS— 'A CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS'

*An evaluation of four Melbourne Citymission
Learning Support Programs for children & young people*

Anne Pate

Research & Social Policy Unit, Melbourne Citymission
SEPTEMBER 2008

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About Melbourne Citymission

Melbourne Citymission is widely recognised as a leader and innovator in the provision of services to the community. Established in 1854, Melbourne Citymission is a non-denominational organisation that assists Victorians who are marginalised, at risk, disadvantaged, frail or denied access to services. Melbourne Citymission aims to build an inclusive community through personal and social transformation. We work towards this by providing a range of support services to people across all life stages from early childhood to palliative care. This work reflects the organisation's interest in life transitions and the ways in which people can best be supported to achieve sustainable transformation in their lives.

Melbourne Citymission assists over 4,000 Victorians on average each week through programs in the following areas:

- Children, Youth, Adult and Family Services
- Disability Services
- Palliative Care
- Youth Homelessness
- Employment, Education and Training
- Aged Care

Melbourne Citymission provides a wide range of services and support for people who are facing disadvantage and social exclusion in Melbourne and across Victoria.

The range of services and programs offered by Melbourne Citymission are underpinned by the key principles of:

- Engagement of the individual as a basis for assessment of needs and experiences,
- Continuity of support through a strengths approach to case based practice, and
- Providing an integrated suite of assistance and resources matched to individual goals.

Acknowledgements

This report forms the second stage of Melbourne Citymission's Evaluation of Learning Support Programs (LSPs), and follows the publication by Melbourne Citymission of *A Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne* in April 2007.

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Executive Summary

Every week, in libraries, community centres and church halls across Melbourne, thousands of students attend free homework clubs and tutoring programs run by community organisations.

In the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne alone, Melbourne Citymission conservatively estimates there are 1,300 participants in community-run 'learning support programs' (LSPs). Demand for places often exceeds supply, despite a significant increase in the number of programs on offer over the past three years.

Most students who participate in LSPs are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

These students attend LSPs because, by and large, the education system is not able to meet their needs. Without community support, they are at risk of leaving school early and falling into low-skilled, part-time jobs with poor job security and little or no prospect of future advancement.

Melbourne Citymission believes that the social context for education is significant and needs to be taken into account when reforming educational policies and programs.

State and federal governments across Australia have acknowledged the high social and economic costs of disengagement from education and have committed to increasing retention rates. However, there has been scant recognition (in policy or funding terms) of LSPs as a complementary social and learning support strategy.

While Victoria has shown leadership in allocating some funding for homework program coordination as part of a pilot project in Melbourne, this funding is strictly targeted to programs for refugee students. The needs of other disadvantaged students who participate in LSPs have been overlooked.

If governments are to meet their school retention and completion targets, there needs to be greater investment in the 10 to 15 per cent of students who are poorly attached to learning and at risk of premature drop-out from formal learning.

Melbourne Citymission contends that early intervention initiatives like LSPs should be a critical component of state and federal education policy and of the National Social Inclusion Agenda, which has identified 'children at long-term risk of disadvantage' as one of its five focus areas.

Until now, the absence of a robust evidence base has made it difficult for the community sector to put LSPs on the public policy agenda.

This, in itself, is symptomatic of resource limitations and the lack of coordinating infrastructure—most LSPs ‘run off the smell of an oily rag’.

This Melbourne Citymission report represents the first substantive evaluation in Australia of LSPs.

As well as promoting principles of best practice, it aims to provide the sector with an evidence base for future advocacy.

Over the course of one school year, Melbourne Citymission tracked eighty students enrolled in four of its seven LSPs.

Using these four programs as a springboard, this report identifies:

- What makes an effective LSP
- The types of outcomes that LSPs can—and should aim to—achieve for disadvantaged students, and
- Who should coordinate the further development of the sector.

Key findings of the evaluation are:

- **Student population** The four Melbourne Citymission programs all aimed to support students who are disadvantaged. Each program had slightly different target groups (eg. young women at risk of homelessness, or primary school aged children with learning difficulties). **A common denominator was students coming from families that lacked financial resources to purchase tutoring support.** Most students referred were not eligible for other forms of funded support within school.

Programs’ entry criteria were fairly flexible, so that within a broad target group a range of student abilities and needs were represented. For example, programs for secondary school students offered tutoring to bright, highly motivated students from families where parents did not speak English and could not easily provide support with learning activities, as well as to students who were performing poorly compared to their peers.

- **Program goals** All four programs aimed to prevent students’ disengagement from learning and to support them to reach their potential. The model of learning support on which the programs are based assumes that developing confidence and improving students’ attitudes towards learning are foundational steps which will eventually produce academic gains. The aim of Melbourne Citymission’s programs for primary school children is to increase students’ confidence and commitment to learning. In the programs for secondary school students, the aim is to improve students’ understanding of key concepts and to enable them to achieve at VCE level.
- **Student and parent motivations** Primary school aged children mentioned needing help with homework as their motivation for attending programs. Parents hoped their children would receive support with literacy and

numeracy, and that they would be encouraged to be more confident, either socially or academically. Secondary school aged students wanted help with specific subjects, and some also mentioned being unable to afford private tuition. For primary school students use a mix of 1–1 and group work, mainly to provide support with homework, including basic literacy and numeracy. Melbourne Citymission’s tutoring programs for secondary school students match students with tutors who provide support with specific subjects, often in preparation for VCE.

- **Student satisfaction** Children and young people who attended the programs in 2007 who completed a questionnaire at the end of the year reported very high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment of the programs. The friendly, informal atmosphere, individual attention, and relationships with tutors were particularly significant for these participants.
- **Key elements of program success** Students, parents, teachers and tutors identified some key principles or success factors for programs, including: the level of support, often 1–1; the location of programs outside the school setting and/or their use of an informal approach; mentoring relationships between tutors and students; and access to good learning environments and resources, for example in libraries. Both in programs for primary school students and programs for secondary school students, stakeholders view the quality of relationships between students and tutors, and the informal environment in the programs as critical for the achievement of outcomes.
- **Student attendance** Of the eighty students enrolled in our four programs during 2007, just over one third attended in a regular, sustained way. Primary students’ attendance at programs was sometimes affected by parental availability to collect them, or by issues such as being suspended from school. As might be expected, secondary students used LSPs somewhat differently to primary students, taking more responsibility for their own learning. Many attended either for a short period of time or were enrolled for the whole year but attended sporadically.
- **Student outcomes** Feedback from tutors, students, teachers and schools suggests that student outcomes were high for most of those whose attendance was sustained throughout the year.

The majority of students were perceived to have made significant progress on a range of indicators. Student outcomes included increased confidence, a more positive attitude towards learning, and improved academic performance. Benefits observed for primary school students by teachers, parents, coordinators and tutors included improved behaviour within group settings, both at the program and in school. Tutors in the programs for secondary school students observed improvements in students’ understanding of concepts.

Overall, improvements in interest in learning, confidence, homework completion, and learning skills were more evident than improvements in academic performance. This is consistent with the model of learning

support on which the programs are based, since the aim is firstly to address these foundational issues in order to produce academic gains.

Most of the students who attended programs until the end of the year, reported more positive attitudes towards school. The majority said that they enjoyed going to school more since attending the program, because their confidence and understanding have increased. **Programs appear to help prevent non-attendance and disengagement from school for at least some 'at risk' students.** A virtuous circle is established whereby students are more confident, attend and participate more fully in school, and are less likely to fall behind.

- **Tutor outcomes** The evaluation showed that tutors, many of whom were university students, benefited from their experience working in the programs. Benefits for tutors included opportunities to develop skills in teaching, sometimes with a view to a teaching career, and in working with young children. Tutors also said that they gained increased awareness of the role of social disadvantage in educational outcomes.
- **School perspectives on LSPs** Schools reported high levels of satisfaction with the programs. They mentioned benefits including access to Melbourne Citymission's knowledge and services additional to the LSP, and access to free support which students from disadvantaged backgrounds would otherwise be denied. Schools use LSPs within the context of other resources available to them. However, they advised that there are few supports of this kind available for the students they refer. In particular, they valued the provision of 1–1 assistance, which is not always available even within the LSP sector.

Liaison between schools and programs was patchy, and may limit the outcomes achieved for students. For example, lack of information about age-specific learning activities and standards, or social issues which may be impacting on the child, can reduce programs' ability to intervene effectively. Individual Learning Plans, if developed by schools, were not sent to programs.

Future actions

The LSP sector has emerged and grown significantly in recent years, but needs more support from government. Although much has been done without infrastructure support, this limits what can be achieved and is not sustainable.

Community organisations are filling the gap to improve educational outcomes for students at risk of disengaging from school. One stark example of this was provided in the 2006 mapping survey that preceded this report. In that study, Melbourne Citymission learned of a community arts organisation that branched out from hip hop classes to providing a homework club at the behest of local schools struggling to stem the flow of Polynesian students dropping out. Melbourne Citymission recommends the following actions to further strengthen the community-managed LSP sector:

Funding for sustainability

1. We recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) considers how funding support could be provided to the community-managed LSP sector, to ensure program sustainability. **Our experience indicates that LSPs cost between \$1000–1500 per student each year. Relatively small amounts of funding can achieve significant outcomes for participating students and reduce their risk of long-term disadvantage.**

As our *Profile* showed, community-managed LSPs experience significant difficulty securing adequate funding, limiting their capacity for forward planning and reducing their effectiveness. None of the four Melbourne Citymission programs included in this evaluation had recurrent funding and none had an adequate budget. The use of internal and external philanthropic funding to maintain community-managed Learning Support Programs is not sustainable in the long term.

2. Although funding has recently been announced to support the coordination of homework programs for refugee students, the community-managed LSP sector is meeting the needs of a wider group of disadvantaged students. These needs also require funding support.

Systemic reform

1. Community-managed LSPs need to be recognised as a complementary social and learning support strategy for at-risk students of all ages to prevent their disengagement from school. In the current context, LSPs are essential for these at-risk students because the education system is not meeting their needs.
2. The community-managed LSP sector and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development need to work in partnership to further develop LSPs to provide additional support to children outside of traditional classroom settings. In the recent School Reform Discussion Paper, the Victorian Government recognised the value of partnerships between schools, families, and local communities. These partnerships can smooth transition points and improve student outcomes, particularly for schools ‘where low socioeconomic background and other forms of disadvantage continue to have a negative impact on student outcomes and perpetuate gaps in attainment.’¹ **Melbourne Citymission believes that LSPs provide a good opportunity for schools to work in partnership with community organisations in order to enhance learning outcomes for disadvantaged students.**
3. Systemic reform should include strengthened liaison between schools and programs. One component of this could be ensuring that individual support plans for students participating in programs are informed by Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).

1 Victorian Government (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: School Reform Discussion Paper*, Melbourne, April 2008 p.15

2. 'Student study centres part of \$900m plan' in the *Herald Sun*, 19 February 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21811,21247463-661,00.html>
4. Further coordinated development of the sector should take into account the sector's experience to date and what has been learned about the critical features that make LSPs successful.
 5. The LSP sector's experience in working with disadvantaged children outside of school settings should also inform strategies to address the issues within schools and families which result in some children falling behind, and to build a more inclusive education system. These could include enhanced provision of 1–1 support within the classroom, and increased resources for literacy and numeracy programs.
 6. The Victorian Government, as part of the COAG National Reform Agenda on literacy and numeracy, recently proposed the introduction of homework centres to provide tutoring support.² The form these centres would take is not clear and it is important that learning from the existing LSP sector informs their development.

Program development

1. LSPs should incorporate the following key principles identified in this report:

Program purpose and inputs

A clear purpose

- A clearly articulated purpose which is informed by stakeholder experience
- A clearly defined target population which reflects identified needs

Good coordination arrangements

- A paid, dedicated coordinator position
- An appropriate location in relation to other organisational programs, to facilitate support to the LSP, including access to relevant expertise

Sufficient resources

- An adequate and recurrent budget
- Sufficient tutor numbers to provide 1–1 support where needed
- Access to an appropriate venue (probably outside of school settings)
- Access to appropriate resources to support learning

Program model & operation

- A referral process and delivery arrangements (timing, frequency and location) which facilitate access by the intended student population
- Referrals which provide sufficient information, and ongoing liaison with referrers (mostly but not exclusively schools)
- High quality tutor recruitment, training and matching processes
- Program activities and approach which meets student needs— eg. for an informal approach to learning or 1–1 support— and which supports school learning

- Processes to ensure tutors are matched appropriately with students (where relevant)
- Processes for evaluating student outcomes and adjusting the program

Program partnerships

- Partnerships with schools which promote additional benefits (eg. access by schools and community organisations to each others' resources) and ensure continuing alignment of programs with school objectives
 - Partnerships with parents (where appropriate).
2. Our research into Melbourne Citymission programs and those provided by other organisations has shown that the LSP sector includes a range of program models. Programs operate in a variety of venues, both within and outside of school settings, and vary in their activities and in the use of 1–1 or group approaches. We recommend that the diversity within the LSP sector be maintained, since it allows for the needs of diverse student groups and ages to be met.
 3. Even without major systemic reform, there are a number of strategies that could be implemented now to support the LSP sector and improve quality. For example, DEECD could consider options such as making the online website for teachers available to LSPs, and ensuring that teachers have input into tutor training.

Mark (primary school student aged 11 years)

Mark's school principal referred him to the homework club because he is below standard for his age group in reading and writing, and has some behavioural issues, including difficulty in focusing and working in groups. He has been suspended from several schools. Mark receives some support from a teaching aide during the school week, but has not been assessed for learning or educational difficulties. His school advised that modifying tasks, eg. working from lower grade maths, helps with Mark's learning and behaviour problems.

During 2007 Mark attended the homework club on just over half of the weeks it was held, sometimes not coming because his mother could not collect him. Tutors at the program worked with him on homework sheets (maths, spelling and reading). They recognised that he also needed some fun activities to engage him and build trust.

Mark said that he enjoyed all parts of the program, 'because it is fun', and that he enjoys going to school more since attending the club. Mark's tutors felt that the program had been very useful for him, and that he benefited from the 'more positive learning environment' and the consistent interest shown in him. One wrote that in contrast to what can be achieved in a classroom setting, 'we have been able to be more patient and attentive and show particular interest in his learning needs, as well as providing Mark with a reliable routine'.

Although Mark's progress on some of the indicators we measured was modest at the first data collection (his tutor thought he had made progress only on learning skills), by the end of the year he had made more progress on all indicators. In particular his confidence and learning skills had improved significantly. At the end of the year, he understood questions better, had a more positive attitude to learning, and was more able to concentrate. In addition he interacted with other children and tutors much more appropriately.

Mark's tutor felt that the key to change for him was 'care and respect from other people at the program'. The tutor also felt that Mark would benefit from ongoing support through the homework club.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

During the 2007 school year, Melbourne Citymission evaluated four of the seven Learning Support Programs (LSPs) it provides in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. The evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which LSPs are effective in improving broad educational outcomes for participants. It is the first substantive evaluation of its kind undertaken in Australia.

As part of the groundwork for this study, in late 2006 Melbourne Citymission surveyed LSPs provided by community organisations in northern and western Melbourne, publishing ‘*A Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne*’ in April 2007.³ The substantial growth in community-based LSPs in Melbourne over the past few years raises questions regarding where LSPs fit within the broader suite of formal education programs and the role of government in supporting their future development and sustainability.

The survey findings documented in the *Profile* provide a context for the detailed evaluation of four Melbourne Citymission programs, the results of which are presented in this report. In the Findings section, the Program Case Studies describe each program in turn, considering program models and processes, as well as student outcomes. Student attendance and outcomes in all four programs are summarised in the final section of the Findings. The Discussion identifies key principles for the success of LSPs, which inform our recommendations for the future development of the sector.

3. Melbourne Citymission
A Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne, 2007

1.2 Learning Support Programs—Aims and Objectives

Learning Support Programs offer out-of-school hours tutoring or homework assistance with the aim of improving educational outcomes for students of all ages. Whilst service models vary significantly, these programs have been introduced to specifically address the educational needs of children in disadvantaged circumstances and to prevent disengagement and early school leaving. This is achieved by:

- Assisting children to catch up with their learning
- Instilling enjoyment of learning and commitment to school
- Strengthening learning skills so children perform more effectively in the school environment, and
- Encouraging parents to support children’s learning.

A key element of many LSPs is their focus on increasing participant self-esteem through experiencing success, feeling valued, developing social skills, and positive role modelling by tutors. Rather than focusing purely on educational achievement through homework assistance and preparation for VCE examinations, the priority for some LSPs is to build student social skills and self-confidence to ensure a stronger commitment to formal education in the longer term.

LSPs assist children at both primary and secondary school levels. LSPs aimed at older secondary school students tend to be more focussed on tuition in specific subjects or on examination preparation to improve results.

In some instances, these programs are provided *within* schools by teaching staff. Increasingly, however, they are being provided at both primary and secondary school levels by community support agencies outside the formal education system.

Many programs have been developed to respond to the unmet needs of particular communities or disadvantaged populations—for example, new migrant families from the Horn of Africa, families who have experienced homelessness or families whose parents have disabilities or cognitive impairments.

Our Profile of LSPs found that auspice agencies included well-established community organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and Anglicare, local councils and municipal libraries, and small, volunteer-run, incorporated associations representing emerging migrant communities. Melbourne Citymission, like other large community organisations, has developed and operated a number of LSPs in response to needs, often as an adjunct to existing services.

The Northcote Homework Support Group is a typical example of how an LSP develops and operates. The group was started in 2004 after the Melbourne Citymission Disability Case Management Team identified that some children in families where one or more parents have a learning difficulty were falling behind in their education, with consequences for their self-esteem and social development. The parents often have limited education and struggle to support their children with learning activities such as regular reading. However, these children do not qualify for specialist educational support, and in most cases their parents' lack of financial resources means they are unable to purchase additional learning help.

Children attending the Northcote Homework Support Group are aged between 6 and 13 years. A limited review after two years indicated substantial benefits including:

- Increased confidence
- Increased motivation and interest in school
- Experience of a positive relationship with their volunteer tutor.

Due to the success of this initial program and growing community needs management at Melbourne Citymission's North West Region decided to establish additional homework support groups, based on the same model with local variations.

This model includes employment of a teacher as coordinator, and use of volunteer tutors who work on a 1–1 basis with participants (middle to senior primary school years). The philosophy is not only to assist students with their homework, but also to increase their commitment to learning and their self-esteem. Central to the model is student interaction with adults who act as positive role models. Participants do not pay fees and each group is limited to a maximum of fifteen students.

An overview of all seven LSPs operated by Melbourne Citymission is provided in Appendix 1. Four of these were selected to participate in the evaluation, based on criteria described in the **Methodology**. The four programs were:

- Brunswick Learning Club (primary school aged students)
- Broadmeadows Learning Club (primary school aged students)
- Western Tutoring Program (secondary school aged students)
- Connect-Ed Tutoring Program (secondary school aged students).

In 2007, eighty students were enrolled across these four programs.

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation

Melbourne Citymission has wide experience working with children and young people living in disadvantaged circumstances. Although education can be an important route out of disadvantage, many of the children and young people with whom we work are further disadvantaged within the education system. For example, children growing up in families experiencing homelessness may have disrupted schooling, including prolonged absences and frequent changes of school. Some families, including those where one or both parents has a learning difficulty, or where parents do not speak English well, may struggle to provide support with their children's learning. Children with specific learning needs or behavioural issues do not always cope well with traditional classroom environments and may not receive sufficient additional support within the education system. Families on low incomes may find it difficult to support their children's full participation in extracurricular activities or to meet the costs of learning resources such as computers and books.

Melbourne Citymission believes that the social context for education is significant and needs to be taken into account when reforming policies and programs. In the current context, LSPs are essential for these at risk students because the education system is not meeting their needs. Literacy programs, for example, are highly targeted. Melbourne Citymission, like other community organisations, has developed no-charge LSPs to provide supported learning opportunities for children and young people, often on a 1–1 basis in informal environments.

The recent emergence of the community-managed LSP sector and the lack of overall infrastructure for these programs, means there is a need to refine their goals, direction, outcomes and funding with reference to a robust evidence base. We need to address what makes an effective LSP, what outcomes we want for participants, and who should coordinate the further development of the sector.

We have addressed these questions through an evaluation using qualitative and quantitative data on educational outcomes for students who participated in

the four selected Melbourne Citymission programs during 2007. We do this to identify key principles of good practice and to lead the debate on policy reform to provide learning support for disadvantaged children and young people in the public education system.

1.4 Overview of the four selected Learning Support Programs & referring schools

The evaluation Steering Group selected four of Melbourne Citymission's seven LSPs to participate in the evaluation. These were chosen to represent a variety of:

- **student age groups and populations**—primary school age, early secondary school age, and late secondary school age. The programs also meet a variety of needs, including those of young people at risk of homelessness, and primary school children with learning difficulties.
- **program aims** including homework support, support with English language, and tutoring.
- **program sizes**, ranging from twelve students to thirty students attending weekly.
- **operational stages**—developmental (first or second year), established (three to five years) and mature (five years or more).
- **program location arrangements**, including one based in a school, two based on Melbourne Citymission premises, and one based at the City Library in the CBD.
- **staffing arrangements**, including paid and voluntary tutors.
- **session types**, including a mix of group and 1–1 work.

Distinctive features of the four selected programs are summarised overleaf.

During 2007, twenty-seven schools had students attending one of the four Melbourne Citymission programs included in the evaluation. Of these, eighteen had students attending a program for secondary aged students (one of these schools had one student at Western Tutoring Program and one student at the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program). Nine schools had students attending a program for primary school aged students. Two of these nine schools were secondary schools, because the students involved began attending the program when in primary school, and were allowed to continue in their first year of secondary school.

Twenty-three of the schools with students involved in programs were in the state sector, three were Catholic schools, and one was a university offering VCE study. Most of the schools were located in the northern or western metropolitan regions, with one school located in the eastern region. This reflects the location of the four programs included in the evaluation.

The majority of schools had only a small number of students taking part in a program, usually between one and four students, apart from the two schools with students attending the Broadmeadows Learning Club, which were the sole referrers to this program.

TABLE 1: DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE FOUR EVALUATION PROGRAMS

Program	Distinctive features
Brunswick Learning Club Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed by Melbourne Citymission (MCM) in partnership with local schools ▪ Reasonably established program (2–3 years) ▪ Funding: School Focussed Youth Service 2005–06; mix of funding sources including philanthropic trusts 2006 onwards ▪ Coordinated by a paid MCM coordinator ▪ Held at MCM’s community facility in Brunswick ▪ Staffed by a stable group of volunteers ▪ Supports children with specific learning difficulties ▪ Mix of 1–1 and group work ▪ Aims to engage with parents
Broadmeadows Learning Club Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed by MCM and two schools as part of the Broadmeadows Regeneration Project ▪ In a relatively early stage of development (1 year) ▪ Funding: School Focussed Youth Service 2006–07; mix of funding sources including philanthropic trusts 2006 onwards ▪ Coordinated by a paid MCM coordinator ▪ Held on school premises ▪ Staffed by volunteers ▪ Mix of 1–1 and group work, aimed at building confidence and improving social skills
Western Tutoring Program Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed by MCM youth workers and local schools ▪ MCM’s longest running LSP (7 years) ▪ Funding: Invergowrie Foundation 1997–2008 ▪ Coordinated by a paid MCM coordinator ▪ Held at MCM’s Western office in Footscray ▪ Staffed by paid tutors, mainly university students ▪ Supports young women (many from non-English speaking and/or refugee backgrounds), referred by schools or by themselves ▪ Tutoring is 1–1 and often aimed at supporting VCE studies
Connect-Ed Tutoring Program Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed by MCM in partnership with the City Library in Flinders Lane ▪ In operation for 3 years ▪ Funding: MCM 2004–07; Trust 2007–08 ▪ Has undergone a number of changes to the model—drop-in group sessions, then 1–1 ▪ Coordinated by a paid MCM coordinator since late 2007 ▪ Students and tutors meet by arrangement, normally at City Library ▪ Staffed by volunteer tutors, mainly university students ▪ Supports young men and women at risk of homelessness, referred by schools or MCM programs ▪ Tutoring is 1–1 and often aimed at supporting VCE studies

2. Context

4. Dawkins, P. *Education as an Economic and Social Investment: The Human Capital Reform Agenda in Victoria and Australia*. Presented at the From Welfare to Social Investment Conference, 21 February 2007, Department of Education, Melbourne.

This section provides a context for the evaluation findings, highlighting current policy reform agendas, available evidence on the benefits of Learning Support Programs for participating students, and emerging concerns with quality in the LSP sector.

2.1 Student needs and education policy reform

State and Federal Governments have recognised the importance of education as both an economic and social investment, and have set education goals, initiated reform agendas and introduced program reforms.⁴

An example is the Victorian Government's commitment to significant improvements in education outcomes as measured by higher retention and Year 12 completion rates. This commitment to increasing retention rates reflects concern that children who leave school early are at risk of falling into low-skilled, part-time jobs with low levels of job security and little or no prospect of future advancement. In Victoria in 2005, 11.7% of young people aged 15–19 were not in full-time education, training or employment.

One of the Victorian Government's targets for school education is that 90% of students starting secondary school will complete Year 12 or its equivalent by 2010. Current levels of retention in Victorian schools are as follows:

TABLE 3: SCHOOL RETENTION RATES BY SECTOR 2001–2007 (YEARS 7–12)

	Govt	Non-Govt	All schools
2001	79.6	90.3	83.6
2002	80.7	92.9	85.3
2003	81.2	93.4	85.8
2004	81.3	94.2	86.2
2005	80.3	92.7	85.1
2006	78.8	93	84.4
2007	79.9	91.1	84.4
MALE	72.1	85.9	77.5
FEMALE	88.4	96.3	91.8

Source: Department of Education & Training February school census

Retention rates have not varied significantly over the past seven years, suggesting that more needs to be done to engage with the population of children who are at risk of early school leaving.

Beneath the aggregate data on retention rates and the destinations of early school leavers, there are significant variations, which correlate with geographical location and socioeconomic status. Melbourne Citymission has previously argued that the education system needs to take into account the social context which influences educational attendance and achievement.⁵

Marks and McMillan in their trend study of 13,613 (1995 initial cohort) Year 9 students found that the most significant contributing factor to school non-completion is low literacy and numeracy achievement in middle schooling. Other predictors of non-completion included students coming from a family with low socioeconomic status, attending a government school, being male, and having Australian born parents.⁶

Melbourne Citymission's experience suggests that further significant improvements in school retention and completion rates are likely to require program initiatives that focus more on the 10–15% of students who are poorly attached to learning and are at risk of premature drop-out from formal learning. This would include a greater emphasis on structured approaches to assist meaningful retention of 'at risk' children in learning and to enable their catch-up to the learning levels of their peers. These strategies need to be implemented at all stages of children's development, and to address the needs of diverse groups of children who are disadvantaged.

Approaches already being developed include the Victorian Government's targeted intervention programs for students needing additional support with literacy and numeracy, and inclusive strategies for other at-risk groups.⁷ The previous Federal Government, in its 2007 budget, announced the extension of its national Tuition Voucher Scheme to cover both literacy and numeracy for students who do not pass the Aim 3 test.

In addition to approaches implemented within schools, the use of community settings should also be considered. There is some evidence (described in 2.2 below) that Learning Support Programs are effective in supporting students who are poorly attached to learning, and could be further developed to complement classroom teaching.

The development of both school based and community managed LSPs that offer a range of assistance out of school hours highlights the need for individualised catch-up learning for students of all ages, with a focus on those from disadvantaged circumstances. The apparent growth of these responses to community needs at a local level raises questions about the capacity of Victoria's education system to ensure the engagement and retention of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The rapid growth of LSPs should stimulate policy debate leading to further investment in out-of-school hours learning assistance that builds on current experience. As in the UK, governments in Australia could take a more proactive approach to supporting their future development as a key element of a more outward looking education system.

5. Melbourne Citymission *Policy Bites*, Issue No. 1, October 2005
6. Marks, G. and McMillan, J. *Early school leavers: who are they, why do they leave, and what are the consequences?* pp.6–12 in Report of the ACER Research Conference 2001: What does the research data tell us? ACER, Melbourne, 2001
7. Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Education, and Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria, *Council of Australian Governments' National Reform Agenda: Victoria's Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes*, February 2007

8. 'Student study centres part of \$900m plan' in the *Herald Sun*, 19 February 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/0,21811,21247463-661,00.html>

9. MacBeath J. *Learning for yourself: supported study in Strathclyde schools*, Strathclyde Regional Council and Strathclyde University, Glasgow, 1995

10. Melbourne Citymission *Homework Support Group Evaluation Report on Melbourne Citymission's northwestern region support group*, December 2004 (unpublished), and Westland E. *Outcomes of survey*, a summary paper on consultations with stakeholders of the Melbourne Citymission Tutoring Program in Footscray, 2005 (unpublished)

11. Horn M. and Parkinson S. *Hanover Family Services Tutoring Program—A response to the educational and social learning needs of children and young people experiencing homelessness: Evaluation Report*, Hanover Welfare Services, South Melbourne, December 2004

12. Brisbane City Council *Homework clubs in Brisbane and beyond*, Draft report of the Homework Club Research Project, Community Development—Youth Team, Brisbane, 2005

The Victorian Government, as part of the COAG National Reform Agenda on literacy and numeracy, recently proposed the introduction of homework centres to provide tutoring support.⁸ The form these centres would take is not clear and it is important that learning from the existing LSP sector informs their development.

2.2 Evidence on benefits and outcomes of Learning Support Programs

No substantive evaluation has previously been undertaken in Australia to measure outcomes for children who participate in LSPs. We hope that this evaluation will begin to address this and will supplement the evidence described below.

A Scottish study undertaken by Strathclyde Regional Council in the mid 1990s provided valuable evidence of the benefits of supported study across primary and secondary age cohorts, including 'growth in student self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school, and improved teacher-student relationships'.⁹

Preliminary analysis of two of the Melbourne Citymission LSPs included in this evaluation showed very positive results across both primary and secondary age groups.¹⁰ An earlier limited evaluation by Hanover Welfare Services focussed on children in families who had experienced homelessness: it found significant positive outcomes for tutoring program participants.¹¹

More recently, the Brisbane City Council documented the successes and challenges facing homework clubs in their jurisdiction. Fifteen programs were described in the study, which found a wide range of service models and multiple challenges, including funding insecurity, coordination, accessible space, parental involvement, finding and supporting volunteers and the need for support networks between clubs.¹²

The LSPs described in this evaluation and in the earlier audit of programs in the northern and western regions of Melbourne are all operated by community organisations, rather than by schools themselves, and offer a more informal approach to learning than that provided in schools. Evidence from the literature indicates that students who are most at risk of dropping out of school may not respond well to programs which simply extend school hours.¹³

2.3 Program quality

A growing body of literature explores the links between program quality and student outcomes. There is a developing consensus that participation in programs is not sufficient to produce outcomes: for this to occur programs must be of high quality.

The Harvard Family Research Project's review of seminal research and evaluation studies found that critical factors to achieve successful outcomes are:

- Access to and sustained participation in programs
- Quality programming which provides opportunities for autonomy and choice
- Strong partnerships between schools, programs, and families.¹⁴

Similarly, the Afterschool Alliance in the US highlighted the practices characteristic of proven afterschool approaches to learning. These include:

- Academic instruction is designed to meet the needs, abilities and learning styles of students and provide them with a better chance to succeed;
- Engaging, relevant activities are often project-based, community-based or both, and designed to increase student motivation to learn;
- Linkages are made to the school day, but content is delivered in different ways by applying school day lessons to real world settings;
- Student choice is built into program design;
- Partnerships among schools and community-based organizations are essential because they bring new and diverse learning opportunities;
- Students have opportunities to work both independently and in groups, and to play leadership roles; and
- Communication between families and teachers is maintained.¹⁵

The growth in LSPs in Melbourne described in our audit has been accompanied by an increased concern within the sector to improve program quality in order to maximise outcomes for students. In recent research, the Refugee Education Partnership Project (REPP) found that challenges facing LSPs in Victoria include:

- Limited resources leading to high reliance on volunteers
- Difficulties recruiting/training/retaining volunteers
- Limited places in relation to demand
- Difficulty matching tutor skills to students (especially in maths and science).¹⁶

These LSPs have been established by community organisations in response to perceived needs, rather than as a consequence of a planned approach across regions. As one respondent to our audit said, they ‘run on the sniff of an oily rag’. Their capacity to recruit and train good quality tutors, promote themselves to potential students, and develop quality assurance mechanisms may be compromised as a result.

Furthermore, the lack of system endorsement and management of programs can lead to poor connections between schools and LSPs, since ‘school staff need to have confidence in the quality of programs in order to endorse them and refer students to them’.¹⁷

The REPP research also identified the need to encourage parental participation in their children’s education and in LSPs, since the lack of capacity and knowledge of families to support their children’s learning is one of the factors creating a need for LSPs.

One move which the LSP sector has taken to address quality concerns is the establishment of the Homework Help Network, which is auspiced by REPP, and provides opportunities for networking to a wide range of community providers of LSPs. The Network has also developed resources such as minimum standards, best practice guidelines for coordinators, and training materials, and made these accessible to LSP providers.

As a result of advocacy by the sector, the Western Metropolitan Region pilot (a partnership between REPP and the Department of Education and Early

14. Harvard Family Research Project After School Programs in the 21st Century 2008

15. www.afterschoolalliance.org ‘Afterschool Alert’ Issue Brief #29, September 2007

16. Refugee Education Partnership Project *The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria* 2007

17. *Ibid.*, p.29

18 *More help for refugee students* Victorian Budget 08–09 Refugee Fact Sheet 2/5/08

Childhood Development) will explore the potential to strengthen LSPs through regional coordination of both school and community based Learning Support Programs. The pilot will also aim to increase linkages with mainstream school programs and to improve volunteer support and training. In parallel with this development, DEECD has also recently announced that it will provide funding to LSPs working predominantly with children from refugee backgrounds.¹⁸

3. Methodology

The evaluation research questions and methodology were developed by the Steering Group and were informed by the audit of community-managed LSPs documented in the *Profile*.

The *Profile* found that the low level of formal evaluation in LSPs is reasonable considering their developmental nature and lack of recurrent resources.¹⁹ The evaluation described in this Report has generated some useful learning about how to evaluate programs which are small, insecurely resourced, and lack quality assurance mechanisms.

19. Melbourne Citymission
A Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne, 2007, p.33

3.1 Research questions

The research questions to be addressed in the evaluation included:

- What is the profile of participants in Melbourne Citymission's LSPs?
- What are the key elements of Melbourne Citymission LSPs that contribute to outcomes for participants?
- What outcomes (short-term) are being achieved for participants?

In the context of the growth in LSPs in the northern and western regions of Melbourne, documented in the *Profile*, Melbourne Citymission and the Steering Group also sought to identify ways of ensuring the long-term sustainability of LSPs and implications for policy to improve the educational outcomes of students in disadvantaged circumstances.

3.1 Methodology

Melbourne Citymission selected four of its seven programs to participate in the evaluation, representing a variety of student populations, operational stages, sizes, and activities as outlined in the **Introduction** (1.4).

All students enrolled in the four programs during 2007 were eligible to participate in the evaluation, and all schools with students enrolled in the programs were also eligible to participate. However, participant consent was sought as detailed overleaf.

The evaluation framework was developed following consultations with key stakeholders and uses a program logic model. This assumed that the goals of LSPs are:

- To assess and identify student strengths and learning needs
- To strengthen student attachment and commitment to learning

- To address specific learning difficulties, improve competencies, and improve academic results.

In each of the four programs the evaluation methodology comprised:

- Analysis of student demographic data, including age, grade, country of birth, language spoken at home, and diagnosed learning difficulty
- Interviews with coordinators to document program models of support to students, including:
 - Use of volunteer or paid tutors
 - Location & frequency of sessions
 - Involvement of school teaching staff
 - Use of assessment tools to guide learning plans
 - Development & review of individual learning plans
 - Involvement of parents
 - Nature and content of sessions
 - Governance, accountability and budgets
- Focus groups with tutors to gain their perspectives on program strengths and weaknesses and to obtain their feedback on the benefits for themselves and for individual students
- Program observation by the researcher
- Interviews with schools who had students attending programs, regarding their relationships with the programs, and perceived program strengths and limitations
- Outcomes measurement for participating students and their parents, including:
 - Analysis of attendance data
 - Student and parent feedback on outcomes and satisfaction
 - Teacher feedback on student gains
 - Tutor feedback twice during the year on student gains.

The outcomes measurement tools used to collect feedback from tutors and teachers included a set of indicators chosen to reflect the broad range of educational outcomes. These indicators were: social skills, homework completion and standard, behaviour, academic performance, self-confidence, learning skills or strategies, and interest and commitment to learning. Tutors and teachers were asked to rate how much the students had progressed on each of these indicators.

All seven data instruments used in the evaluation can be obtained from Melbourne Citymission on request. An example data instrument is included in Appendix 2 (Tutor Feedback Form).

3.2 Ethics

Participants in the student questionnaire, teacher feedback form, tutor feedback form, parent focus group, tutor focus groups, and school interviews were assured that their responses and feedback would remain confidential and would not be attributed

to them in the Report. It was also explained to students and parents that their answers would have no effect on the assistance they received from Melbourne Citymission.

Signed consent was sought from parents, guardians or carers of all students under the age of 18, or from students only if over 18, in accordance with the Ethics approval provided by the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development.

3.3 Limitations

The most significant limitation of the evaluation design was the short evaluation period of one year, which did not allow us to track students' long-term outcomes.

Background information on students supplied by schools was limited, and did not always contain information on other supports received by individual students.

Students' academic performance was assessed using feedback from teachers and tutors on their perceptions of change. Student grades were not collected.

3.4 Participation rates

Outcomes data in relation to individual students was collected at various points during the year. Eighty students enrolled in the four programs during 2007. Students enrolled at different times throughout the year, and thirty-two of the eighty students left the programs before the end of Term 3. These enrolment patterns affected the numbers possible for each data instrument.

The Table below shows numbers possible and participation rates for all data instruments. As the Table indicates, numbers possible and participation rates varied between instruments and programs. Reasons for this are explained below.

TABLE 2: PARTICIPATION RATES: STUDENT OUTCOMES DATA AND SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

Instrument/ Program	Tutor Feedback 1	Tutor Feedback 2	Teacher Questionnaire	Student Questionnaire	School Interview
Brunswick	10 (10)	7 (8)	8 (8)	6 (8)	6 (8)
Broadmeadows	13 (14)	11 (11)	13 (13)	10 (10)	2 (2)
Total primary	23 (24)	18 (19)	21 (21)	16 (18)	8 (10)
Western	21 (22)	14 (16)	0 (11)	13 (16)	4 (13)
Connect-Ed	6 (6)	0 (8)	0 (0)	0 (8)	5 (5)
Total secondary	27 (28)	14 (24)	0 (11)	13 (24)	9 (18)
Total overall	50 (52)	32 (43)	21 (32)	29 (42)	17 (28)

Figures in brackets show total number possible for each data instrument. These figures reflect the numbers of students enrolled when particular data instruments were administered.

Tutor Feedback 1 *end of Term 2*

Twenty-eight students had either left or not yet enrolled when the data was collected. However, participation was almost 100% of the students enrolled at that time.

Tutor Feedback 2 *end of Term 4*

The low number of possible forms is because some students left the programs before data was collected. Participation was almost 100% in three of the programs, but reduced to 75% overall because the form was not administered in Connect-Ed.

Teacher Questionnaire *end of Term 4*

The low number of possible questionnaires (32) reflects delays obtaining consent for students (necessary before schools could be approached). It also reflects the fact that some students had left programs. Participation was 100% for students still enrolled in primary programs. It was not possible to obtain feedback from teachers in secondary schools, despite repeated attempts. These schools said they could not provide feedback because they did not know enough about their students' attendance in the programs, which in itself is an interesting finding.

Student Questionnaire *end of Term 4*

Participation was almost 100% for primary students still enrolled in Term 4. Thirteen (mainly secondary) students did not complete the questionnaire. Ideally all students leaving programs at any stage during the year would have completed the questionnaire, but in practice coordinators report that it is difficult to determine if students have left, especially as some have erratic patterns of attendance.

School Interviews *Term 2 and throughout the year*

We achieved a good level of participation in interviews with school principals or their nominated representatives, particularly for primary programs. Interviews continued through the year as new students were referred. There were twenty-seven referring schools, but one school had a student at Western Tutoring Program and another at Connect-Ed (counted as two interviews out of two possible interviews).

We have *complete outcomes* data (both tutor feedback forms, the teacher feedback form, and the student questionnaire) for fourteen students, all of whom attended primary programs. We have *all data except the teacher feedback form* for eleven of the secondary students enrolled in programs in 2007 (all at the Western Tutoring Program).

Within the data instruments, some questions had high rates of missing data. In particular, teachers who completed a questionnaire often provided only partial responses to the ratings of student progress on specific indicators.

Our experience confirms that evaluating LSPs is complex. This relates in part to their developmental nature and lack of a dedicated coordinator in some programs. For example, ideally we would have ensured that all students completed a student questionnaire, including those who left before this was administered in Term 4. In practice, students often left suddenly, and sometimes it was not clear for some weeks that a student was not returning to the program. This made it difficult to follow up students to obtain data.

We also experienced delays obtaining consent from all students. This was particularly significant in relation to the teacher feedback, since we could not approach teachers without this consent.

In addition to the data collection methods summarised in the above Table, data on program processes was collected through a variety of methods in each program:

- *Tutor Focus Groups* were attended by sixteen of the fifty tutors working in the programs in Term 3.
- *Coordinator Interviews* were conducted in all four programs.

- *Parent Focus Groups* were arranged for both primary programs, but no parents attended the Broadmeadows focus group. Four parents of students attending Brunswick Learning Club participated in the focus group held there.
- We also visited programs regularly to *observe* them in action.

3.5 Data analysis

For the purposes of this report, the feedback on students' progress on indicators was analysed in terms of the proportion who achieved significant improvement (ratings of 7–10 on the scale). Full results can be obtained on request. We conducted categorical and thematic analysis of the qualitative data from a range of instruments.

4. Findings

Zahra (primary school student aged 9 years)

Zahra was referred to the homework club by her school, for help with homework. She speaks Arabic with her family at home and was born in the Middle East.

During 2007 Zahra attended the program on most weeks it was held, missing sessions only when her mother could not collect her. She worked with tutors 1–1 or in small groups, on maths, reading, and homework.

Zahra said she wanted to come to the program to get help with homework, and that she enjoyed all parts of it, because *'I learn lots of new things and there are lots of nice people'*. She enjoys going to school more since joining the club, adding *'because of homework club I really enjoy my day'*.

At both data collections, Zahra's tutor said she had improved significantly on all indicators. Confidence, and interest or commitment to learning, were the areas with most improvement at the end of Term 2. Her tutor felt that the main benefits for Zahra were the opportunity to practice maths, language, and problem-solving skills. At the end of the year the tutor thought Zahra would benefit from further help with social and emotional skills and reading.

Zahra's class teacher, like her tutors and Zahra herself, felt the program had been very useful for her. In particular, the teacher had noticed that Zahra is more confident in class. She felt that the reasons for this were being in a different learning environment and the support with homework received. The teacher said that Zahra tells her about what she does at the club.

4.1 Learning Support Program Case Study: Brunswick Learning Club

Introduction

The Brunswick Learning Club provides support with homework and other learning activities to around ten to fifteen children each year who attend primary schools located in Brunswick. It operates from Melbourne Citymission's premises at Hartnett House and is held weekly on Thursdays from 4.15–5.15 pm.

The Brunswick Learning Club was developed in 2005 as a collaboration between Melbourne Citymission and four schools in the area: Brunswick North Primary School, Brunswick North West Primary School, Brunswick South West Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School.

Melbourne Citymission and the psychologist attached to these schools worked together to establish a homework group in the Brunswick area to support children with a diagnosed or undiagnosed specific learning difficulty or learning disorder. Melbourne Citymission and the schools successfully sought funding from the Moreland School Focussed Youth Service (SFYS) and the Brunswick Learning Club became operational in August 2005.

An Advisory Group consisting of the school principals, the psychologist, Melbourne Citymission staff and SFYS, oversaw the implementation and direction of the Brunswick Learning Club for the first eighteen months. The SFYS funding ceased in June 2006. Melbourne Citymission has continued to operate the program since June 2006 using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding.

The Advisory Group decided to hold the Learning Club at Melbourne Citymission because it wanted to provide different learning experiences for the children as a counterpoint to the formal school environment. It was also thought that the Club might act as a link for some parents to access services at Melbourne Citymission.

Project coordination

Brunswick Learning Club is one of five Melbourne Citymission Learning Support Programs (LSPs) managed by coordinators based at Hartnett House. The other programs are Hume Learning Club, Northcote Homework Support Group, Reservoir East Primary School Afterschool Club, and Broadmeadows Learning

Club, which is also included in this evaluation. The three coordinators of these programs share resources and ideas.

The programs are organisationally located within Family & Community Links, which comprises eleven connected programs providing early intervention and support to families and children in the Brunswick area, using a community development model. Unlike the other LSPs managed from Hartnett House, Brunswick Learning Club is focussed on the Brunswick population. The Club sometimes receives referrals from other Melbourne Citymission programs such as Disability Case Management and programs within Family & Community Links.

Distinctive features

- Brunswick Learning Club was developed in partnership with local schools, and continues to have strong links with the schools although the Advisory Group no longer exists
- Resources for the program in 2007 consisted of unpaid volunteer tutors, along with the paid coordinator and assistant positions
- The program is based in a non-school setting in a Melbourne Citymission facility used for a variety of other community activities
- Brunswick Learning Club aims to support students who have diagnosed or undiagnosed learning difficulties, using an informal approach to learning which incorporates group and 1–1 support
- The program aims to develop students' social skills, confidence and self-esteem in order to improve academic outcomes
- The coordinator works hard to develop relationships with the parents, asking them to provide information at the time of referral about their child's learning needs, distributing a newsletter to keep them informed about what is happening in the Club and engaging with them when they collect their children.

Program profile in 2007

Program resources

The program coordinator, a former teacher, is employed three days each week to manage this program and the Northcote Homework Support Group, and to line manage the coordinators of the other three LSPs based at Hartnett House. In addition a paid assistant was employed in 2007 to help run the Brunswick Learning Club. The total number of weekly staffing hours for Brunswick Learning Club during 2007 was 9.6 hours (7.6 hours for coordinator and 2 hours for paid assistant).

Although the program budget is reported to be adequate, it is not recurrent and this creates uncertainty when planning for the future.

Brunswick Learning Club could not operate without the unpaid volunteer tutors who provide learning support to students. Tutors are asked to commit to the program for one year, and most do no more than this due to changing study and work commitments. In 2007, fifteen tutors assisted at the program. Of these, eight left the program early, for a variety of reasons. These included illness (3), change of employment (1), study commitments (2), and other commitments (1). In one case the tutor left after only a few weeks. The seven tutors who continued in the program throughout the year indicated that they hoped to continue tutoring in 2008.

Eleven of the fifteen tutors were studying. Ages ranged from 17 to 72 years, the majority being students in their late teens or early twenties.

Motives for tutoring were discussed in the tutor focus group and included:

- To use previous skills or experience
- To enhance employment prospects or test out interest in a teaching career
- To work with children
- To do voluntary work in the local area.

One tutor, for example, is training to be a primary teacher, and said that she wanted to give something back to others.

Melbourne Citymission and the schools view the use of volunteer tutors as an essential part of the model, since this promotes an informal approach and creates a mentoring relationship between students and adults other than parents or teachers. Although some tutors leave before the year ends, this provides opportunities for students to learn to interact with a variety of different people. Unlike some of the other programs included in the evaluation, Brunswick Learning Club has no difficulty in recruiting tutors.

All tutors are interviewed before being accepted by the program, and sign a memorandum of understanding. They receive a tutoring manual and an induction either in small groups or 1–1, both of which cover the children's needs and the tutoring role as well as issues such as confidentiality. Opportunities to debrief with the coordinator are provided as needed, and tutors are given a certificate to acknowledge their contribution. Brunswick Learning Club also plans to use training resources developed by the Refugee Education Partnership Project (REPP).

Intended student population

The Brunswick Learning Club aims to reach primary school aged children who have a diagnosed or undiagnosed specific learning difficulty or learning disorder. Whereas schools receive additional funding for students with intellectual disabilities, this is not the case for students with learning difficulties. The program activities and environment are designed to meet the needs of children with specific learning difficulties, rather than those of children with intellectual disabilities or a disruptive behaviour disorder. However, the program has accepted referrals for a small number of students with conditions such as Asperger's Syndrome.

Brunswick Learning Club aims to keep enrolments at approximately twelve, due to the resources available. However, the coordinator believes that there may be more students attending local schools who would benefit from the program.

Interviews conducted with six of the eight schools that referred students to the program during 2007, indicate that their perceptions of the intended population group are consistent with the above description. Three of these schools had been on the program Advisory Group, and had been involved for one year or more. Three of the schools interviewed had been involved for less than one year.

Schools select students for referral who:

- are in the lower half of the grade academically
- have particular difficulties with learning, such as literacy problems
- are willing to attend
- might benefit from contact with an adult who is not a teacher or parent
- need 1–1 support with learning.

Schools also indicated that they consider students' family situations, referring children whose parents:

- are willing to take their child to the program and collect them afterwards
- lack the financial capacity to purchase additional support
- have difficulty providing support with homework for a variety of reasons eg. parent does not speak English
- are struggling with 'welfare issues' such as homelessness or low income.

One school principal added that in contrast to other children, the students she refers to the Brunswick Learning Club *'do not get a lot of adult input into their learning'*, and that she hopes the program will provide this. Another said that the program targets children who are at risk, and promotes their confidence, building momentum in small stages. One principal said that the children she refers to the program need social experience, and to develop the skills for learning.

Interviews with the schools did not suggest a high level of unmet demand, since they have a specific group of 'moderate need' children in mind for the program. Schools commented that the program meets a need for this particular group of students for whom it is difficult to find any funded support for learning. Other resources to support children with learning needs include reading programs that are often run by parent volunteers, psychologist support, and extra literacy funding. Several schools felt that they received insufficient extra government funding (eg. for English as a Second Language programs) to meet the needs of their student populations.

Referral process

During the first two years of the program, referrals were made by the school psychologist or by schools directly, but since then some referrals have been made by other Melbourne Citymission programs or by parents themselves. Referring schools generally advertise the program to all parents but then recommend it for particular students. Primary school principals tend to have a good knowledge of students and often initiate these recommendations themselves.

Referral forms sent by the schools to Melbourne Citymission generally provide limited information about the reasons for the referrals, but this is often supplemented by telephone discussion between the coordinator and the referrer. The coordinator also seeks feedback from students' parents about their interests, learning support needs, and strategies that might help when working with the child. Five parents provided this information in 2007. The coordinator also asks the children what they would like to gain at the Club when they enrol. Referral reasons are included below.

Profile of enrolled students

Table 4 overleaf indicates that the program is reaching its intended target group of students who have a learning difficulty. Although the program is for primary school students, students who are in grade 6 when they start attending are sometimes permitted to continue for their first year of secondary school. None of the students were homeless or acting as a carer during the year.

TABLE 4: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & REFERRAL REASONS—BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB

	Number of students
Total enrolment 2007	12
2007 students also enrolled in 2006	6 (2 now in grade 7)
Referral accepted but did not enrol	1
Referral sources	
Schools	11
Psychologist	1
Referral reasons	
Social/behavioural issues	4
Specific subject support	2
Family issues	1
Delayed reading	1
Homework help	1
Reason not provided	3
Gender	
Male	8
Female	4
Ages (average age 11)	
10 years	3
11 years	4
12 years	3
13 years	2
Grades	
5	6
6	4
7	2
Country of birth	
Australia	11
Somalia	1
LOTE at home	3
Learning difficulty	6

Student and parent motivations

Of the eight students still enrolled in the Brunswick Learning Club at the end of the year, six completed a questionnaire about their experience of the program. Asked why they had joined the program, they mentioned needing help with homework, particularly maths or English, which parents were unable to provide. Several students said their parents had suggested they join the Club.

Parents were also invited to attend a focus group in Term 3 and asked what they had hoped their child would gain from participating in the Brunswick Learning Club. The four parents present mentioned a mix of 'social' and 'learning' aims, including 1–1 support with literacy or maths, increased social and academic confidence, and providing the child with mentoring by adults who are neither parents nor teachers.

Student attendance

Table 5 below shows the numbers of students attending each week during the year and the numbers enrolled at the end of each term.

TABLE 5: STUDENT ATTENDANCE & ENROLMENT AT BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB 2007

	WEEK										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Term 1 Enrolled: 10	5	5	7	7	7	6	5	5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Term 2 Enrolled: 9	6	8	8	5	7	5	5	9	C	C	6
Term 3 Enrolled: 10	6	6	6	5	8	7	10	8	5	C	N/A
Term 4 Enrolled: 6	4	6	6	6	5	4	6	6	5	5	N/A

C= cancelled; N/A = not applicable; enrolled = enrolments at the end of each term

Enrolments at the end of each Term were fairly stable at nine or ten during the year, until the end of Term 4 when they reduced to six.

Numbers attending built up gradually in Terms 1 and 2, peaked towards the end of Term 3, and gradually reduced during Term 4. In most weeks fewer students attended than were enrolled. Reasons for not attending were illness, school camp, or parents being unable to collect their child.

Only four students left the program early (defined in the evaluation as before the end of Term 3). Reasons recorded for this were family issues, or organising another form of support. In two cases the reason was not known.

Individual patterns of attendance were also tracked for the evaluation. These varied enormously, as the Table below shows. The relatively high proportion of students attending for less than 50% of sessions is likely to have affected outcomes achieved.

TABLE 6: INDIVIDUAL PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE AT BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB 2007

% of sessions attended	Number of students
0–25% (1–9 weeks)	4
26–50% (10–18 weeks)	2
51–75% (19–28 weeks)	3
76–100% (29–37 weeks)	3

Program content and delivery

Observations of the program, along with feedback from tutors, the coordinator, and students, indicate that activities in the programs included a mix of structured

support with homework, and informal elements designed to relax the students and help them feel comfortable with each other and with the tutors.

Students described receiving support with homework, including reading and maths; sharing stories with their tutor; and a variety of group learning activities.

Tutors mentioned supporting the students with homework and teaching basic literacy or numeracy. The learning outcomes they aimed to achieve included organisational skills. Building confidence, either in learning or social interactions, was also identified as an important goal by tutors.

The following tutor's description of activities undertaken with one student illustrates this diversity:

Spelling exercises and spelling games, reading exercises, numerical puzzles and tasks, relaxation activities, social interaction games.

During the evaluation we visited Brunswick Learning Club at least once in each term and documented our observations. The program was held in a large room which overlooks a pleasant courtyard in a building with a long and rich history in the local community. The atmosphere at the Club was informal and warm. Students and tutors worked in pairs on the activities mentioned above, and students were allowed to change activities and had a degree of freedom to move around the room.

The session generally started with a group activity involving all tutors and students, such as a ball game involving questions for the catcher to answer. On one occasion the children visited some newly hatched chicks in Hartnett House's playgroup area. Activities of this kind promoted positive social interactions between the children and broke down barriers between them and the tutors. A delicate balance was maintained between allowing for informal engagement and ensuring that work was completed.

We observed positive interactions between tutors and students. For example, a tutor shared stories from her own life, describing her experiences at university to two girls. This exchange encouraged interaction between the two students and discussion of what they might do later in life. Another tutor provided sensitive support to a very shy student to help her feel more confident about a speech she was due to give at school. A positive feature of the program was the tradition of celebrating student's birthdays with a cake.

The coordinator adapts the approach used according to the dynamics in the group. For example, as students become more comfortable with each other and with the tutors she reduces the number of informal group activities, and she is also sensitive to the risk of over-exciting some students if there are too many activities of this kind.

Student outcomes in 2007

The program aims to help students who have diagnosed or undiagnosed learning difficulties, some of whose parents have difficulty supporting them

with homework, to reach their potential. The aim is to promote social skills, confidence and self-esteem and lay the foundations for academic achievement. Students with behavioural issues, for example, may fail to benefit from classroom teaching but thrive in an environment that permits a greater level of flexibility and 1–1 attention.

The coordinator aims to reduce tensions felt by the parents, which may be communicated to the children and increase their anxiety about learning and school. The program therefore engages with the parents as well as with the students. For example, the coordinator seeks parental input at the point of referral, sends exercises home with the children to do with their parents, talks with parents when they collect their children, and produces a regular newsletter with hints on learning activities.

The extent to which outcomes were achieved was determined using feedback collected from teachers, tutors, and students themselves. In addition, we collected feedback from parents on outcomes achieved for the students and for themselves at the parent focus group held in Term 3. Participation rates for each data source are summarised in the Methodology. Findings from each data source are presented below and compared.

Tutor feedback

Tutor feedback was collected in Term 2 in relation to ten of the students (all those enrolled at that time). It was collected again in Term 4 for seven students, for all of whom we also have a Term 2 feedback form.

- In Term 2, the program was described as ‘very useful’ to the student’s development, learning or academic achievement for three of the students, and ‘useful’ for the other seven students.
- In Term 4, the program was described as ‘very useful’ for four of the students, and ‘useful’ for three of the students.

These ratings were the same in Terms 2 and 4 for six of the seven students for whom we have both feedback forms. One student who had particularly high needs was given a higher rating in Term 4 (‘very useful’) than in Term 2 (‘useful’), suggesting that the tutor had observed increasing benefits for this student.

Benefits to students were described in terms of their experience of a positive learning environment. This was seen as leading to social confidence, confidence to take risks or make mistakes in learning, improved concentration on learning, and improved ability to work in groups. Tutors mentioned that students were opening up to them about their lives. Taken together, these responses suggest that the program helps to lay the foundations for participants to learn.

One tutor observed that:

This student often presented as very shy and quietly spoken and not always confident with homework tasks, however she is academically competent. Since attending the club she has ‘blossomed’ socially, enjoys her time here and happily enters into all activities.

20. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator can be obtained from Melbourne Citymission on request

21. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator can be obtained from Melbourne Citymission on request

Tutors were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed on specific indicators during the year. Progress was rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement.

There was a fairly high proportion of missing data against these indicators. Some indicator scales were not completed at all. We have also treated ‘can’t say’ or ‘not applicable’ responses as missing data.²⁰

The results below exclude missing data, reporting just on students for whom a rating was given, and show the proportion of students rated as having improved significantly (a rating of 7–10). The indicators are ranked to show the indicator with the highest level of improvement first and the lowest last:

TABLE 7: TUTOR FEEDBACK 1 (TERM 2) FOR BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):

Social skills	Homework	Behaviour	Academic	Confidence	Interest	Learning skills
89%	88%	78%	75%	60%	60%	56%

TABLE 8: TUTOR FEEDBACK 2 (TERM 4) FOR BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):

Behaviour	Confidence	Learning skills	Social skills	Homework	Academic	Interest
100%	100%	100%	86%	86%	83%	71%

These Tables show that as the year progressed the proportion of students who had improved significantly increased on all indicators. This was particularly noticeable for learning skills and confidence.

Tutors at the focus group held in Term 3 described how students had benefited from attending the program:

1–1 support has really helped this student. She is much more outgoing, and is interacting more with other people in the group. Her academic confidence has also improved. She was initially very nervous about making a mistake. Now she has the confidence to read aloud.

This student was very quiet at first, but has made friends in the Club. By the third week her mother remarked that she was blossoming socially. Although there are still issues for this student at school, she is much happier at the Club and hasn’t looked back.

This male student has issues trusting people and used to be rude at times to others. He has a lot of angst about teachers. However he has toned down his behaviour a lot. I had a normal conversation with him today, which I cannot imagine having done in the beginning. Generally he is much easier to deal with although he can still be hard work. Often he says he is looking forward to the next week at the Club. He knows now that in the program he will not be blamed for everything as he is by other children and even teachers at school.

One tutor concluded that the students ‘develop a different view of themselves’.

Teacher feedback

Feedback was collected from teachers of all eight students still enrolled in the program at the end of Term 4 (five schools were involved). This feedback is a critical measure of the program's success in achieving change, since transferring benefits to the school setting is a crucial aim.

Asked to rate how useful the program had been for their student:

- Teachers of five of the eight students said the program had been 'very useful' to their student's learning or academic achievement.
- The program was rated 'useful' for one student, and 'no use at all' for one student.
- A teacher whose student had been referred to the program while at primary school, but was now in secondary school, said she could not answer this question.

Asked if the program had benefited their student:

- Teachers of six of the students said the program had benefited their student.
- One teacher said the program had not benefited their student.
- The same teacher who was unsure about the program's usefulness to their student was also unable to complete this question.

Teachers were asked to describe the kinds of benefits they had observed for their students. Benefits named included academic confidence, learning skills, organisational skills, improved commitment to learning, better achievement at particular tasks such as maths tables, and improved social skills.

Teachers were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed on specific indicators during the year, and the extent to which the student's participation in the Brunswick Learning Club had contributed to this change.

There was a high level of missing data for these questions, with several teachers providing answers only for one or two indicators, or skipping the whole section.²¹ The data below is for those where a rating was given. Progress was rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement. 'A significant impact' below includes all ratings between 7–10.

TABLE 9: TEACHER FEEDBACK (TERM 4) FOR BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (teacher perceptions):

Interest	Behaviour	Academic	Learning skills	Attendance	Confidence	Social skills	Homework
50%	33%	33%	33%	33%	20%	17%	14%

The contribution of the program to changes on indicators was also rated on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = no impact, and 10 = substantial impact. These results (reported in the Outcomes Ratings table on page 90) indicate that on most indicators the program was not felt to have contributed significantly to change.

Teachers had a less positive view than tutors of student progress on indicators, although as the above Table shows, teachers of half the students felt that their student's interest and commitment to learning had improved significantly. The Brunswick Learning Club was felt to have had a significant impact on these students' increased interest in learning.

One teacher said their student was:

...much more focussed in class. He concentrates and completes most of his work by the end of the lesson. He often encourages other students to attend school more regularly.

Asked if they would recommend the program to other parents or students, six teachers responded 'yes', the teacher who said the program had been 'no use at all' for their student responded 'can't say', and one teacher did not answer the question.

Teachers' views on the program's strengths, reasons for impacts, and ideas for improvement are discussed below under 'Program strengths'.

Student feedback

Of the eight students still enrolled in the program at the end of the year, six completed a questionnaire about their experience of the Brunswick Learning Club.

Asked how much they had enjoyed the program, two students said they had 'enjoyed all parts of the program'. Three students said they had enjoyed 'most parts of the program, but not all', and one said they had not enjoyed it very much.

Reasons given for enjoying all parts of the program were that it is fun, and one student also mentioned how much she likes her tutor. Reasons given for enjoying most but not all aspects of the program included disliking one of the other students, and disliking sums. The student who said they had not enjoyed it much mentioned having to work which they find boring.

Asked how useful the students thought the program had been in helping them with their learning, two students (the same two who had said they enjoyed all parts of the program) said they had found it 'very useful' and four said it had been 'useful'. The student who had said they had not enjoyed the program much did not answer the question.

Students were asked if they had enjoyed going to school more since attending the program. Four said yes, one said no, and one responded 'can't say'. Reasons given for enjoying school more were: 'school work is easier', and 'it is helpful for maths and when we did the test it made it easy for me'.

Three of the six students said they would recommend the program to friends at school and three said they would not. The coordinator and tutors commented that some children do not tell others that they attend the program because they fear being teased or stigmatised, which may explain this finding.

Asked how the program had helped them, the students said it had helped with doing homework, maths, reading, and handwriting. One student said 'I've improved a lot in my work'. Social benefits such as making friends and getting to know the tutors were also evident. As one student commented, 'I was nervous at first but am now more comfortable to talk to people'.

Parent feedback

The four parents who attended the focus group in Term 3 also provided valuable feedback on how their children had gained from the program. Several parents had noticed that their child was more confident at home and in the classroom. Parents viewed experiencing positive social interactions as an important outcome in itself. Program features they saw as important included students' exposure to the idea that learning can be fun, and having learning reinforced through 1–1 support.

For example, one mother described how her child refused to practice a spelling exercise with her, but is willing to do this at the program. She felt that his confidence and abilities are improving due to receiving 1–1 attention from an adult who is neither parent nor teacher.

Parent outcomes

Several parents who attended the focus group had been very anxious about their child's learning difficulties, and some had made repeated unsuccessful efforts to obtain appropriate support. One parent described how she had raised concerns about her child's progress for several years, without support being provided, and that the school had now raised the possibility of keeping the student back for a year.

The Brunswick Learning Club coordinator believes that high levels of parental anxiety can add to children's stress about learning. A variety of strategies including the newsletter and informal discussions are employed to engage with parents and improve their knowledge about ways of supporting their children.

Parents were asked at the focus group how their child's participation in the program had benefited them. The main benefit of the program for parents was a reduction in their anxiety about their children, since they felt reassured and relieved that their child was now receiving support in a 'safe environment'. One parent spoke about how the program *'takes the pressure off'* and several talked about how difficult they find it to get their child to work on homework with them. Another parent said *'your concerns are listened to here'*, contrasting this with what she saw as the school's failure to listen to her requests for more support for her child.

Tutor outcomes

The tutors who supported the program on a voluntary basis should also be seen as a group for whom outcomes can be achieved. Tutors said that participation in the program had the following results for them:

- increased confidence and skills in interacting with children, particularly those with learning needs
- increased understanding of the significance of social supports for learning
- learning how to teach
- and increased awareness of the issues faced by children from disadvantaged families.

Program strengths, critical success factors, and limitations

Program strengths & critical success factors

Table 10 below shows stakeholders' perspectives on the strengths of the Brunswick Learning Club.

These perspectives were provided by at least one stakeholder in each category in response to open questions in the Tutor Feedback Form, Student Questionnaire, Teacher Feedback Form, School Interviews, Tutor Focus Group, and Parent Focus Group.

TABLE 10: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON STRENGTHS & CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE BRUNSWICK LEARNING CLUB

Program strengths & critical success factors	Tutors	Parents	Students	Principals	Teachers
Informal atmosphere & approach to learning	•	•			
Voluntary attendance	•				
1-1 support to learning	•			•	•
Different peer group than at school can break down bullying or teasing	•	•			
Relationships between students			•		
Learning in a non-school setting	•			•	•
Tutor-student relationship	•	•	•	•	•
Tutors show interest in the children's whole lives (not just academic)	•	•			
Tutors' life experiences (eg. of university) can broaden children's horizons	•			•	
Organised time to complete homework		•	•		•
Program is provided free of charge				•	
Program is local				•	
Liaison between school and program				•	•

Feedback from tutors, students, parents, principals and teachers indicates that some program strengths are viewed as particularly critical to success. The Table shows that the feature of the program that all stakeholders valued was the relationship between students and their tutors. These relationships were characterised as warm, friendly and caring.

The following comments illustrate the importance of the tutor-student relationship:

- *The human contact is the most valuable element* (coordinator)
- *They are happy and with people who care about them* (parent)

Several principals commented that children are sometimes more open to suggestions from someone who is not a teacher, and that this support reinforces what is taught in school.

Tutors, principals and teachers said one program strength was the opportunity to learn in a non-school environment. Another principal said that the program demonstrates that *'learning is lifelong and not just something that you do in school'*. She felt strongly that LSPs should be run outside of school settings for this reason. Another principal observed that *'if it's just another hour of school it loses its charm'*.

Tutors saw the provision of non-judgemental, consistent, 1–1 support in an informal, relaxed setting outside of school, amongst a different peer group, as critical factors to the success of LSPs.

Teachers were asked to say what aspects of the program had led to children's improvement on particular indicators. Responses to this question reflected the needs of particular students, and focused on having an organised time to do homework with assistance and to rehearse work covered at school; the non-school setting; and the relationships between students and tutors, which create trust and promote understanding.

The four parents who took part in the focus group at the program were highly satisfied with the Club and keen that it should continue. Indeed, a noticeable feature of all the feedback received was the high level of satisfaction expressed.

Program limitations, and ideas for improvement

Asked how the program could be improved, tutors raised their concerns about whether there is sufficient liaison between Brunswick Learning Club and the schools. This issue was also identified by school principals and teachers, and by parents, and is therefore addressed separately below.

Other suggestions made by the tutors were to run the program during the school holidays, perhaps as a social group, since some of the students were felt to lack opportunities for constructive activities. Recruiting more male tutors was also suggested, since some of the boys respond better to male support (and the students are predominantly male).

Asked how the program could be made better, some students, perhaps unsurprisingly, wanted more games and social activities.

Schools identified transport from school to the program as an area of difficulty, since some children's parents are unable or unwilling to commit to taking their children there. One school principal had resorted to taking the children to the Club herself for a while.

Some schools and one parent had initially been ambivalent about people not trained in teaching being responsible for supporting learning. The respondents

who mentioned this were quick to add that their concerns had been alleviated. The parent said that she had been a bit concerned at the beginning about how tutors are chosen, but that there had not been any problems.

The principal who mentioned this issue said that she thinks the drawbacks are outweighed by the strengths of having support from an interested person, which the tutors are very able to provide. She added that the program is not fundamentally about achieving immediate academic gains, but about building a basis for learning.

Relationships between program and schools

As noted above, tutors who took part in the focus group were unsure how much communication there is between teachers and the program. They commented that because increasingly students do not bring homework to the Club, it is hard for them to know what standard the children should be achieving, and what resources would best meet their needs. Solutions suggested by tutors included the program having access to the school's syllabus for each year, and receiving more information from teachers about individual students' needs.

Parents also suggested that there should be more liaison between the schools and the program, especially if homework is not being set regularly. One parent said they wanted to see more structured goals set for their child each term in the program. Parents thought it was important that teachers identify priorities for the Club to work on.

Several school principals acknowledged the difficulty of liaising with the program regularly. One principal said she saw improving communication between individual teachers and the program as a significant area for future development. Suggestions for improving liaison included more use of email, and setting up a learning folder for each child that could accompany them to the Club.

Few teachers completed the question in the feedback form on ways in which the program could be improved. However, the two who did both raised the issue of communication, one saying that more communication between the Club and themselves is needed so they are kept up to date. The other had a different angle, suggesting that students need to be encouraged to discuss issues with them between sessions at the program.

There was minimal discussion between students and teachers about their experiences at the program. Of the eight, three had not discussed it at all, and another three had simply said they attended. One teacher said their student had talked about how much she likes the tutors at the program.

In contrast with teachers, the school principals interviewed had a good level of knowledge of the program, and were often personally involved in selecting or recommending students to attend. Four of the schools interviewed had been involved in the program's Advisory Group.

When asked how the program benefits the school, principals mentioned:

1. The program adds another element to the range of support that can be

offered to students who are not keeping up with learning. This helps the teachers' relationship with the child and supports what the school is trying to achieve.

2. Involvement in the program promotes a mutually beneficial relationship between the school and Melbourne Citymission. For example one school had provided its premises for a MCM parent information session, and the school has benefited through having more informed access to community resources and expertise.

School principals emphasised the importance of developing a relationship with an organisation they can trust to deliver a good service. Describing the program as *'fabulous and very responsive'*, one added that *'Melbourne Citymission has a lot of knowledge regarding how to do it, based on its experience'*. Another said that she would like to see more of these kinds of programs *'to close the gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged groups'*. She added that LSPs should be run by community organisations rather than by private institutions, because an organisation like Melbourne Citymission understands social needs. All the school respondents said they would recommend the program to other parents, students or schools.

Program future

An ongoing challenge the program has faced is the lack of recurrent funding. The trend away from setting homework in some schools is also posing dilemmas for the program, and makes the need for effective liaison between schools and the Club even more critical. Supporting the tutors and ensuring they understand the need for a strengths-based approach is also a critical ongoing issue for the program. An ongoing operational issue is the complexity of managing children's behavioural problems, although the coordinator has developed successful strategies for dealing with this.

Melbourne Citymission's commitment to the program during its three years in operation has resulted in it becoming a well-established resource that has had strong support from referring schools, parents and students. It is with great regret that Melbourne Citymission has had to cease the operation of the program from June 2008 due to lack of funding. Should any funds be sourced in the near future Melbourne Citymission would be keen to reactivate this successful initiative.

Debbie (primary school student aged 10 years)

Debbie was referred by her school to the homework club because of difficulties with maths. Her mother also advised that she is easily distracted and lacks confidence. Debbie said she wanted help with homework.

During 2007 Debbie attended the program nearly every week, except when she was unwell. Her tutor described her as academically competent but not always confident with homework, and worked with her on homework tasks,

including maths and spelling worksheets. Another important aim was to build Debbie's social confidence as she was very shy initially.

Debbie said she enjoyed most of the program, although she finds maths difficult. She thought that coming to the club had helped her with maths and with handwriting. Since coming to the club she has enjoyed school more because schoolwork is easier. She clearly enjoyed the social aspects of the program, saying that *'it's good because I meet my friends here'*.

Debbie's tutor said that since she began coming to the club she *'has blossomed socially, enjoys her time here and happily enters into all activities'*, and that there had been a huge improvement in her general self-esteem and ability to interact with other children. Debbie was felt to have improved significantly on all indicators. In particular, her learning skills had developed and she was more able to complete homework.

Debbie's teacher felt that the program had been useful for her, and that the main benefit was that she is now *'more confident in her abilities and more prepared to voice her opinion'*. The areas where she had improved most during the year were completing homework, and interest or commitment to learning. The teacher felt that having an organised time to complete homework, with 1-1 support, had made the difference for Debbie.

4.2 Learning Support Program

Case Study: Broadmeadows Learning Club

Introduction

The Broadmeadows Learning Club provides support with homework and other learning activities to around eighteen children each year who attend Campmeadows and Meadowbank primary schools in Broadmeadows. The two schools are due to merge in 2008 as part of the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration Project, and Melbourne Citymission has been a member of the Meadowbank/Campmeadows Merger Committee. The cross-sectoral Early Years Partnership in Broadmeadows has been working for several years to develop primary schools as community hubs, and to ensure that the Regeneration Project is informed by these approaches.

Broadmeadows Learning Club was established to support the learning needs of children attending Campmeadows or Meadowbank schools, and also to promote opportunities for children from the two schools to interact prior to the merger. The program is held weekly on Mondays from 3.30–5pm, alternating between the schools each term.

Through their involvement in the Broadmeadows Community Neighbourhood Renewal initiative, the two schools and Melbourne Citymission identified the need for a homework club as part of a suite of programs and activities to address local disadvantage. The program commenced operation in Term 3, 2006, six months before the evaluation. Funding was provided for the first year by the Hume School Focussed Youth Service, and ended in June 2007. Melbourne Citymission has continued to operate the program since June 2007 using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding.

Project coordination

Broadmeadows Learning Club is one of the five Melbourne Citymission LSPs managed by coordinators based at Hartnett House. The coordinators of these programs share resources and ideas and are managed by the Brunswick Learning Club coordinator.

The programs are located within Family & Community Links, which comprises eleven connected programs providing early intervention and support to families and children, using a community development model. Broadmeadows Learning Club takes referrals from the two schools in the Broadmeadows Neighbourhood Renewal area.

Distinctive features

- Broadmeadows Learning Club was developed in partnership with the two referring schools, to meet some specific needs around the forthcoming merger, as well as the needs of the students
- Resources for the program in 2007 consisted of unpaid volunteer tutors, the paid coordinator, a cultural aide at one of the schools, and a parent who runs the 'walking bus' which takes children to the program
- Although the program is operated by Melbourne Citymission it is held on school premises, and is attended by students from Campmeadows and Meadowbank Primary Schools
- The program aims to support students who need help with homework or with social skill development, using an informal approach to learning provided through group and 1–1 support
- The program aims to develop students' social skills, confidence and self-esteem in order to improve academic outcomes
- The original program coordinator left Melbourne Citymission at the end of Term 1, 2007. Due to funding insecurity recruitment was delayed, which meant that during Term 2 the Club had to be cancelled several times when other Hartnett House staff were unavailable. A new coordinator commenced in Term 3 2007.

Program profile in 2007

Program resources

The program coordinator is employed one day each week to manage the Broadmeadows Learning Club and one day each week to manage the Northcote Homework Support Group. A parent who is an active member of the local community is paid for one hour to run the 'walking bus', and a cultural aide at one of the schools also works at the program for two hours each week. The total number of weekly staffing hours for Broadmeadows Learning Club during 2007 was 10.6 hours.

Although the program budget is reported to be adequate, it is not recurrent and this creates uncertainty when planning for the future.

Like Brunswick Learning Club, Broadmeadows Learning Club relies on unpaid volunteer tutors to support students with their learning. However, it is much

harder to recruit and retain tutors for the Broadmeadows Learning Club. This may reflect lack of local community capacity, and negative perceptions about Broadmeadows held by potential tutors who live outside the area. During 2007, the five Melbourne Citymission LSPs based at Hartnett House began to redirect volunteers towards the programs which were finding it hard to recruit tutors. This approach is helping to address the problem.

In 2007, nine tutors assisted at the program. (The cultural aide and walking bus coordinator are excluded from this total, although both also did tutoring. One tutor attended once but then decided it was too far for her to travel, and is also excluded from this total.) Of the nine tutors, four left the program early, for a variety of reasons, and three started tutoring only late in the year. The tutors who left early included three VCAL students who had been tutoring as a course placement and who then left their courses. The other tutor left due to university commitments. For most of Terms 1, 2 and 3, the number of tutors present was low, averaging four or five each week. It was consequently very difficult to maintain a 1–1 tutor-student ratio.

Of the nine tutors, seven were studying. Ages ranged from 16 to 53 years, with the majority being students in their late teens or early twenties. One of the most committed tutors was a former teacher.

Motives for tutoring were discussed in the tutor focus group and included a desire to use previous skills or experience, and an interest in working with children who are disadvantaged and need more help than can be provided in school. One tutor, for example, had previously taught adults and worked as a counsellor. No longer in employment, she heard about the program through a local Learning Centre and thought it sounded interesting. The other committed tutor had been a teacher in the northern and western suburbs throughout her working life, and wanted to see what could be achieved for children needing more support.

Although the use of volunteers is seen as an important part of the 'learning club' model, it has been difficult to sustain at Broadmeadows Learning Club. The use of TAFE students on placement also created problems, perhaps because they were not genuine 'volunteers'. The coordinator indicates that whilst she would use students on placement again, she would ensure they are better trained and prepared for the experience.

Training for tutors is similar to that provided by the Brunswick Learning Club. All tutors are interviewed before being accepted by the program, and sign a memorandum of understanding. They receive a tutoring manual and an induction either in small groups or 1–1, both of which cover the children's needs and the tutoring role as well as issues such as confidentiality.

Intended student population

Broadmeadows Learning Club aims to reach primary school children aged ten years and over who need help with homework or social skill development. Some children need help with both of these areas, whilst others have good support at home but lack social skills or behave disruptively at school, impeding their ability to learn.

The program aims to keep enrolments at approximately twelve, due to the resources available, but this is not possible due to high levels of demand. Although

the program has expanded its intake beyond twelve, during 2007 a large number of referrals (eight) could not be accepted due to program resource constraints.

Interviews with the two referring schools indicate that their perceptions of the intended population group are consistent with the above description. They refer students who need what one assistant principal described as 'positive alternate settings', because they are not fully engaged in school, and are therefore 'at risk' of poor educational outcomes. He also stated that children need to be motivated to attend the program, and that the school prioritises children who are not already accessing other out of school programs.

Support with 'social problems' or 'personal and social development', including boosting confidence, were mentioned as reasons for referral by the schools. One principal mentioned the need to prepare students for life after school. She hopes that the program will provide them with social confidence and exposure to a wider world than they have access to within Broadmeadows, which lacks some of the resources available in other communities.

The two schools indicated that they also hope the program will meet the needs of bright or high achieving students who might benefit from additional support to fully maximise their potential. One said they aim to ensure there is a balance of needs in the group. To this end, the school does not refer children with very disruptive behaviour.

Both schools have high levels of social disadvantage within their student population. For example, in both schools nearly all the children qualify for the Educational Maintenance Allowance (\$215 per annum for primary school children whose parents receive Centrelink benefits and meet other criteria, to help with costs associated with education such as uniforms, school excursions, and text books). One school operates an oral language program for children from non-English speaking backgrounds, and uses additional funding to provide after school programs including a tennis club. The other school has partnerships with twelve community organisations and also employs a full-time welfare officer. Substantial additional resources have been allocated as part of the Regeneration Project, in recognition of the high levels of socioeconomic need.

Referral process

Both schools select the students they think are most in need of the program and most likely to succeed, and in both schools, the principals are involved in selecting or recommending students. The schools referred all twenty-one students who were enrolled in Broadmeadows Learning Club during 2007.

Referral forms sent by the schools to Melbourne Citymission generally provide limited information about the reasons for the referrals, but this is often supplemented by telephone discussion between the coordinator and the referrer. In contrast to the Brunswick Learning Club, the coordinator did not seek feedback from the students' parents about their interests, learning support needs, and strategies which might help when working with the child. The program and schools both commented on the difficulty of liaising effectively with parents who are often dealing with a variety of complex social issues.

Profile of enrolled students

TABLE 11: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & REFERRAL REASONS—BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB

	Number of students
Total enrolment 2007	21
2007 students also enrolled in 2006	12
Referral accepted but did not enrol	0
Referral sources	
Schools	21
Referral reasons	
Social/behavioural issues	8
Homework help	8
Reason not provided	5
Gender	
Male	9
Female	12
Ages (average age 10)	
7 years	1
8 years	2
9 years	4
10 years	8
11 years	3
12 years	2
13 years	1
Grades	
2	1
3	5
4	7
5	5
6	2
Country of birth	
Australia	16
Philippines	2
Lebanon	1
Vietnam	1
New Zealand	1
LOTE at home	9
Learning difficulty	0

None of the students were acting as a carer during the year, and none experienced homelessness.

Almost half of the students attending the program were from families where a language other than English is spoken at home.

Student and parent motivations

Of the thirteen students still enrolled in the Broadmeadows Learning Club at the end of the year, ten completed a questionnaire about their experience of the program. Asked why

22. Warr, Deborah
Outside the School Gates: a model for tackling disadvantage and promoting participation in preschool education at the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre,
 Centre for Health & Society, Melbourne, 2007, p.3

they had joined the program, most mentioned needing help with homework. Students had also been encouraged to join by friends already attending, parents, or teachers.

We planned to hear parents' views about what they hoped their children would gain from the program at a focus group in Term 3 but unfortunately no parents attended at the scheduled time. As a recent report into the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre observed, the community is characterised by 'widespread impoverishment associated with high levels of unemployment and under-employment, sole parents struggling to do the work of two people in raising children, and families who have recently settled in Australia'.²² These circumstances help explain both the need for the program and the difficulties engaging parents which schools and the program experience.

Student attendance

Table 12 below shows the numbers of students attending each week during the year and the numbers enrolled at the end of each term.

TABLE 12: STUDENT ATTENDANCE & ENROLMENT AT BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB 2007

	WEEK										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Term 1 Enrolled: 18	6	9	7	9	15	17	13	14	PH		
Term 2 Enrolled: 18	C	9	C	11	9	11	11	C	PH	11	6
Term 3 Enrolled: 17	C	13	14	C	13	15	14	11	4	10	
Term 4 Enrolled: 10	7	8	11	13	C	8	10	10	10	10	

C= cancelled; PH = Public Holiday; N/A = not applicable; enrolled = enrolled at the end of each term

Enrolments at the end of each Term were fairly stable at around eighteen for most of the year, until the end of Term 4 when they reduced to ten.

Numbers attending varied significantly during the year, with generally lower numbers in Term 2 than in Term 1. In Term 2, the program had to be cancelled due to the lack of a coordinator on weeks 1, 3 and 8. In addition, curriculum days led to cancellation of the program in week 8, Term 2 and to a reduction in numbers due to one school or the other being on a curriculum day in weeks 9 and 10 of Term 3.

Attendance increased during Term 3 but then decreased in Term 4 as enrolments also declined. In most weeks across the year, fewer students attended than were enrolled. Reasons for missing sessions were illness, other commitments, family members not able to collect, or students forgetting to attend.

Eight students left the program early (defined for the evaluation as before the end of Term 3). Reasons were: not enjoying the program, other commitments, and issues at school. In addition, three students left the program early in Term 4.

Individual patterns of attendance were also tracked for the evaluation. These varied enormously, as Table 13 below shows. The relatively high proportion of students attending for less than 50% of sessions is likely to have affected outcomes achieved. In particular, seven students attended for fewer than 25% of sessions, mostly concentrated in one term.

TABLE 13: INDIVIDUAL PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE AT BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB 2007

% of sessions attended	Number of students
0–25% (1–8 weeks)	7
26–50% (9–16 weeks)	2
51–75% (17–24 weeks)	7
76–100% (25–32 weeks)	5

Program content and delivery

Observations of the program, along with feedback from tutors, the coordinator, and students, indicate that activities in the program included a mix of structured support with homework and informal elements designed to relax the students and help them feel comfortable with each other & with the tutors. Compared to the Brunswick Learning Club, there was more emphasis on group learning activities and less on the 1–1 tutor relationship, due to the difficulty recruiting and retaining tutors mentioned above.

Students described receiving support with homework, with a focus for many on reading and maths, and a variety of group activities including games related to learning. They also mentioned completing homework in groups. One student wrote that at the program she had enjoyed the following activities:

Sudoku, word search, decorating, project for school, playing games, reading book, find info. Learn and learn more.

Tutors also mentioned homework or school projects, and teaching basic literacy or numeracy. For example, one tutor wrote:

Work on projects set by the teacher, helping to plan what to include and how to put the project together.

The following response from one tutor illustrates how they approach selecting activities for the student:

Tasks are given based on interest, capacity to provide 1–1 attention, and time. Activities are set to further develop interests and skills as well as to complete given tasks.

Improving the social skills of some students was an important goal. For example, one tutor wrote that their student had received assistance with literacy, but that there had also been:

... a focus on social skills, improving her interactions with other students and treating others with respect.

We visited Broadmeadows Learning Club at least once in each term and documented our observations. The program was held in both referring schools, alternating between them each term so that each school hosted the program for half the year. The program was normally held in the library, although in one of the schools this was sometimes not possible due to a staff meeting. On these occasions, a computer science classroom was used.

Locating the program in the school libraries was a good way to prompt interest in learning, and sharing of resources. For example, a child might find a book and show it to others, or be asked by their tutor to look for a particular resource on the shelves. The library also has more space than other rooms, and the coordinator commented that the boys in particular settle better there.

The atmosphere at the Club was informal, with students and tutors working in pairs or small groups on the activities mentioned above. Sometimes one tutor would move between several students. Students were allowed to change activities and had a degree of freedom to move around the room.

A noticeable feature of the Broadmeadows Learning Club was the large size of the group in relation to the number of tutors, and the presence of some children whose behaviour was disruptive at times. However, towards the end of the year the tone and atmosphere were much calmer. We observed positive interactions between tutors and students. The tutors provided unobtrusive but nonetheless evident direction and support.

Student outcomes in 2007

The program aims to help students with their learning and to improve their social skills. For a range of reasons including not speaking English, and social disadvantage of various kinds, some of the children's parents have difficulty providing them with learning support. The program aims to promote social skills, confidence and self-esteem to lay the foundations for academic achievement. Students with behavioural issues, for example, may fail to benefit from classroom teaching but thrive in an environment that permits more flexibility and 1-1 attention.

The extent to which outcomes were achieved was determined using feedback collected from teachers, tutors, and students themselves. Participation rates for each data source are summarised in the Methodology.

Findings from each data source are presented below and compared.

Tutor feedback

Tutor feedback was collected in Term 2 in relation to thirteen students. It was collected again in Term 4 for eleven students; for nine of these students we also have a Term 2 feedback form.

- In Term 2, the program was described as 'very useful' for the student's development, learning or academic achievement for five of the students, 'useful' for seven students, and 'not very useful' for one student.

- In Term 4, the program was described as ‘very useful’ for the majority of the students (nine), and ‘useful’ for the remaining three students.

Where there was a change in the ratings given in Term 2 and Term 4 for individual students, it was always in a positive direction. For example, for three students the program was rated ‘useful’ in Term 2, and ‘very useful’ in Term 4; and for one student, for whom the program was rated ‘not very useful’ in Term 2, the program was rated ‘useful’ in Term 4.

Benefits to students identified by tutors included confidence, especially the confidence to take risks and try new things, improved concentration on learning, and improved ability to work in groups. Taken together, these responses suggest that the program helps to lay the foundations for participants to learn.

It is interesting to contrast these two comments, written by different tutors, about one of the students. In Term 2, the tutor wrote that:

She was very reluctant to speak up in the Club but with encouragement and more confidence and the support of others in the group she is now starting to make herself heard to an extent.

In Term 4, the second tutor observed that:

She is very organised, focussed and artistic. She has learnt to do her homework before playing with others. She is quiet but interacts more now with others in the group and has improved her social skills.

At the end of the year, one tutor observed that their student:

... presented with disruptive behaviour initially. However he is now more focussed and positive in group situations. With encouragement he can get his work done in a positive way.

Tutors were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed against specific indicators during the year. Progress was rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement.

There was a fairly high proportion of missing data against these indicators. Some indicator scales were not completed at all. We have also treated ‘can’t say’ or ‘not applicable’ responses as missing data.²³

The results below exclude this missing data, reporting just on students for whom a rating was given, and show the proportion of students rated as having improved significantly (a rating of 7–10). The indicators are ranked to show the indicator with the highest level of improvement first and the lowest last:

TABLE 14: TUTOR FEEDBACK 1 (TERM 2) FOR BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):

Homework	Confidence	Learning skills	Interest	Behaviour	Academic	Social skills
86%	80%	78%	73%	63%	63%	50%

23. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator can be obtained from Melbourne Citymission on request

TABLE 15: TUTOR FEEDBACK 2 (TERM 4) FOR BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS**Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):**

Social skills	Homework	Confidence	Interest	Learning skills	Behaviour	Academic
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	91%	89%

It is noticeable that a higher proportion of students on all indicators were felt to have made significant progress by Term 4 compared to Term 2.

Tutors at the focus group held in Term 3 identified benefits to the students including learning to work together, developing friendships, increased confidence, and improved behaviour. One tutor said that the main benefit of the program is that it gives students the *'chance to experience success'*.

Teacher feedback

Feedback was collected from teachers of thirteen students still enrolled in the program towards the end of the year. This feedback is a critical measure of the program's success in achieving change, since transferring benefits to the school setting is a crucial aim.

Asked to rate how useful the program had been for their student:

- Teachers of two of the thirteen students said the program had been 'very useful' to their student's learning or academic achievement.
- The program was rated 'useful' for ten students, and 'not very useful' for one student.

Asked if the program had benefited their student:

- Teachers of twelve of the students said the program had benefited their student.
- The teacher who said the program had not benefited their student had also rated it as 'not very useful'. (In Term 4 the student's tutor had rated the program as 'very useful' for this student.)

Teachers were asked to describe the kinds of benefits they had observed for their students. Benefits named included improved academic confidence, learning skills, and organisational skills, and homework being completed. Several students were seen as benefiting from the opportunity to improve their social skills through mixing with other students and interacting with their tutors. One teacher wrote that their student often goes home to an empty house, so attending the program helps alleviate this.

Teachers were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed on specific indicators during the year, and the extent to which the student's participation in the Broadmeadows Learning Club had contributed to this change.

There was a very high level of missing data for these questions, with several teachers providing answers only for one or two indicators, or skipping the whole section.²⁴ The data below is for those where a rating was given. Progress was rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement.

TABLE 16: TEACHER FEEDBACK (TERM 4) FOR BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB STUDENTS**Proportion of students improving significantly (teacher perceptions):**

Confidence	Academic	Learning skills	Interest	Homework	Behaviour	Social skills	Attendance
38%	25%	25%	25%	13%	13%	13%	0%

The Table shows that most students on most indicators were not felt to have progressed significantly. In addition, on most indicators the program was not felt to have contributed significantly to change (results reported in the Outcomes Table on page 90).

The ratings scales appear to have been difficult for teachers to use, as the high level of missing data and generally disappointing results above indicate. The short evaluation period of one year may have been too brief for many students participating in these programs to demonstrate significantly changed attitudes, academic results and behaviours in the school setting. These findings must also be viewed in the context of the generally high ratings of program usefulness and the responses to the question on benefits of the program.

One teacher who felt that their student had progressed significantly on all indicators (apart from attendance) said this impact had occurred because:

She is able to get a lot more 1-1 support from the Club which she may not be able to get from home.

Another, who said their student had improved fairly significantly in self-confidence and interest and commitment to school work, said that this change had occurred because of the opportunity to experience learning in a different context.

Asked if they would recommend the program to other parents or students, twelve teachers responded 'yes' and one did not answer this question.

Teachers' views on the program's strengths, reasons for impacts, and ideas for improvement are discussed below under 'Program strengths'.

Student feedback

All ten students still enrolled in the program at the end of the year provided feedback about their experience of the Broadmeadows Learning Club. These students were likely to be those who had enjoyed the program most.

All ten students said they had 'enjoyed all parts' of the program. Reasons for enjoying the program so much were receiving help with homework and learning, and interaction with tutors. Several also mentioned that they found the program 'fun'.

One student wrote:

I'm working with people and enjoy their company. People are giving me more time for help.

Asked how useful the students thought the program had been in helping them with their learning, nine students said they had found it 'very useful' and one said it had been 'useful'.

24. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator can be obtained from Melbourne Citymission on request

Students were asked if they had enjoyed going to school more since attending the program. Nine said yes, and one responded ‘can’t say’. The following comments by students explain why they enjoy going to school more:

Because it helps me to learn things easier, and the next day it has been easier at school.

I used not to want to go to school because I didn’t know a lot.

I didn’t have time to do my homework and my grades were going down and I didn’t like school. It’s just been great.

All ten students said they would recommend the program to friends at school.

Students said the program had helped them because it provided support to complete homework, and improved their confidence and understanding. One said ‘*the program has worked my brain and given me confidence to try more things*’. Another said they use what they learn in the program at school.

Tutor outcomes

The tutors who supported the program on a voluntary basis should also be seen as a group for whom outcomes can be achieved. Tutors said their participation had helped them to:

- learn to respond more appropriately to children – for example, dealing with mood changes or disruptive behaviour, and
- become more aware of the realities of some of the children’s lives.

Program strengths, critical success factors, and limitations

Program strengths & critical success factors

Table 17 below shows stakeholders’ perspectives on the strengths of the Broadmeadows Learning Club. These were provided by at least one stakeholder in each category in response to open questions in the Tutor Feedback Form, Student Questionnaire, Teacher Feedback Form, School Interviews, and Tutor Focus Group.

TABLE 17: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON STRENGTHS & CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE BROADMEADOWS LEARNING CLUB

Program strengths & critical success factors	Tutors	Students	Principals	Teachers
Informal atmosphere & approach to learning	•		•	
1-1 or small group support to learning	•		•	•
Learning in a non-school setting				•
Tutor-student relationship		•		•
Tutors show interest in the children's whole lives (not just academic)		•		
Tutors are voluntary (sends a positive message to the children)	•			
Organised time to complete homework		•		
Liaison between school and program	•			
Quality of the tutoring			•	
Efforts made to engage parents			•	

Tutors, students and teachers all referred to various aspects of the relationship between tutors and students as key strengths of the program.

Tutors saw the provision of 1-1 support to the children, or support in small groups, as a critical factor for the success of LSPs.

From students' perspective, the best parts of the program were learning new things, help to complete homework, and their relationships with tutors.

One principal commented that the program's strength is that learning activities happen in an enjoyable way, and the children experience success and have their confidence boosted. A teacher wrote that the strength of the program for her student was:

The socialisation aspect as well as the opportunity for her to reflect on her work and have structured time to complete assigned tasks.

Program limitations, and ideas for improvement

Asked how the program could be improved, tutors were concerned about whether there is sufficient liaison between Broadmeadows Learning Club and the two schools. This issue was also identified by school principals and teachers, and is therefore addressed separately below.

Other suggestions made by the tutors were to keep weekly records of program activities; to plan group activities to address particular needs, such as those of students from non-English speaking backgrounds; more opportunities for the tutors to reflect together about the program and share ideas; and payments to tutors.

Students thought there should be more tutors, and several wanted the program held for longer or on more than the current one day each week.

Teachers were keen for the program to be held on more evenings or for longer sessions. They also hoped that more tutors could be recruited, and several said they thought that activities at the Club should be more structured.

Recruiting and retaining tutors is clearly a challenge for the Broadmeadows Learning Club, and is a priority for future development.

Engaging more effectively with parents is another priority for future development, since these links are minimal at present. However, both the coordinator and the schools note that this is difficult to achieve, in part because of the complex issues faced by families. This was also observed during the evaluation, as it was very hard to obtain signed consent forms from the parents, and no parents came to the focus group that was scheduled.

Relationships between program and schools

As noted above, tutors wanted stronger liaison with the schools. Improved liaison with schools would include the provision of better referral information, feedback on whether teachers observe progress in the children, and guidance on tasks to set the students.

Both school principals recognised the need for improved liaison, and acknowledged that they shared responsibility for the difficulties in achieving this. They would like to see more input from teachers into referral information, and dialogue between teachers and the program to plan individual students' work. One principal felt the school could share expertise in tutoring to support the program.

Although tutors, the coordinator and principals report that liaison between the program and the schools needs to be improved, there is some evidence that teachers and students do communicate about what happens at the program. Only one student of the thirteen for whom we have teacher feedback had not discussed the program with their teacher. (This was the student whose teacher felt the program had not been very useful for him.) The other twelve had talked mainly about the work done at the program, and some had also discussed their enjoyment of the social interactions with their teachers. For example, one teacher wrote that their student:

... has mentioned that she enjoys being part of the learning club each week. We have discussed some of the work she has done there in class as well as some of the friends she has made.

When asked how the program benefits the school, principals mentioned:

- Working in partnership to meet the needs of children
- Demonstrating that school is broader than what happens during school hours
- Improving the school's profile or marketability
- Developing a link with a community organisation
- Supporting the merger by mixing up the children from the two schools and working in partnership with the other school.

Program future

Like Brunswick Learning Club, Broadmeadows Learning Club faces challenges to its future sustainability due to funding insecurity. Improving liaison with schools is another area for further development.

Feedback from tutors, students, principals and teachers indicates that the program is achieving outcomes for many of the students, and that schools and students would like to see it continue and to be expanded.

The program has now entered a period of consolidation, with a more stable, consistent group of tutors, and in 2008 a much better ratio of tutors to students .

4.3 Learning Support Program Case Study: Western Tutoring Program

Introduction

The Western Tutoring Program provides free 1–1 tutoring support to around forty-five young women of secondary school age who are identified as being at risk of leaving school or home. It is often a stepping-stone for young people, particularly students from a non-English speaking background who require support and guidance as they approach the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The Invergowrie Foundation has funded the program for ten years, which has enabled tutors to be paid. The program is held from 3.30–4.30pm and 4.30–5.30pm every Wednesday and Thursday, at Melbourne Citymission’s Western office in Footscray.

The Western Tutoring Program was first established in 1996 as a small support group run by workers from the Job Placement and Employment Training program (JPET), and was aimed at young women at secondary school who were experiencing difficulties with their studies. Local schools and youth workers had identified the need for a program that would encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop stronger learning skills.

The majority of students attending the program are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many have had refugee experiences that have disrupted their education. For example, some have experienced or witnessed torture or trauma, which can contribute to personal difficulties with settlement in a new country and adjustment to the Australian education system.

The tutoring program offers students the extra support needed to understand the curriculum; to organise their schoolwork; assist with homework and study; and to help prepare for exams including VCE. Feedback from students has shown that participants gain increased confidence and self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved language skills and better adjustment to their new country.

Project coordination

The Western Tutoring Program coordinator is based at Melbourne Citymission’s Western office in Footscray and reports to the manager of the Employment, Education and Training team. This team provides support and skills development

to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or experiencing disadvantage, to facilitate access to mainstream education, training and employment options. Other programs in the team include JPET, and the Horn of Africa Young People's Pathway Project. Although the Tutoring Program differs from these programs in that it does not provide case management, there is some opportunity to share resources and ideas, and to refer young people to these supports.

Distinctive features

- The Western Tutoring Program has been in operation for around ten years and is the longest running Melbourne Citymission LSP
- The program has benefited from its long-term relationship with the Invergowrie Foundation, and relatively secure funding
- The program aims to support young women to help them stay engaged with school and to reach their potential
- The majority of students who use the program are from non-English speaking and/or refugee backgrounds
- The program is offered to a large number of students each year, usually around forty-five, some accessing more than one tutoring session each week
- Tutoring is 1–1, provided mainly by students in their early twenties who themselves have recently completed VCE, and who therefore have a good understanding of the curriculum and standards
- The tutors are paid for their work, which facilitates recruitment and retention.

Program profile in 2007

Program resources

The program coordinator is employed two days each week to manage the Western Tutoring Program.

The program is not recurrently funded and this creates uncertainty when planning for the future. The Invergowrie Foundation provides funding for the payment of tutors on a yearly basis (currently funded until the end of 2008). Melbourne Citymission funds the coordinator's salary.

The program recruits tutors through advertising at Melbourne University and selects those who have high grades and recent experience in the subjects they are offering. Recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of high quality tutors is not a problem. Some tutors have been involved with the program for several years.

In 2007, seventeen tutors assisted at the program. Only two left the program early during the year, in both cases due to university commitments.

Of the seventeen tutors, fifteen were studying. Ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, the majority being students in their late teens or early twenties.

Motives for tutoring were discussed in the tutor focus group and included obtaining useful skills or experience, and working with children who are disadvantaged. One tutor, for example, is considering a teaching career. Another was motivated by his enjoyment of the subjects and his desire to communicate this to others.

All tutors accepted by the Western Tutoring Program are required to have had some previous experience in tutoring. No formal training is provided, but tutors are encouraged to share any concerns with the coordinator.

Intended student population

The Western Tutoring Program aims to reach young women who are at risk of disengaging from school or are in need of extra support to help them reach their potential, which they may not be able to access at home or through other means. In particular the program aims to meet the needs of students from refugee or non-English speaking backgrounds.

Interviews with welfare coordinators at four of the thirteen referring schools indicate that their perceptions of the intended population group are consistent with the above description. Several schools distinguished between two quite different groups of students who they refer to the program. The first group is those from refugee or non-English-speaking backgrounds who are struggling to cope with their schoolwork, and who lack support at home either because their parents do not speak English or because of other issues in the home environment. The second group is students who are motivated or bright but are overly anxious about doing well.

The program aims to keep enrolments at no more than forty-five, due to the resources available. Interviews with the schools, and program experience, suggest there is some unmet demand for the program, although schools also have access to a range of other resources. One welfare officer mentioned that some students who could benefit are unable to attend a program after school because of their commitments as carers at home.

The schools interviewed for the evaluation had access to a range of other resources to support students with learning needs, such as learning aides, literacy programs, ESL classes, and other tutoring programs run either by community organisations or by the schools themselves. For example, one school that had two students attending the Western Tutoring Program during 2007, also hosts a 'homework club' twice each week, held on school premises but provided by a community organisation. However, Melbourne Citymission's program was viewed as unique because it provides 1–1 support. Some students also attend other tutoring programs.

Referral process

School welfare coordinators play a pivotal role in filtering referrals to the program, although schools interviewed varied in how widely they advertised the program to students and in whether all interested students were encouraged to apply. In contrast to the LSPs for primary school students, schools did not make the majority of referrals to the Western Tutoring Program, as the Table below indicates.

Referral forms sent by the schools to Melbourne Citymission generally provide limited information about the reasons for the referrals. To an extent, students are assumed to be capable of negotiating directly with the program regarding their needs.

The coordinator advises that numbers of referrals and enrolments vary from year to year. For example, in 2006 forty-five students were enrolled in the program, but in 2005 and 2007 numbers were lower.

Profile of enrolled students

TABLE 18: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & REFERRAL REASONS—WESTERN TUTORING PROGRAM

	Number of students
Total enrolment 2007	29
2007 students also enrolled in 2006	8
Referral accepted but did not enrol	3
Referral sources	
Schools	12
Student	12
Melbourne Citymission	5
Referral reasons	
VCE preparation	26
Language difficulties	3
Gender	
Female	29
Ages (average age 17)	
14 years	2
15 years	2
16 years	7
17 years	4
18 years	4
19 years	3
20 years	3
Grades	
9	2
10	4
11	8
12	10
Country of birth	
Vietnam	5
Australia	3
Malaysia	1
Sudan	1
LOTE at home	20
Learning difficulty	0

The coordinator advises that more students were born overseas than the above figures suggest (program data is incomplete).

None of the students had a diagnosed or suspected learning difficulty. None were acting as a carer during the year, and none experienced homelessness.

Student motivations

The twenty-nine students who enrolled in the Western Tutoring Program were referred either for help with specific subjects, to prepare for VCE, or for support due to language difficulties.

Of the sixteen students still enrolled in the Western Tutoring Program at the end of the year, thirteen completed a questionnaire about their experience of the program. Asked why they had joined the program, they mentioned needing help with specific subjects (four), maths (two), and homework (two). Four students said they joined so they could have help to improve their English. Another student joined after a friend recommended the program to her. One student wrote that she joined because:

I needed help with my homework because I don't have any other supports at home. I couldn't afford tuition. I am from a non-English speaking background.

Student attendance

Table 19 overleaf shows the numbers of students attending each week during the year and the numbers enrolled at the end of each term. The program provides four sessions of tutoring each week and the weekly attendance refers to total attendance across all these sessions.

TABLE 19: STUDENT ATTENDANCE & ENROLMENT AT THE WESTERN TUTORING PROGRAM 2007

	WEEK										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Term 1 Enrolled: 23	1	3	7	14	13	16	16	19	16	16	
Term 2 Enrolled: 29	7	16	19	20	12	8	13	C	6	10	10
Term 3 Enrolled: 16	10	11	16	19	17	15	12	14	10	11	
Term 4 Enrolled: 0	13	19	14	19	17	10	6	3	4	3	

C= cancelled; N/A = not applicable; enrolled = enrolled at the end of each term

The program was cancelled in week 8, Term 2, due to team planning days.

Enrolments at the end of each Term were fairly stable at twenty-three to twenty-nine for most of the year, until the end of Term 4. It is anticipated that at least some students enrolled in 2007 will return to the program in 2008.

Numbers attending varied significantly during the year. In terms 2, 3 and 4 numbers peaked in weeks 2–5 and then gradually declined towards the end of term.

Attendance increased during Term 3 but then decreased in Term 4 as enrolments also declined. In most weeks across the year, fewer students attended than were enrolled. Reasons for not attending were illness, other commitments including paid work, and family issues.

Thirteen students left the program early (defined for the evaluation as before the end of Term 3). Reasons recorded for this were organising a private tutor, no longer needing tutoring, and having another commitment such as part-time work. In the case of six students we do not have information about why they stopped coming to the program.

Individual patterns of attendance were also tracked for the evaluation. These varied enormously, with some students consistently attending between one and three sessions each week, whilst others joined the tutoring program briefly, or were very sporadic in their attendance. Total number of sessions attended by individual students ranged from one to sixty-four, with the average number attended being seventeen sessions.

Program content and delivery

Observations of the program, along with feedback from tutors, the coordinator, and students, indicate that tutoring is provided almost exclusively on a 1–1 basis, and that the approach used is tailored to individual students' needs. This contrasts with the primary school programs included in the evaluation, which also use group activities to build students' trust and confidence. Tutors with expertise in specific subjects are matched to students according to their needs.

Students described receiving help with writing essays or other assignments across a variety of subjects, practice with speaking English, and help with planning or study skills. One student wrote that she had received help with:

Revision for exams, how to construct essays or speeches, and assignments.

Tutors also mentioned supporting students with specific subjects and helping them to complete homework, along with a variety of tasks such as practising oral presentations, and helping develop pronunciation. The range of subjects offered at the program in 2007 included biology, maths, English as a Second Language, English literature, chemistry, and Japanese.

Many of the tutors emphasised that their activities focused on helping students understand key concepts. For example, one tutor helping a student with maths and psychology wrote that the support provided included:

Explaining concepts and processes and going through exercises. Filled in gaps in her understanding, and designed extra exercises to give her practice at particular areas.

Although building students' confidence was a goal mentioned by some tutors, it was less evident as a focus than in the two programs for primary school students.

During the evaluation we visited the Western Tutoring Program once in each term and documented our observations. The program was held in Melbourne

Citymission's premises at Footscray, which is the base for a number of programs including Adult & Family Services, as well as for the programs provided by the Employment, Education and Training team. Students and tutors worked in pairs, at various locations around the office depending on which desks were available. At most sessions attended up to six tutor-student pairs were present.

The atmosphere at the program was informal and friendly, with students and tutors welcomed and farewelled by the coordinator, but working independently for the hour. At each of the sessions we attended, several students did not come as arranged. On the rare occasions that a tutor did not come, the coordinator sometimes assigned their students to different tutors.

A noticeable feature of the program was the closeness in age of students and tutors. Several students and tutors were studying the same texts or subjects at different levels. We observed warm, friendly and supportive interactions between students and their tutors.

Student outcomes in 2007

The program aims to support young women, particularly those from non-English speaking or refugee backgrounds, who are at risk of disengaging from school, and to enable them to fulfil their potential.

The extent to which outcomes for these young women were achieved was determined using feedback collected from teachers, tutors, and students themselves.

Although teacher feedback forms were posted to schools, and followed up with a telephone call, we did not receive any teacher feedback. Reasons for this are discussed below in 'Relationships between the program and schools'. As a result we do not have complete data sets for any of the students, although we do have both tutor forms, and the student questionnaire, for eleven of the students. Findings from each data source are presented below and compared.

Tutor feedback

Tutor feedback was collected in Term 2 in relation to twenty-one students. It was collected again in Term 4 for fourteen students; for thirteen of these students we also have a Term 2 feedback form.

- In Term 2, the program was described as 'very useful' for the student's development, learning or academic achievement for ten of the twenty-one students, and 'useful' for eleven students.
- In Term 4, the program was described as 'very useful' for six of the fourteen students, and 'useful' for the remaining eight students.

For seven of the thirteen students for whom we have both feedback forms, the ratings did not change from Terms 2 to 4. For three students the program was rated 'useful' in Term 2, and 'very useful' in Term 4; and for three students the program was rated 'very useful' in Term 2 and 'useful' in Term 4. In one case, the reduced rating was explained by a change in the tutoring arrangements from 1-1

to shared sessions, which the students had requested. However the tutor felt that shared sessions reduced the quality of support she could provide because the two students were at different levels of ability.

The benefit to students identified most frequently by tutors was improved understanding of key concepts. For example, one tutor wrote that:

We went through some theory on trigonometry for maths and although she remembered a little from class it made a lot more sense to her going through it 1-1 and she was able to do the chapter questions very easily once she really understood the concepts.

Another wrote that her student benefited from having concepts explained and clarified and that this ‘gives her confidence and the foundation to build on her knowledge’.

Other benefits mentioned by tutors included improved study techniques, and increased motivation. Several also mentioned that students’ grades had improved. The tutors tended to see outcomes in terms of keeping up or getting ahead of class, reflecting the more competitive, results-orientated nature of secondary school education compared with primary school education.

The following comment highlights the program’s role in supporting students to continue with subjects in which they are struggling:

This student seems to be rapidly growing more confident in her own ability. She tells me that before starting the program she was going to drop maths. Now she is enjoying it more because she understands it, and her marks are improving as well. She is applying herself more to her studies and her ability to problem-solve by herself and recognise patterns in maths (and therefore apply learned concepts to new problems) is greatly improving.

Tutors were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed on specific indicators during the year. Progress was rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement.

There was a very high proportion of missing data against these indicators. Some indicator scales were not completed at all. We have also treated ‘can’t say’ or ‘not applicable’ responses as missing data.²⁵

The results below exclude this missing data, reporting just on students for whom a rating was given, and show the proportion of students rated as having improved significantly (a rating of 7–10). The indicators are ranked to show the indicator with the highest level of improvement first and the lowest last:

TABLE 20: TUTOR FEEDBACK 1 (TERM 2) FOR WESTERN TUTORING PROGRAM STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):

Behaviour	Academic	Interest	Learning skills	Confidence	Social skills	Homework
86%	82%	82%	81%	79%	78%	74%

25. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator are available from Melbourne Citymission on request

TABLE 21: TUTOR FEEDBACK 2 (TERM 4) FOR WESTERN TUTORING PROGRAM STUDENTS**Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):**

Learning skills	Behaviour	Confidence	Social skills	Interest	Academic	Homework
100%	100%	100%	100%	92%	91%	80%

Particularly noticeable in these Tables is the high ratings on all indicators for the majority of students at both data collections.

Across most indicators, a higher proportion of students were rated as having made a significant improvement in Term 4 as compared to Term 2.

Tutors at the focus group held in Term 3 identified benefits to the students that included confidence, strengthened understanding, improved ability to transfer learning between problems. Tutors saw the role of the program not just in terms of academic outcomes, but also in terms of broadening the students' horizons and increasing their confidence.

Teacher feedback

Feedback from teachers is a critical measure of the program's success in achieving change, since transferring benefits to the school setting is important.

Feedback forms were sent to welfare officers who had been interviewed in Term 1 so that they could be circulated to students' class teachers. Although we made follow up phone calls to all these contacts and offered to complete questionnaires in a phone interview, we did not receive any teacher feedback forms for students attending the Western Tutoring Program. Several schools said they could not provide feedback because they had not been aware that the students were attending the program (as noted previously, many students self-refer to the program).

Some of the other possible reasons for this poor response are discussed below in *Relationships between the program and schools*.

Student feedback

Of the twenty-one students still enrolled in the program at the end of the year, thirteen provided feedback about their experience of the Western Tutoring Program.

Asked how much they had enjoyed the program, eleven of the thirteen students said they had 'enjoyed all parts' of the program, and two said they had enjoyed 'most parts of the program but not all'. Reasons for enjoying the program so much were partly because of aspects of the program, such as the friendly relationships with tutors, and partly because they can see benefits which translate into the school environment. For example, one student wrote:

It's laid back and I usually go back to school understanding more.

Another student's feedback suggests that the focus on explaining key concepts and improving understanding is effective for her, saying that she is able to get ahead in school *'as it is taught twice to me which cements my understanding'*.

Asked how useful the students thought the program had been in helping them with their learning, ten students said they had found it 'very useful' and three said it had been 'useful'.

Students were asked if they had enjoyed going to school more since attending the program, and if so, why. Eleven of the thirteen students said yes, and two responded 'can't say'. They appeared to enjoy school more because they felt more confident. For example, one student wrote:

I feel more confident with maths and science now, so I attend more lessons.

Twelve students said they would recommend the program to friends at school, and one responded 'can't say'.

Asked how the program had helped them, students mentioned being able to keep up with schoolwork, and developing their confidence. One student added:

The program has been a blessing in my life. I have been part of it for 3 years and my English has improved, my writing and essay and language analysis are better. The best thing about it is it's free and I am grateful to be part of it. Thank you.

Tutor outcomes

The tutors who supported the program on a voluntary basis should also be seen as a group for whom outcomes can be achieved. Asked at the focus group how their participation had benefited them, tutors mentioned:

- sense of personal satisfaction at having put skills into use
- developing good relationships with the students and acting as mentors to them
- learning about different cultures
- and tutoring helps with university study (eg. in linguistics).

Program strengths, critical success factors, and limitations

Program strengths & critical success factors

Table 22 below shows stakeholders' perspectives on the strengths of the Western Tutoring Program. These were provided by at least one stakeholder in each category in response to open questions in the Tutor Feedback Form, Student Questionnaire, Tutor Focus Group, and School Interviews.

TABLE 22: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON STRENGTHS & CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE WESTERN TUTORING PROGRAM

Program strengths & critical success factors	Tutors	Students	Schools
1-1 support to learning	•		•
Program is provided free of charge	•	•	•
Learning in a non-school setting	•		
Program is local	•		•
Tutor-student relationship	•	•	
Quality of tutoring		•	•
Voluntary attendance	•		
Students are not labelled	•		
Friendly welcome at MCM		•	

Four secondary school welfare officers participated in school interviews. They noted that a critical success factor of the Western Tutoring Program is its provision of 1-1 support, which is unusual even in the LSP sector.

Tutors were conscious of the opportunity for students to learn in an environment where less is known about them and they are not labelled. As one tutor expressed this *'it's a fresh start with us'*.

For students, the quality of the tutoring and the way they are treated by tutors and staff at Melbourne Citymission were both important. One student said their tutor understands them as well as providing effective teaching whilst another commented that *'being welcomed by all the nice staff'* was the best part of the program.

Program limitations, and ideas for improvement

Asked how the program could be improved, tutors suggested more resources to support learning, and improved liaison with the schools both at the point of referral and to help structure learning activities at the program.

Students thought the program should be held more often. One student mentioned the lack of a dedicated space for the program and the consequent disruption to Melbourne Citymission staff and to tutoring activities.

Relationships between the program and schools

Of the four schools interviewed for the evaluation, three had a fairly minimal relationship with the Western Tutoring Program during 2007, being involved simply in selecting and referring students. The fourth school had more direct involvement, providing some teacher feedback and liaison on students' progress, and having links with other Melbourne Citymission programs such as JPET. All four schools had had students attending the Western Tutoring Program for more than two years, and two of the schools had been involved since the program started.

When asked how the program benefits the school, welfare officers mentioned:

- Improved student grades
- Access to other support provided by Melbourne Citymission across a range of welfare issues
- The ability to offer an extended range of supports to students.

One welfare officer commented that *'whatever help and support we can get from outside is really great for our students and for the school'*.

Tutors, the coordinator, and the school welfare officers believe that although the program is creating some good outcomes for students, liaison with the schools needs to be strengthened to maximise outcomes. However, they also recognised that secondary school students sometimes refer themselves to the program, and can reasonably be expected to take some responsibility for their own learning goals. Several of the schools mentioned that because the coordinator is part-time, liaison is difficult. The poor response to our request for teacher feedback should be seen in the context of these fairly distant existing relationships between the schools and the program.

Program future

Key issues for the program are to secure more long-term funding, and to address the lack of a dedicated space. The program model has led to effective outcomes for students over the past ten years and is unlikely to be altered significantly. As a result of its experience running this program, Melbourne Citymission Employment, Education and Training team has also established a tutoring program at the newly established Youth Enterprise Hub in Braybrook, which is open to young men as well as to young women.

Wendy (secondary school student aged 16 years)

Wendy contacted the tutoring program herself because she was having difficulty with maths and English and because she knew the program would provide her with free support. She speaks Vietnamese with her family at home.

During 2007 Wendy attended two sessions of tutoring in English each week, except when prevented by work commitments. Her tutor supported her with specific homework tasks, focusing especially on grammar and structuring essays, and also helped her develop a study timetable. The tutor aimed to build Wendy's confidence, explain concepts, and improve her study skills and motivation. Initially Wendy had 1–1 support but midway through the year this was changed and she and another student were tutored together.

As a result of the support she received, Wendy said she felt her understanding improved, and that it helped her prepare for her exams. She enjoyed all parts of the program, *'because it's fun and it helps'*, and felt the tutoring had been very useful for her. She also said she enjoys going to school more since attending the program, because she understands more.

Wendy's tutor felt that she had made significant progress (7–10 on all indicators at the first data collection, and 6 or above at the second data collection). In particular her social skills, confidence, motivation and learning skills improved significantly. However, the tutor felt that Wendy would benefit more if she received 1–1 rather than shared tutoring. The tutor reflected that Wendy needs continued support to continue to build on learning, and added that *'she has slipped through the cracks at school. It is not her ability that is the problem but gaps in knowledge that are now causing her problems'*.

Wendy's school advised that they could not provide feedback about her experience at the program because they had not been aware that she was attending.

4.4 Learning Support Program Case Study: Connect-Ed Tutoring Program

Introduction

The Connect-Ed Tutoring Program (known until September 2007 as the Melbourne Citymission/City Library Tutoring Program) provides free 1–1 tutoring support to secondary school students who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness and who live in the City of Melbourne and inner surrounding areas. The program aims to strengthen or maintain disadvantaged students' engagement in education by providing specialist tutoring in the well-resourced environment of the City Library.

The Connect-Ed program has its origins in a small pilot program established by the City Library in Flinders Lane and Melbourne Citymission in 2004. In this pilot phase, four to six volunteer tutors attended City Library on Thursday evenings between 4–6pm, and students were invited to drop in for homework support as needed. Attendance rates varied enormously, and it was decided to adapt the model for the second pilot phase in 2005–06. In this second phase, students were matched with trained tutors attending Melbourne University, and received specialised individual support. As a result of consultation with local schools, and the changes to the model, the program's profile was raised, and retention and referral rates increased significantly. The Centre for Adult Education, Melbourne Citymission programs, and a local secondary school referred students to the program.

Before September 2007, the program did not have a dedicated coordinator or an allocated budget, but was jointly coordinated by the Team Leader for Melbourne Citymission's Step Ahead program, the Melbourne Gateway Reconnect Team Leader, and student volunteers recruited through Melbourne University.

During 2007, it became increasingly clear that this arrangement for project coordination, was limiting the outcomes that could be achieved, and funding was successfully applied for from the Campbell Edwards Trust Fund. A support worker was recruited in September 2007 to manage the program two days each week.

In this case study, 'coordinator' refers to the Step Ahead Team Leader who supported the program in addition to her core role, until the 'support worker' was appointed.

Project coordination

The support worker appointed in September 2007 is based at Melbourne Citymission's central office in the Melbourne Gateway Reconnect team, reporting to the Team Leader.

The organisational location of the Connect-Ed program reflects the focus on early intervention it shares with Melbourne Gateway Reconnect. Step Ahead and Melbourne Gateway Reconnect both provide support to young people who have experienced some level of disengagement from their families of origin, or are at risk of doing so. Many are also disconnected from education, or only marginally attached to the school system.

The target group of the Connect-Ed program reflects this demographic, and referrals are made by Step Ahead and Melbourne Gateway Reconnect as well as by schools.

Distinctive features

- The Connect-Ed Tutoring Program aims to support young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness and other forms of disadvantage, to help them stay engaged with school and to reach their potential
- The Connect-Ed Tutoring Program was developed in partnership with the City Library
- Student volunteers recruited through Melbourne University have played a critical role as tutors and coordinators of the program
- Until late 2007, the program did not have a dedicated, paid coordinator, and this limited what could be achieved
- The program model has undergone several changes during its comparatively short history, and is continuing to develop
- Tutoring is 1-1, provided mainly by student volunteers in their early twenties who themselves have recently completed VCE, and therefore have a good understanding of the curriculum and standards.

Program profile in 2007

Program resources

The support worker is employed two days each week to manage the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program. Two Melbourne University students acted as unpaid coordinators of the program during 2007, providing support to tutors, and liaising with the students.

The program budget is not recurrently funded and this creates uncertainty when planning for the future. The Campbell Edwards Trust Fund is funding the program until September 2008.

The program recruits most of its tutors through the Volunteer Fair held at Melbourne University in May each year. Although this is a successful method of recruiting good quality tutors, the timing of the Fair in Term 2 means that there is a risk of insufficient tutor numbers during Terms 1 and 2, especially if tutors do not stay on for a second year.

In 2007, twenty-one tutors were recruited and trained to assist at the program. Of those recruited, four left the program early during the year, due to university commitments, starting a job, or in one case because their students no longer needed support. The program was not held in Term 1 because of a lack of tutors, and ran at partial capacity in Term 2, until the majority of tutors were recruited through the Volunteer Fair. Only eight of the tutors recruited were matched with students.

All the tutors were studying, apart from two who were new graduates in their first year of employment. Ages ranged from 18 to 32 years, the majority being in their late teens or early twenties.

The two tutors who participated in the tutor focus group in Term 3 were motivated by a desire to do some form of voluntary work in order to benefit others and enhance their own skills.

Of the tutors recruited during 2007, five have expressed interest in continuing to provide tutoring at the program in 2008.

Connect-Ed provides training to all tutors in group sessions before they commence with the program. This training covers an introduction to the client group, including understanding homelessness and housing support services; possible scenarios which might be encountered while tutoring; learning styles; the tutoring role; program aims; and an introduction to the City Library venue and resources. In addition there are opportunities to debrief with the coordinators and in future regular tutor meetings will be held.

Intended student population

The Connect-Ed Program aims to reach disadvantaged young people, who are in grades 10–12 at school. In particular, the program is designed to support young people who are homeless or at risk of homeless, and/or are disengaged from their families. The common feature of these students is that they lack support with study outside school. For many of the students referred by Melbourne Citymission programs, their caseworker is their main source of support.

The program aims to keep enrolments at approximately twenty-five to thirty, due to the resources available.

Only one of the five schools interviewed for the evaluation had referred students to the program. The other schools had students attending who had either contacted the program themselves, or had been referred by a Melbourne Citymission program. The school counsellor from the referring school promotes the program to students from low-income families who could not otherwise access tutoring support. Most students referred by this school are struggling academically, though some are relatively high achieving and are referred so they can realise their potential.

The other schools interviewed also perceive the program as having a particular role in assisting children who lack parental support, whether because they are living independently of their parents, or because their parents do not speak English or have mental health issues. Student motivation to attend also influences whether or not a referral is made.

Interviews with the schools, and program experience, suggest there is some unmet demand for the program, but that referrals have sometimes not been made because the program has not been promoted sufficiently to schools. One school commented that they were unsure until quite late in the year whether or not the program was in operation, but that students ideally need access to tutoring from the beginning of the academic year.

The schools interviewed have limited access to other resources to support students whose learning needs are difficult to meet in the classroom setting. One school has access to a tutoring program run by another community organisation, which also provides 1–1 support. Several schools mentioned the importance of using resources outside the school rather than within it. Two of the schools interviewed have a particular focus on inclusion of students who might not be supported in other schools, due to a range of social issues.

Referral process

The school that had referred students to the program promotes it to all students but also recommends it to those who met the criteria outlined above.

Referral forms sent by schools to Melbourne Citymission generally provide limited information about the reasons for the referrals. The support worker advises that insufficient background information for some students led to a delay in enrolling the students.

Although the program aims to support up to thirty students, numbers of referrals and enrolments vary from year to year. For example, in 2006 thirty-three students were enrolled in the program, but in 2007 the numbers were much lower. The new support worker will work closely with schools and with Melbourne Citymission programs to increase the number of referrals and to improve the amount of background information obtained.

TABLE 23: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & REFERRAL REASONS – CONNECT-ED TUTORING PROGRAM

	Number of students
Total enrolment 2007	18
2007 students also enrolled in 2006	0
Referral accepted but did not enrol	7
Referral sources	
Schools	9
Melbourne Citymission	9
Referral reasons	
VCE preparation	18
Gender	
Male	13
Female	5
Ages (average 17)	
16 years	2
17 years	4
18 years	4
19 years	3
21 years	1
Grades	
10	4
11	8
12	12
Country of birth	
Australia	10
Vietnam	2
China	1
Ethiopia	1
India	1
Sudan	1
South Timor	1
LOTE at home	9
Learning difficulty	0
Homeless during the year	6

Students whose referrals had been accepted by the program, but who did not enrol, were either no longer interested in receiving tutoring or could not be contacted.

Student attendance

Table 24 below shows the numbers of students attending each week during the year and the numbers enrolled at the end of each term.

TABLE 24: STUDENT ATTENDANCE & ENROLMENT AT CONNECT-ED TUTORING PROGRAM 2007

	WEEK										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Term 2 Enrolled: 3	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	1	
Term 3 Enrolled: 8	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	7	2	5	2
Term 4 Enrolled: 0	7	5	5	6	4	2	0	0	0	0	0

C= cancelled; N/A = not applicable; enrolled = enrolled at end of each term

The program was not held in Term 1, due to insufficient numbers of tutors.

The support worker advises that the data provided in the above Table may slightly under-represent weekly attendances. This reflects difficulties maintaining data for the evaluation without a paid coordinator.

Enrolments at the end of each Term were low during 2007, reflecting the relatively short periods for which many students attended the program and the lack of tutors during the middle of the year. Five students left the program before the end of Term 3, and another group of twelve students were referred late in Term 3.

Numbers attending were also low for most of the year, with the highest weekly attendance being seven in Week 8, Term 2 and Week 1, Term 4. Students typically attend for brief periods, sometimes stopping tutoring because of a change of subject, no longer needing the help, or other commitments.

In Term 4, all attendances ceased after Week 6, because the majority of students were in year 12 and were undertaking exams.

Individual attendance data is incomplete due to staffing changes. However, it indicates that as many as seven of the eighteen students who enrolled in the program did not attend any tutoring sessions.

Students who enrolled and who did attend tutoring, generally attended for short periods during the year, apart from one student who received twenty-one sessions of tutoring from Term 2 to the middle of Term 4. Of the students who attended the program in Term 2 only, one student received nine sessions of tutoring, one attended for six sessions, one attended for four sessions, and two students attended for two sessions. The students who enrolled late in Term 3 either did not attend any sessions, or attended between four and six sessions each.

Program content and delivery

It was not possible to directly observe the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program, because during 2007 students and tutors made their own arrangements to meet at times which suited them best. An attempt was made to arrange to observe the program at a time when several pairs of tutors and students were due to meet, but this was cancelled when it transpired that only one pair would be meeting, since this felt overly intrusive. However, we attended all three tutor-training sessions at the City Library, and were able to observe the benefits of meeting in such a well-resourced location.

Tutoring is provided exclusively on a 1–1 basis, and the approach used is tailored to the students' needs. Unlike the primary school programs included in the evaluation, the emphasis is on 1–1 work, with no group activities, and unlike the Western Tutoring Program, the students and tutors meet at a variety of times throughout the week. This limits the opportunity for liaison between coordinators, students and tutors, and was also one of the reasons for the low level of participation by tutors and students in the evaluation.

Tutors who completed feedback forms in Term 2 mentioned supporting students with specific subjects and helping them to complete homework, along with a variety of tasks such as structuring essays, and practising past examination papers. The following tutor's comment suggests the range of activities undertaken:

I have been helping with maths and English homework by working through problem sets and article analysis with her. In maths I have been helping her to understand what the questions mean and what kind of steps are needed to solve them. In English we have read through a couple of articles together and have gone over possible writing techniques the author has used and the intended effect on the reader.

Some students attending the program are motivated and able to direct their own learning with support. For example, one tutor wrote that:

We went over past exam papers and also questions in his maths textbook. The student brought along questions every session and was quite clear about what he wanted help with each time.

Student outcomes in 2007

The program aims to support students of a range of abilities to reach their potential and to stay engaged in education.

The extent to which these outcomes were achieved was determined using feedback collected from tutors at the end of Term 2. It was not possible to obtain feedback from teachers because of difficulties obtaining consent from students, despite repeated reminders via their tutors. Some students also left the program before we could collect feedback from them. The lack of evaluation data reflects in part the lack of a set time for tutors and students to meet, and the lack of a dedicated support worker until late in the year.

26. Full details of missing data and sample sizes in relation to each indicator are available from Melbourne Citymission on request

As a result the outcomes data obtained was limited to the six tutor feedback forms collected in Term 2.

However, two of the schools interviewed indicated that their students had provided positive feedback to them about the program. In one case, the student had said how useful the program had been. This particular student is a Melbourne Citymission client and the school believed that he only completes homework when at the program. Several schools also mentioned that their students benefit from the other support provided by Melbourne Citymission programs in addition to the tutoring program.

Tutor feedback

Tutor feedback was collected in Term 2 in relation to six students.

- For all six of these students the program was described as ‘useful’ for their development, learning or academic achievement.

The benefit to students identified most frequently by tutors was improved understanding of key concepts, due to the opportunity for 1–1 support and reinforcement. For example, one tutor wrote that:

I think that the student found it easier to understand concepts in physics and was thus able to complete problems with more ease and greater understanding. There was a large improvement in her ability to complete work over the weeks as she became more confident and was able to articulate where she did not understand parts of the course.

Another tutor referred to the importance of providing reassurance to reduce students’ anxiety and build their confidence:

At times when she has seemed stressed because she was very behind on homework tasks I reassured her that she could complete it herself.

Tutors were also asked for their opinion on how their student had progressed against specific indicators during the year. Progress were rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 = no improvement, and 10 = great improvement.

There was some missing data against these indicators. Some indicator scales were not completed at all. We have also treated ‘can’t say’ or ‘not applicable’ responses as missing data.²⁶

The results below exclude this missing data, reporting just on students for whom a rating was given, and show the proportion of students rated as having improved significantly (a rating of 7–10). The indicators are ranked to show the indicator with the highest level of improvement first and the lowest last:

TABLE 25: TUTOR FEEDBACK 1 (TERM 2) FOR CONNECT-ED TUTORING PROGRAM STUDENTS

Proportion of students improving significantly (tutor perceptions):

Homework	Interest	Confidence	Learning skills	Academic	Social skills	Behaviour
100%	100%	100%	83%	80%	66%	60%

The Table shows that on each indicator a high proportion of students progressed significantly according to tutors.

Tutors who attended the focus group held in Term 3 identified benefits to the students including improved grades and having a mentor to support them both with study and their general development.

Tutor outcomes

The tutors who supported the program on a voluntary basis should also be seen as a group for whom outcomes can be achieved. Asked at the focus group how their participation had benefited them, tutors mentioned:

- gaining personal satisfaction at having done something to improve students' understanding
- improving their own knowledge of particular subjects
- and developing valuable skills in communication and in explaining concepts.

Program strengths, critical success factors, and limitations

Program strengths & critical success factors

Table 26 below shows stakeholders' perspectives on the strengths of the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program. These were provided by at least one stakeholder in each category in response to open questions in the Tutor Feedback Form, Tutor Focus Group, and School Interviews.

TABLE 26: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON STRENGTHS & CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE CONNECT-ED TUTORING PROGRAM

Program strengths & critical success factors	Tutors	Schools
1-1 support to learning	•	•
Program is provided free of charge	•	•
The City Library venue (access to resources)	•	•
Program held outside school		•
Tutor-student relationship	•	•
Quality of tutoring (good matching)	•	
Flexible entry criteria	•	
Good support to tutors	•	

Again, the relationship between students and tutors was viewed as significant by tutors and schools. In particular, access to mentoring by other young people was seen as a key strength by schools. One school welfare officer commented that:

The students need additional people who are not parents or teachers to value and reinforce learning.

One school welfare officer said that the anonymity of the program, due in part to the fact that it is not held at the school, was an important strength as it reduces the possibility of stigma being attached to students who attend.

Program limitations, and ideas for improvement

Asked how the program could be improved, tutors at the focus group suggested that more background information on the students' needs would be useful. Tutors also thought it could be better promoted to potential tutors to ensure an adequate number of tutors.

Schools indicated that more direct promotion of the program to their students would help improve referral rates and ensure good targeting of the program. One school welfare officer suggested that group study skills sessions, in addition to the 1–1 tutoring, could enhance the program.

The lack of ongoing funding for the program potentially jeopardises the program's sustainability. The program would have benefited from stronger oversight during 2007. Feedback from all stakeholders indicates that it is vital that the program continues to have a paid support worker to ensure that quality is maintained and that relationships with schools are further developed.

Relationships between the program and schools

Of the five schools interviewed for the evaluation, three had no direct involvement in the program during 2007; one school had referred students but had no further involvement; and one school had a student attending and provided some guidance on priority tasks for the student (although they had not referred the student). Of the five schools, three had been involved with the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program during 2007 only, one school did not know whether students had attended in previous years, and the fifth school had referred students in 2006 and 2007.

When asked how the program benefits the school, only two of the school welfare officers provided a response. They indicated that their school benefits from access to free tutoring support provided by an organisation with an appropriate ethos and philosophy, and that they also value the connection to community organisations and networks.

Feedback from tutors, the coordinator, and the school welfare officers indicates that although the program is creating some good outcomes for students, liaison with schools needs to be strengthened to maximise outcomes. For example, lack of feedback on whether students referred by schools enrol in the program and on how they progress, reduces the opportunity to achieve benefits for students.

Apart from their concerns about the need to strengthen liaison between the program and schools, the schools interviewed were very positive about the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program. One respondent saw the program as helping to level the playing field so that students who face a range of primarily social difficulties are able to compete in education. Another argued that the State government should invest more in this kind of support, to ensure sustainability of these programs.

Program future

As described above, the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program now has a paid support worker for the first time in its history, which should result in improved liaison with schools, and better promotion of the program to prospective students and tutors.

Goals for the program in 2008 are to increase the number of referrals from Melbourne Citymission programs, to ensure the intended population group is reached; to re-engage with the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) so that referrals from them increase; and to promote the program more widely to other community agencies.

In addition, the program model will be adapted to enable improved monitoring of the tutor-student sessions. Tutors and students will be encouraged to meet at one of two set times during the week at which the support worker will also be available.

Tutors will be provided with more opportunities to share issues and ideas during 2008, with the introduction of peer support sessions every six weeks in addition to the training provided when they commence tutoring.

The support worker will also provide direct support to the students, in particular referring them to other services, such as family mediation, housing and health services, where these are needed.

4.5 Student Attendance and Outcomes in the four Programs

This section brings together key findings on student attendance and outcomes from all four programs. Student attendance is a significant issue since it may affect the extent to which outcomes are achieved.

4.5.1 Student attendance in programs

Attendance in LSPs is voluntary for students. Our evaluation found that schools, tutors, and Melbourne Citymission program coordinators view this as a program strength, because it contributes to programs' informal and distinctiveness from school and places responsibility on students for their own involvement.

The drawback of voluntary attendance, however, is that some students' attendance may be too sporadic or short-lived to achieve significant outcomes. Attendance patterns and their implications are discussed separately in relation to primary and secondary students, since different factors are at work in each case.

Primary school students' attendance at programs was sometimes affected by parental availability to collect them, or for one or two students, being suspended from school which meant they were not at school on the day the program was held. Approximately half the students enrolled in Brunswick Learning Club or Broadmeadows Learning Club attended for at least half the total number of sessions, and a quarter attended for over 75% of sessions.

Secondary school students use LSPs quite differently to primary school students, taking more responsibility for their own learning and using programs more opportunistically. Just under half the students at Western Tutoring and Connect-Ed had referred themselves to the programs. Many attended either for a short period of time or were enrolled for the whole year but attended sporadically. The twenty-nine students enrolled at Western Tutoring Program attended an average of seventeen sessions each. Individuals' attendance at Connect-Ed was particularly low, and as many as seven enrolled students did not attend any tutoring.

Whether low levels of attendance constitutes a problem depends partly on individual students' reasons for non-attendance. In fact, the majority who left programs for secondary school students early in the year had decided they no

longer needed tutoring in the subject. Some students missed sessions at the Western Tutoring Program because of illness, family issues, or other commitments. In the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program, low levels of enrolment and attendance reflected issues around program coordination, specifically the late recruitment of most tutors, which led to a delay in promotion of the program to a wider group of students. In addition, many of the students who enrolled late in the year did not take up tutoring.

Of the eighty students enrolled in our four programs during 2007, just over one third can be defined as attending in a regular, sustained way. This figure comprises eighteen students who attended over half of Brunswick Learning Club or Broadmeadows sessions, and twelve students at the Western Tutoring program who attended more than the average of seventeen sessions.

The outcomes data we have shows that for most of those whose attendance was sustained throughout the year, significant outcomes were achieved. These outcomes are presented in the four Learning Support Program Case Studies but are also summarised below.

4.5.2 Tutor Feedback: student progress on indicators

The Table below highlights key findings from tutors' ratings of student progress, and shows that tutors gave very positive ratings on all indicators to the majority of students.

The 'highest' indicator ranking in the Table below is the indicator with the highest proportion of students in the program achieving ratings between 7–10 on the improvement scale. The 'lowest' indicator ranking is the indicator with the lowest proportion of students in the program achieving ratings between 7–10 on the improvement scale.

Example: At Brunswick Learning Club the Tutor Feedback 1 results showed that the indicator with the highest proportion of students rated as having improved significantly was social skills (89% of students), and the indicator with the lowest proportion of students rated as having improved significantly was *learning skills* (56% of students).

TABLE 27: TUTOR FEEDBACK: HIGHEST AND LOWEST INDICATORS (ALL PROGRAMS)

Program/Indicator ranking		Tutor Feedback 1	Tutor Feedback 2
Brunswick	Highest:	Social skills (89%)	Learning skills/Behaviour/ Confidence/(100%)
	Lowest:	Learning skills (56%)	Interest (71%)
Broadmeadows	Highest:	Homework (86%)	Social skills/Homework/ Confidence/Interest (100%)
	Lowest:	Social skills (50%)	Academic performance (89%)
Western	Highest:	Behaviour (86%)	Behaviour/Confidence/ Learning skills (100%)
	Lowest:	Homework (74%)	Social skills (71%)
Connect-Ed	Highest:	Homework/Behaviour/ Confidence/Interest (100%)	Not completed
	Lowest:	Social skills (66%)	Not completed

The Table shows that the majority of students in all programs (at least 50% across all indicators, at both data collections) were felt to have improved significantly. At the second data collection progress ratings were higher across all indicators. For example at the second data collection the lowest ranked indicators were *interest* for Brunswick Learning Club students (71% rated as having improved significantly); *academic performance* for Broadmeadows Learning Club students (89% rated as having improved significantly); and *social skills* for Western (71% rated as having improved significantly).

4.5.3 Teacher Feedback: student progress on indicators

Table 28 below highlights key findings from teachers' ratings of student progress on indicators (obtained for primary school students only).

TABLE 28: TEACHER FEEDBACK: HIGHEST AND LOWEST INDICATORS (PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS)

Program	Highest indicator	Lowest indicator
Brunswick LC	Interest (50%)	Homework (14%)
Broadmeadows LC	Confidence (38%)	Homework, social skills, and behaviour (13%)

Teachers had a less positive view than tutors of student progress on indicators. The highest proportion of students rated as having improved significantly on an indicator was 50%—*interest* at Brunswick Learning Club. Other ratings were generally low. In addition, many teachers did not complete the indicator question or provided answers just for a few indicators. This affected the data for Broadmeadows students in particular.

We also asked teachers to provide a rating of how far the program had contributed to students' progress, since progress on an indicator may or may not be seen as related to the program's support to the student. On most indicators across both programs, teachers did not view the program as having contributed significantly. However the Brunswick Learning Club was felt to have had a significant impact on students' interest in learning in the case of half of the students.

The ratings scales appear to have been difficult for teachers to use, as the high level of missing data and generally disappointing results above indicate. The short evaluation period of one year may have been too brief for many students participating in these programs to demonstrate significantly changed attitudes, academic results and behaviours in the school setting. These findings must also be viewed in the context of the generally high ratings of program usefulness and the responses to the question on benefits of the program.

Teachers of primary school students provided very positive responses when asked whether the program had been useful to their student, whether it had benefited their student, and whether they would recommend the program to other parents or students. In each program, only one student was not felt to have benefited. These findings are summarised in Table 29 below.

TABLE 29: TEACHER FEEDBACK ON THE USEFULNESS & BENEFITS OF PROGRAMS TO PARTICIPATING STUDENTS, AND WHETHER THEY WOULD RECOMMEND THEM TO OTHERS (PRIMARY PROGRAMS)

Program	Usefulness to student	Benefit Y/N	Recommend program Y/N
Brunswick LC N = 8	Very useful: 5 Useful: 1 Not very useful: 0 No use at all: 1	Y: 6 N: 1	Y: 6 N: 1
Broadmeadows LC N = 13	Very useful: 2 Useful: 10 Not very useful: 1 No use at all: 0	Y: 12 N: 1	Y: 12

One teacher of a student at Brunswick Learning Club was unable to provide responses to these questions. A teacher of a student at Broadmeadows Learning Club did not answer the question on whether they would recommend the program.

4.5.4 Student Feedback: experience of the program, and attitudes to school

Students were asked whether they had enjoyed the program (all parts, most, not much, or not at all); how useful the support had been (very useful, useful, not very useful, or no use at all); whether they enjoy school more since attending the program; and whether they would recommend the program to others. Responses from students at each program are shown in Table 30 below (Connect-Ed students did not complete this questionnaire).

TABLE 30: STUDENT ATTITUDES TO PROGRAMS AND TO SCHOOL

Program	Enjoyment of program	Usefulness of program	Enjoyment of school	Recommend program
Brunswick LC N = 6	All parts: 2 Most: 3 Not much: 1	Very useful: 2 Useful: 4	Y: 4 N: 1 Can't say: 1	Y: 3 N: 3
Broadmeadows LC N = 10	All parts: 10	Very useful: 9 Useful: 1	Y: 9 Can't say: 1	Y: 10
Western Tutoring N = 13	All parts: 11 Most: 2	Very useful: 10 Useful: 3	Y: 11 Can't say: 2	Y: 12 Can't say: 1

The Brunswick Learning Club coordinator and tutors advise that some students may not recommend the program to others because they fear being teased or stigmatised.

The Table shows that most students across all three programs enjoyed their time at the program and that all students surveyed felt it had been useful or very useful for them. **Significantly, almost all students attending said that they enjoy school more since coming to the programs.** The most commonly expressed reason for this was that they find schoolwork easier and are more able to keep up in class.

4.5.5 School Feedback: benefits to students

We conducted seventeen interviews with schools that had students attending programs in 2007. These interviews involved school principals or their nominated representatives—welfare officers in secondary schools, and two assistant principals in primary schools. Details of participation rates are included in the **Methodology**.

The feedback discussed in this section provides useful information about schools' overall perceptions of benefits to students. It does not relate solely to the students whose outcomes were evaluated in our study, since schools responded based on their experience of the program in previous years as well as in 2007.

Table 31 overleaf shows how schools rated the programs' usefulness to the development, learning or academic achievement of participating students; and whether they would recommend the program to other parents, students or schools.

TABLE 31: SCHOOL FEEDBACK ON THE USEFULNESS OF PROGRAMS TO STUDENTS AND WHETHER THEY WOULD RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM TO OTHERS

Program	Usefulness to students	Recommend program
Brunswick LC N = 6	Very useful: 4 Can't say: 2	Y: 5 Can't say: 1
Broadmeadows LC N = 2	Very useful: 2	Y: 2
Western Tutoring N = 4	Very useful: 3 Useful: 1	Y: 4
Connect-Ed N = 5	Very useful: 1 Useful: 2	Y: 3 Can't say: 2

Where they were able to provide a response, schools felt that the program had been very useful or useful for participating students. Most schools would recommend the program to other schools, students or parents. Where schools were unable to answer a question this was usually because they had only recently had students attending the program, and lacked sufficient knowledge.

Schools identified a variety of benefits for students participating in the programs. Their responses to this open question also suggest their assumptions about what children need in order to learn. **The benefits named by schools are similar to the indicators we developed, suggesting that schools and programs have shared assumptions about the model for learning which is required.**

The benefit observed most often, by both primary and secondary schools, was **increased self-esteem or confidence**. The informal, enabling environment created in the programs appears to work well for students who have difficulty keeping up in school. As one assistant principal expressed it, the program (Broadmeadows) '*creates an environment built around success*'. For children who are not used to succeeding, the boost to their confidence can be considerable.

Central to this outcome is the tutor-student relationship, which as well as providing opportunities for detailed reinforcement and explanation, is also often a warm, friendly relationship. One principal said that '*if that's happening well the learning happens*'.

Schools had also noticed **improvements in social skills**, particularly for primary school students, where disruptive behaviour patterns, difficulty working with others, or lack of social confidence can severely hinder some children's learning. The calm environment and the opportunity to work 1-1 with a tutor seem to be particularly important for these students. Students who are being bullied or teased in school were also felt to benefit from exposure to a different peer group where these patterns can be broken.

One primary school principal with students attending Brunswick Learning Club said that the children they refer are a group '*who need social experience to develop the skills for learning*'. Another principal whose students also attend this program said that the children referred '*don't get a lot of adult input into their learning*'. Students attending the programs are exposed to adults other than their parents or teachers, who act as mentors or role models.

For students referred to Melbourne Citymission's LSPs, progress towards better **academic outcomes** is likely to involve small steps. Only two schools mentioned improved academic results as a benefit of the program. These were both secondary schools, reflecting the more performance-oriented culture at this level.

Some schools viewed **completing homework** as a significant benefit for participating students, since it ensures that they keep up with their class. For students living in households that are overcrowded or lack resources for learning, simply having an appropriate place to complete homework is beneficial.

Schools also felt that a benefit of the programs is that students' learning is reinforced in a non-school environment. One primary school principal said that this promotes the idea that '*learning is lifelong and not just something you do in school*'. Schools believed that students enjoyed attending the programs, and that as a result their **interest and commitment to learning** improves.

Other benefits mentioned by schools were the opportunity for students to access other Melbourne Citymission supports such as family mediation or housing services, and reductions in parental anxiety about their child's learning.

Few schools had experienced difficulties with the program. Where schools did have concerns, these related to communication issues, including lack of feedback regarding whether referred students have actually enrolled in the program, and difficulties contacting coordinators who are part-time.

To summarise, schools identified a number of benefits to students that they viewed as arising from the particular model of support provided by the programs.

4.5.6 Summary: student outcomes in each program during 2007

Overall, evaluating student outcomes is complex, since it is difficult to isolate causes of improvement, and our study focused only on one year in students' development. The outcomes data is less complete than we had hoped, partly due to the difficulty of obtaining feedback from teachers and to complex patterns of student attendance, with some students leaving programs early in the year. The findings of this study can only be indicative. Outcomes data for Connect-Ed students is unfortunately too sparse to draw conclusions, so the discussion below relates to Brunswick Learning Club, Broadmeadows Learning Club, and Western Tutoring Program.

Within the constraints described above, feedback from tutors, students, teachers and schools (summarised in Table 32 below) suggests that student outcomes were high for most of those whose attendance was sustained throughout the year. The majority of students were perceived to have made significant progress on indicators. Improvements in interest in learning, confidence, homework completion, and learning skills were more evident than improvements in academic performance. This is consistent with the model of learning support on which the programs are based, since the aim is firstly to address these foundational issues in order to produce academic gains.

The indicator results show that across all programs and nearly all indicators, tutors perceived greater gains for students at the second data collection than at the first.

Early in the year, students at Brunswick Learning Club made more progress than students at Broadmeadows according to their tutors, though by the end of the year a higher proportion of Broadmeadows students were making significant progress on indicators. This shift could be due to the low number of tutors and lack of a coordinator affecting program quality at Broadmeadows earlier in the year. It is also possible that Broadmeadows students needed more time in the program to achieve progress.

Teachers of primary students attending Brunswick Learning Club or Broadmeadows Learning Club reported that the programs had been very useful or useful for nearly all students and that nearly all their students were benefiting. However, teachers did not report significant progress for most students on most indicators. It is possible that the low ratings against indicators reflect methodological issues with the ratings scales. This is supported by the fuller (and more positive) responses to the indicator question provided by teachers of Brunswick Learning Club students than by teachers of Broadmeadows Learning Club, suggesting the former had a better knowledge of the program or of their students and were therefore more able to complete the scale.

Tutors at the Western Tutoring Program observed good progress on indicators by most students, but we lack teacher feedback to provide a fuller picture.

In addition to the outcomes described above, students reported high levels of enjoyment of programs, and more positive attitudes to school. Programs appear to help prevent non-attendance and disengagement from school for at least some 'at risk' students. A virtuous circle is established whereby students are more confident, attend and participate more fully in school, and are less likely to fall behind.

The proportion of students in each program rated as having made significant progress (7–10 on the ratings scales) on indicators is summarised in Table 32 overleaf.

TABLE 32: OUTCOMES RATINGS—PROPORTION OF STUDENTS RATED AS HAVING MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ON INDICATORS

Tutor Feedback 1								
Indicator	Social skills	Home-work	Behaviour	Academic	Confidence	Interest	Learning skills	
Brunswick LC	89	88	78	75	60	60	56	
Broadmeadows LC	50	86	63	63	80	73	78	
Western Tutoring	78	74	86	82	79	82	81	
Connect-Ed Tutoring	66	100	60	80	100	100	83	

Tutor Feedback 2								
Indicator	Social skills	Home-work	Behaviour	Academic	Confidence	Interest	Learning skills	
Brunswick LC	86	86	100	83	100	71	100	
Broadmeadows LC	100	100	91	89	100	100	100	
Western Tutoring	100	80	100	91	100	92	100	

Teacher Feedback								
Indicator	Social skills	Home-work	Behaviour	Academic	Confidence	Interest	Learning skills	Attendance
Brunswick LC	17	14	33	33	20	50	33	33
<i>Program contribution</i>	33	0	33	20	33	50	33	17
Broadmeadows LC	13	13	13	25	38	25	25	0
<i>Program contribution</i>	10	9	0	0	18	0	0	11

Ratings show the proportion of students who had improved significantly i.e. rated 7–10 on the improvement scale

Ratings in italics (Teacher Feedback) show the proportion of students for whom the program was felt to have made a significant contribution to change on each indicator

Tutor Feedback was not provided for Connect-Ed students at the second data collection

5. Discussion

This discussion uses our evaluation to identify critical factors for the success of LSPs; assesses the extent to which these principles are being achieved in Melbourne Citymission's programs; and considers implications of the evaluation findings for the future development of the LSP sector in Victoria.

5.1 Principles for Learning Support Programs

The principles identified below are derived from the Program Case Studies. They also correlate well with previous research, including Melbourne Citymission's *Profile of Learning Support Programs*; the Refugee Education Partnership Project's work on developing best practice principles and minimum standards; and US literature on the links between program quality and outcomes.²⁷

Our evaluation, supported by the literature, suggests that LSPs should have:

Program purpose and inputs

A clear purpose

- A clearly articulated purpose which is informed by stakeholder experience
- A clearly defined target population which reflects identified needs

Good coordination arrangements

- A paid, dedicated coordinator position
- An appropriate location in relation to other organisational programs, to facilitate support to the LSP, including access to relevant expertise

Sufficient resources

- An adequate and recurrent budget
- Sufficient tutor numbers to provide 1–1 support where needed
- Access to an appropriate venue (probably outside of school settings)
- Access to appropriate resources to support learning

Program model & operation

- A referral process and delivery arrangements (timing, frequency and location) which facilitate access by the intended student population
- Referrals which provide sufficient information, and ongoing liaison with referrers (mostly but not exclusively schools)

27. For example: Little, Priscilla M. *The Quality of School-Age Child Care in After-School Settings* Harvard Family Research Project, 2007; HFRP *After School Programs in the 21st Century*, 2008; Vandell et. al *Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs 2007*

- High quality tutor recruitment, training and matching processes
- Program activities and approach which meets student needs—eg. for an informal approach to learning or 1–1 support—and which supports school learning
- Processes to ensure tutors are matched appropriately with students (where relevant)
- Processes for evaluating student outcomes and adjusting the program

Program partnerships

- Partnerships with schools which promote additional benefits (eg. access by schools and community organisations to each others' resources) and ensure continuing alignment of programs with school objectives
- Partnerships with parents (where appropriate).

TABLE 33: ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES IN MELBOURNE CITYMISSION'S FOUR EVALUATION PROGRAMS DURING 2007

Principle	Brunswick Learning Club	Broadmeadows Learning Club	Western Tutoring Program	Connect-Ed Tutoring Program
Program purpose & inputs				
1. Clear purpose informed by experience	A	A	A	A
2. Defined target population (reflecting needs)	A	A	A	A
3. Paid, dedicated coordinator position	A	P	A	P
4. Organisational location facilitates support	A	A	A	A
5. Adequate, recurrent budget	N	N	N	N
6. Sufficient tutor numbers to provide 1-1	A	N	A	N
7. Appropriate venue (space, stability, etc.)	A	P	P	A
8. Access to resources to support learning	A	A	A	A
Program model & operation				
9. Referral process & delivery arrangements which facilitate access by the intended population	A	A	A	P
10. Referrals provide sufficient information, and there is ongoing liaison with referrers	A	P	P	P
11. High quality tutor recruitment, training & matching processes	A	P	A	A
12. Activities & approach meets student needs	P	P	A	A
13. Evaluation/QA processes in place	P	P	A	P
Program partnerships				
14. Partnerships with schools	A	A	P	N
15. Partnerships with parents (where appropriate)	A	P	N/A	N/A

A = achieved P = partly achieved N = not achieved N/A = not applicable

28. Little, Priscilla M.
*The Quality of
 School-Age Child
 Care in After-School
 Settings* Harvard
 Family Research
 Project, 2007, p.10

5.2 Program purpose and inputs

Melbourne Citymission programs

As Table 33 shows, all four Melbourne Citymission programs had a clear purpose informed by experience (1), and a *defined target population reflecting needs* (2).

The four programs all aimed to support students who are disadvantaged, each program having slightly different target groups (eg. young women at risk of homelessness, or primary school children with learning difficulties). A common denominator across all four programs was families lacking financial resources to purchase tutoring support. Schools tended not to refer students with significant behavioural issues or disabilities to the programs. Most of the students referred were not eligible for other forms of funded support within school.

Programs' entry criteria were fairly flexible, so that within their broad defined target group a range of student needs were represented. For example, secondary programs provided tutoring to bright, highly motivated students from families where parents did not speak English and could not easily support them with learning activities, as well as to students needing additional tutoring to reach a more basic level of understanding.

None of Melbourne Citymission's four programs had an *adequate, recurrent budget* (5). All four have used a mix of internal and external funding at various points in their history (mostly School Focused Youth Service funding in the initial phases of programs for primary school students, or philanthropic trust funding). Although Western Tutoring Program has a strong and long-term relationship with the Invergowrie Foundation, program costs other than tutor payments are met through internal Melbourne Citymission resources.

Connect-Ed Tutoring program and Broadmeadows Learning Club did not have a *paid, dedicated coordinator* (3) for at least part of the year. This reflected lack of funding (Connect-Ed) or insecure funding (Broadmeadows). Not having a coordinator affected the achievement of the other principles, as the higher number of 'N' ratings for these programs indicates.

For example, the lack of a dedicated coordinator for most of 2007 at Connect-Ed meant that there was limited capacity to promote the program to schools and to develop strategies to recruit *sufficient numbers of tutors* (6). This led to a mismatch between student and tutor numbers at various points in the year and may have affected student attendance.

All four Melbourne Citymission programs had an *organisational location facilitating support* (4), and *access to resources to support learning* (8). The programs all developed as an adjunct to other programs working with the client group, in response to perceived need, and their organisational location reflects this history.

Implications for the LSP sector

Further research is needed into the relative importance of different principles or critical success factors.²⁸ However, our evaluation suggests that some principles are more critical than others. In particular, lack of adequate, recurrent funding

is a significant problem for LSPs. This affects program capacity to resource a dedicated coordinator position. Our experience indicates that without a stable position of this kind, achievement of the other principles is more difficult.

29. *Ibid.*, p.8

LSPs operated by large community organisations such as Melbourne Citymission are in a fortunate position compared to those managed by small incorporated associations, since they are able to take advantage of the opportunities to share resources and knowledge with related programs and to manage risk and quality issues.

5.3 Program model & operation

Melbourne Citymission programs

Referral processes in the Connect-Ed Tutoring Program required further development to facilitate access by the intended student population (9). Connect-Ed is at a formative stage of development and is working to improve its links with referrers to maximise its capacity to reach disadvantaged young people.

A critical factor for the achievement of student outcomes is the provision of *sufficient referral information and ongoing liaison with referrers* (10). In all four programs, referral information supplied by schools was very limited. The Brunswick Learning Club coordinator was able to supplement this with information from parents and additional liaison with schools, facilitated by relatively strong existing links due to the program's history.

Obtaining good referral information and developing ongoing liaison with schools is complicated by the fact that at the secondary school level students are more likely to refer themselves to a program: just under half the students enrolled in Western Tutoring Program contacted the program direct. Although it may be appropriate for VCE students to take personal responsibility for their learning, greater liaison with teachers would enhance the capacity to target specific needs.

The tutor-student relationship is a critical part of the program model and it is essential that *tutor recruitment, training and matching processes* are of high quality (11). Three of the four programs provided tutors with training they had developed (Western Tutoring Programs recruits students with previous experience of tutoring). All four programs provide ongoing support as needed to tutors.

Outcomes will only be achieved if *program activities and approach meets student needs* (12). This has been described elsewhere as 'intentional programming with opportunities for autonomy and choice'.²⁹

Melbourne Citymission's program models at both primary and secondary age levels are designed to meet student needs and to support student autonomy and choice in ways appropriate to age.

For primary school students in particular, schools, program coordinators and tutors view developing social skills and confidence as important steps on the way to academic improvements. Programs therefore include some group activities to develop social skills, and tutors provide positive feedback to students.

There are signs that meeting student needs is becoming more difficult to achieve in programs for primary school students due to the trend away from setting homework in some schools. If liaison between schools and programs were more consistent, this would not matter, but because liaison is patchy, programs are sometimes unsure what activities to undertake with students who do not bring homework.

For secondary school students, the emphasis is on 1–1 work directed by the student, with a focus on particular subject areas. This approach appears to work well for most students in the Western Tutoring and Connect-Ed Tutoring Programs.

Program evaluation/QA processes (13) are informal or ad hoc. In all programs, a finding which is consistent with our survey of community-managed LSPs in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. Program monitoring data such as information on student needs is generally limited and this affected program's capacity to resource the evaluation.

Western Tutoring Program and Connect-Ed are required to submit reports to their funding bodies, but these are generally brief, consisting of participation rates and broad descriptions of program developments. Brunswick Learning Club has unsuccessfully sought feedback from teachers, and the coordinator has tried to resolve this through creative strategies such as providing feedback to teachers.

Implications for the LSP sector

Increasingly, the LSP sector in Melbourne is developing a more coordinated approach to tutor training, mainly through the work of the Refugee Education Partnership Project in conjunction with AMES. Melbourne Citymission supports this development.

Program models in Melbourne Citymission LSPs are based on assumptions about the needs of referred students. As we found in our survey of community-managed LSPs these assumptions are shared across the sector. It is assumed that for primary school students in particular, development of social skills and confidence are important steps on the way to academic improvements.

Although we would need a longer evaluation period to track this, our evaluation did show that most students gained in confidence and had a more positive attitude towards school, and that some students' academic performance improved.

The program model on which LSPs are currently based appears to be justified by our evaluation and should be maintained. However, insufficient referral information, and inadequate ongoing liaison with schools, limit opportunities to address student needs. Our evaluation indicates that outcomes for students could be further strengthened if referral information was more complete and if programs and schools worked together to develop and monitor learning plans for participating students. This requires solutions at a systemic level as outlined in 6. Future Actions.

5.4 Program partnerships

Melbourne Citymission programs

Our evaluation showed that programs differed in the extent to which they achieved *partnerships with schools* (14). To put this in context, most schools (44% of those interviewed) had had students attending for less than one year. 31% had been involved with the program for one to two years; 6% for two to three years; and 19% for three years or more, reflecting in part the varying length of time that programs had been operating. Our interviews also highlighted the range of other resources available to schools, including LSPs operated by other community organisations or by schools themselves. Melbourne Citymission LSPs are one element of a broader picture.

Just under half of all schools interviewed had no relationship with programs beyond selection and referral, at most. In other words, they had not provided guidance to programs on priority tasks or liaised with them about student progress. Four secondary schools (24% of all the schools surveyed) said their involvement in the program was limited to selection and referral of students. A further four secondary schools which had students attending a program had not referred these students. In these cases, students found out about the program themselves, or were referred direct by Melbourne Citymission programs.

Primary schools had much closer links with the programs than secondary schools. In addition to referring and selecting students, many were involved in Advisory Committees, used other Melbourne Citymission services, or liaised with programs on student progress.

The difficulty we experienced engaging secondary schools in the evaluation, suggests that some of the schools we sought unsuccessfully to interview probably did not have direct involvement with the program.

Partnerships with parents (15) were difficult to achieve, and the two secondary programs questioned whether this was a relevant goal for them.

The Brunswick Learning Club coordinator saw developing relationships with parents as important. She aimed to support their involvement in their children's learning, and to reduce their levels of anxiety, by suggesting learning activities and strategies.

The Broadmeadows Learning Club coordinator also aimed to develop links with parents but experienced difficulty achieving this in a community characterised by high levels of disadvantage and stress within families.

The Connect-Ed Tutoring Program coordinator pointed out that some students enrolled in the program have disrupted relationships with their families, and that the program respects these situations. Western Tutoring students were also perceived by the coordinator as not needing parental support for learning in most cases.

30. *Ibid.*, p.29

31. *More help for
refugee students*
Victorian Budget
08–09 Refugee
Fact Sheet 2/5/08

Implications for the LSP sector

Our evaluation found that schools were very positive about the four LSPs and saw them as a useful resource for some students. However we also confirmed the finding of our survey of community-managed LSPs that developing partnerships with schools is difficult. Both schools and programs in our evaluation acknowledged the need for closer partnerships, but they were often at a loss as to how to achieve this.

Our evaluation, in line with research by the Refugee Education Partnership Project suggests that a systemic approach is needed.³⁰ The Western Metropolitan Region coordinated trial provides an opportunity to explore a different model that will allow community-managed LSPs to retain operational independence within a systemic framework built around schools. Regional coordination of both school and community based Learning Support Programs will support the development of increased linkages with mainstream school programs.³¹

5.5 Funding for sustainability

Our evaluation indicates that programs need consistent funding and nurturing over a period of time to achieve quality. Differences in the extent to which Melbourne Citymission programs achieved the principles partly reflected their stage of development. Brunswick Learning Club and Western Tutoring Program both achieved the majority of the principles listed. Both have been operating for longer than the Broadmeadows Learning Club. Connect-Ed, whilst in operation for a reasonably long time, has altered its program model several times and until recently has lacked a dedicated coordinator.

The issue of funding for sustainability is critical for the LSP sector and is considered under **Future Actions** below.

6. Future Actions

The LSP sector has emerged and grown significantly in recent years, but needs more support from government. Although much has been done without infrastructure support, this limits what can be achieved and is not sustainable.

Community organisations are filling the gap to improve educational outcomes for students at risk of disengaging from school. One stark example of this was provided in the 2006 mapping survey that preceded this report. In that study, Melbourne Citymission learned of a community arts organisation that branched out from hip hop classes to providing a homework club at the behest of local schools struggling to stem the flow of Polynesian students dropping out. Melbourne Citymission recommends the following actions to further strengthen the community-managed LSP sector:

Funding for sustainability

1. We recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) considers how funding support could be provided to the community-managed LSP sector, to ensure program sustainability. **Our experience indicates that LSPs cost between \$1000–1500 per student each year. Relatively small amounts of funding can achieve significant outcomes for participating students and reduce their risk of long-term disadvantage.**

As our *Profile* showed, community-managed LSPs experience significant difficulty securing adequate funding, limiting their capacity for forward planning and reducing their effectiveness. None of the four Melbourne Citymission programs included in this evaluation had recurrent funding and none had an adequate budget. The use of internal and external philanthropic funding to maintain community-managed Learning Support Programs is not sustainable in the long term.

2. Although funding has recently been announced to support the coordination of homework programs for refugee students, the community-managed LSP sector is meeting the needs of a wider group of disadvantaged students. These needs also require funding support.

32. Victorian Government (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: School Reform Discussion Paper*, Melbourne, April 2008 p.15

33. 'Student study centres part of \$900m plan' in the *Herald Sun*, 19 February 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21811,21247463-661,00.html>

Systemic reform

1. Community-managed LSPs need to be recognised as a complementary social and learning support strategy for at-risk students of all ages to prevent their disengagement from school. In the current context, LSPs are essential for these at-risk students because the education system is not meeting their needs.
2. The community-managed LSP sector and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development need to work in partnership to further develop LSPs to provide additional support to children outside of traditional classroom settings. In the recent School Reform Discussion Paper, the Victorian Government recognised the value of partnerships between schools, families, and local communities. These partnerships can smooth transition points and improve student outcomes, particularly for schools 'where low socioeconomic background and other forms of disadvantage continue to have a negative impact on student outcomes and perpetuate gaps in attainment.'³² **Melbourne Citymission believes that LSPs provide a good opportunity for schools to work in partnership with community organisations in order to enhance learning outcomes for disadvantaged students.**
3. Systemic reform should include strengthened liaison between schools and programs. One component of this could be ensuring that individual support plans for students participating in programs are informed by Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).
4. Further coordinated development of the sector should take into account the sector's experience to date and what has been learned about the critical features which make LSPs successful.
5. The LSP sector's experience in working with disadvantaged children outside of school settings should also inform strategies to address the issues within schools and families which result in some children falling behind, and to build a more inclusive education system. These could include enhanced provision of 1–1 support within the classroom, and increased resources for literacy and numeracy programs.
6. The Victorian Government, as part of the COAG National Reform Agenda on literacy and numeracy, recently proposed the introduction of homework centres to provide tutoring support.³³ The form these centres would take is not clear and it is important that learning from the existing LSP sector informs their development.

Program development

1. LSPs should incorporate the following key principles identified in this report:

Program purpose and inputs

A clear purpose

- A clearly articulated purpose which is informed by stakeholder experience
- A clearly defined target population which reflects identified needs

Good coordination arrangements

- A paid, dedicated coordinator position
- An appropriate location in relation to other organisational programs, to facilitate support to the LSP, including access to relevant expertise

Sufficient resources

- An adequate and recurrent budget
- Sufficient tutor numbers to provide 1–1 support where needed
- Access to an appropriate venue (probably outside of school settings)
- Access to appropriate resources to support learning

Program model & operation

- A referral process and delivery arrangements (timing, frequency and location) which facilitate access by the intended student population
- Referrals which provide sufficient information, and ongoing liaison with referrers (mostly but not exclusively schools)
- High quality tutor recruitment, training and matching processes
- Program activities and approach which meets student needs— eg. for an informal approach to learning or 1–1 support and which supports school learning
- Processes to ensure tutors are matched appropriately with students (where relevant)
- Processes for evaluating student outcomes and adjusting the program

Program partnerships

- Partnerships with schools which promote additional benefits (eg. access by schools and community organisations to each others' resources) and ensure continuing alignment of programs with school objectives
- Partnerships with parents (where appropriate).

2. Our research into Melbourne Citymission programs and those provided by other organisations has shown that the LSP sector includes a range of program models. Programs operate in a variety of venues, both within and outside of school settings, and vary in their activities and in the use of 1–1 or group approaches. We recommend that this diversity within the LSP sector be maintained, since it allows for the needs of diverse student groups and ages to be met.
3. Even without major systemic reform, there are a number of strategies that could be implemented now to support the LSP sector and improve quality. For example, DEECD could consider options such as making the online website for teachers available to LSPs, and ensuring that teachers have input into tutor training.

7. Conclusion

This report contributes to the evidence base and policy debate regarding the role of LSPs as an early intervention initiative and a complementary strategy for at-risk students.

Students attending the four Melbourne Citymission Learning Support Programs achieved significant improvements across a range of indicators.

The program models described in this report are similar to those in the LSPs managed by other community organisations that we identified in the first stage of this research.

In the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne alone, we conservatively estimate there are 1,300 participants in community-run LSPs, most of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our findings on student outcomes, and the anecdotal feedback provided by LSPs for our *Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne*, suggests that this sector is achieving significant outcomes for children whose needs are not being met within the education system.

However, further gains could be achieved if governments took a more proactive approach to supporting the future development and sustainability of LSPs, as has occurred in the UK. We welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with government and with other providers of LSPs towards this goal.

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Appendix 1: An Overview of Melbourne Citymission's Learning Support Programs

Programs not included in the evaluation

Northcote Homework Support Group

The Northcote Homework Support Group was established in 2004 by Melbourne Citymission to assist the children of parents with a disability who were utilising the Melbourne Citymission Disability Case Management program. While the participants may also have learning difficulties or disabilities they all attend mainstream schools but have no access to additional support within the education system. The Disability Case Management team generally refers participant families although referrals have also been received from local schools.

The aim of this Homework Support Group is to assist the children in the areas of literacy and numeracy and to provide them with an appropriate study environment and 1-1 assistance with their homework. It operates at the Northcote Library and the participants can access all the services at the Library i.e. computers, books, multimedia resources etc. Melbourne Citymission funds the operation of this group using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding. It is compelled, on a yearly basis, to ask the City of Darebin to waive the room hire fee at the Library. Transport to and from the group is provided due to the particular complexities associated with the families utilising this group.

Hume Learning Club

The PS Child Support Group for Parents of Children with Hidden Disabilities has been based at Orana Family Services for approximately four years. Members of the group attended Melbourne Citymission's Northern Parent Support Program (NPSP) launch of the 'Toolkit for Support Groups' in 2004 and at the launch expressed concern about the need for more inclusive education for children with special needs in mainstream schools. The spokesperson for the group then approached the NPSP to seek advice on the feasibility of the parents receiving training in supporting their children with their homework. While this training has not eventuated, funds were secured to operate a homework group for the children.

Funding for the program came initially from both the Uniting Church and Melbourne Citymission. Melbourne Citymission has continued to fund the group using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding.

Hume Learning Club is now in its third year of operation and operates at the Hume Global Learning Centre, which includes a library. Melbourne Citymission is required to pay a room hire fee.

The participant group has broadened since its inception but great care has been taken to maintain its focus on children with identified learning difficulties. Many of the participants have to travel a fair distance to attend the group. This has meant that some of the parents have stayed at the Global Learning Centre while the group has been running. This has had the unexpected benefit of the parents creating an informal social group.

Reservoir East Primary School Afterschool Club

Melbourne Citymission is currently working in partnership with Reservoir East Primary School. In discussions with the principal and vice principal, as well as via a survey of families, it became evident that a homework group would be of benefit to a number of students in the middle years at the school. Due to the complex needs of the children attending the Afterschool Club, homework is a secondary focus. It is seen as a key opportunity for the participants to receive individual attention and support, as well as the personal interest of an adult in a safe environment. Participants were chosen by the principal and vice principal. The group commenced in 2006 and is currently funded by Melbourne Citymission using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding.

Programs included in the evaluation

Brunswick Learning Club

The Brunswick Learning Club was developed in 2005 as a collaboration between Melbourne Citymission, Brunswick North Primary School, Brunswick North West Primary School, Brunswick South West Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School.

Melbourne Citymission and the psychologist attached to these schools worked together to establish a homework group in the Brunswick area to support children with a diagnosed or undiagnosed specific learning difficulty or learning disorder. Melbourne Citymission and the relevant schools successfully sought funding from the Moreland School Focussed Youth Service and the Club became operational in August 2005.

An Advisory Group comprising the schools principals, school psychologist, Melbourne Citymission staff and School Focused Youth Services staff oversaw the implementation and direction of this group. The School Focussed Youth Service funding ceased in June 2006. Melbourne Citymission has continued to operate the program since then using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding. The Brunswick Learning Club operates from Melbourne Citymission's offices in Brunswick.

The Advisory Group decided to hold the Learning Club at Melbourne Citymission because it wanted to provide different learning experiences for the children as a counterpoint to the formal school environment. It was also thought that it might act as a link for some parents to access services at Melbourne Citymission.

During the first two years of the program, referrals were made by the school psychologist or by schools directly, but since then some referrals have been made by other Melbourne Citymission programs or by parents themselves.

Broadmeadows Learning Club

Melbourne Citymission is actively involved in the Broadmeadows Community Neighbourhood Renewal initiative. Through this involvement the need for a homework club, as part of a suite of programs and activities was identified as a key initiative by the local primary schools, Campmeadows Primary School and Meadowbank Primary School. A homework group for the two schools commenced in Term 3, 2006. The Principals of both schools select participants.

Melbourne Citymission, Broadmeadows Community Neighbourhood Renewal, Campmeadows Primary School and Meadowbank Primary School successfully sought funding from the Hume School Focussed Youth Service. The funding was for a year until 30 June 2007 and since then Melbourne Citymission has continued to operate the program using a mix of financial resources including philanthropic trust funding.

Western Tutoring Program

The program was first established in 1996 as a small support group aimed at young women at secondary school who were experiencing difficulties with their studies. The program arose out of a need identified from local schools and youth workers with a focus on encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop stronger learning skills.

In 2006 forty-six students enrolled in the program, with a regular attendance of thirty students each week. The majority of students are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many have refugees experiences that have disrupted their education. Some students have experienced or witnessed torture or trauma, which can contribute to personal difficulties with settlement in a new country and adjustment to the Australian education system.

The tutoring program offers students the extra support needed to understand the curriculum; to organise their schoolwork, assist with homework and study; and help prepare for exams including VCE.

The Invergowrie Foundation has funded the program for ten years, with the main budget cost being payments to the tutors who are generally university students. The program is run at Melbourne Citymission Footscray offices. Student feedback collected in previous years before the evaluation described in this report, has shown that participants gain through increased confidence and self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved language skills and better adjustment to their new country.

Connect-Ed Tutoring Program

The homework program was established in mid 2005 to support disadvantaged students with their VCE studies within the central City area. In the first year there were seventeen sessions held with an average of three or four tutors (university students) assisting eighteen participants. The program is now based on a 1-1 volunteer tutoring model with weekly sessions at the City Library.

Appendix 2: Example Data Instrument: Tutor Feedback Form



Evaluation of Learning Support Programs

Tutor Feedback Form

Student name:

School:

Term:

We are seeking *your* assessment on progress made by the above student in learning skills, development and/or academic achievement at the end of this term.

1. Please list the **activities, tasks or specific learning support** provided to your student.

2. Overall, how **useful** has the program been to your student's development, learning or academic achievement?

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---|
| Very useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Not very useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| No use at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |

3. How has the program **benefited your student**? Please describe with specific examples.

4. Please consider the following list of indicators and provide **your opinion** on the student's progress.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>{circle scale response for each indicator}</i>										<i>{tick box}</i>	
	Progress this term										<i>Can't say</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
	<i>No improvement</i>					<i>Great improvement</i>						
<i>Social skills</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Behaviour at program</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Self-confidence</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Homework completion & standard</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Learning skills/strategies</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Academic performance</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Interest & commitment to learning</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Are there any **unmet needs or learning issues** for this student that might be addressed next term?
Please describe.

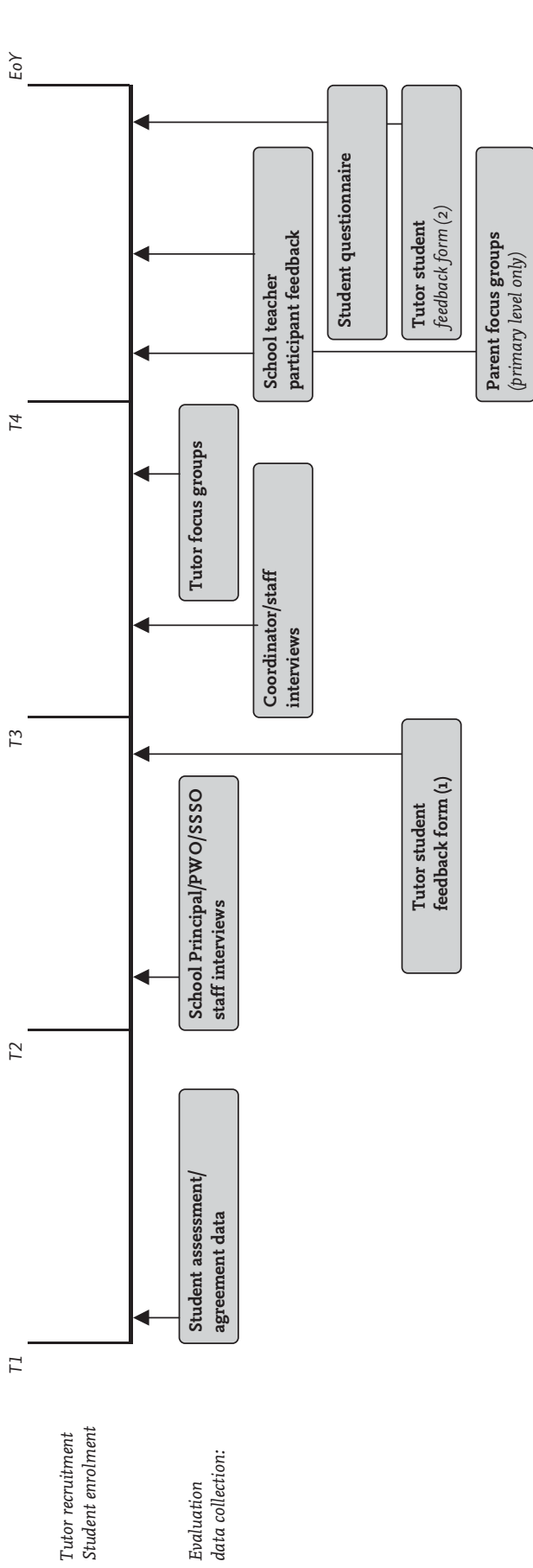
6. Finally, do you have any **other comments** to make about this student's participation in the program?

Many thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. This feedback is greatly appreciated and will greatly help in the evaluation of Melbourne Citymission's learning support programs.

Please give this completed form to the program coordinator. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact Michael Horn (8625-4468) or Anne Pate (8625-4469) at the Research & Social Policy Unit, Melbourne Citymission.

Appendix 3: Summary schedule for data collection

Summary schedule for data collection



Key tasks:

- DEECD and school approvals
- Data variables added to program information collection
- Information included in mail-outs to schools for tutors
- Commitment from tutors to complete end of term feedback forms
- Training for tutors
- Monitor for exiting students to complete questionnaire
- Observation through the year
- Secondary data on program operations through the year
- Information provided to parents and consent sought to approach school
- Follow up with students re exam results



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