

A Profile of Learning Support Programs in North-West Melbourne

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Melbourne Citymission

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Melbourne Citymission
Building Inclusive Communities

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in North-West Melbourne**

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Acknowledgements

Melbourne Citymission is undertaking an innovative evaluation of four of its seven Learning Support Programs during 2007. This first report has been written to document the findings from a survey of 33 community-based programs operating in the northern and western metropolitan regions of Melbourne in 2006. The survey was undertaken to document the growth and extent of the range of programs that aim to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students and their commitment to learning.

The authors would like to acknowledge the vital contribution to this survey of the 33 participating organisations. Melbourne Citymission would like to record its appreciation to the Refugee Education Partnership Project, its auspice Foundation House and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues for their permission to use materials and knowledge from their earlier work on Learning Support Programs targeting refugees in Melbourne.

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Daniel Marshall	Department of Education
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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's aim is 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:

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

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.

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Executive Summary

During the 2007 school year, Melbourne Citymission will be evaluating four of the seven Learning Support Programs (LSPs) it provides in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. Learning Support Programs offer out-of-school hours tutoring or homework assistance with the aim of improving educational outcomes for students of all ages.

As part of the groundwork for this study, Melbourne Citymission conducted a mapping survey of community-managed LSPs in northern and western Melbourne in the latter part of 2006. This audit has sought to build on earlier research undertaken by the Refugee Education Partnership Project, which examined learning support for refugee and new migrant students across Melbourne.

This first Melbourne Citymission report documents the profile of learning support programs operating in the northern and western regions; provides an overview of the different service models and assesses the growth of LSPs in the community sector. It provides context for the broader 2007 study and will provide a point of comparison for the four Melbourne Citymission programs being evaluated.

A total of 33 programs took part in the survey undertaken by telephone interview during fourth term 2006. These programs are delivered by 20 different auspice agencies and community support organisations.

Enrolments in 2006 totalled over 1,300 students across all ages, with a regular attendance of over 800 students. The majority offer 1 session per week lasting between 1 and 2 hours. Whilst the longest running program commenced in 1992, nearly half the programs have been running for only 2 years.

Key findings:

- The programs operate in 26 suburbs ranging from inner city Melbourne, North Fitzroy and Carlton through Footscray, Reservoir and Coburg to outer suburbs such as Hoppers Crossing, St Albans and Wyndhamvale;
- The majority (74%) include primary school age children in their sessions;
- Half (52%) cater specifically for students from a refugee or CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) background whilst 42% accept any student needing educational support;
- Average enrolment in 2006 has been 42 students with an average attendance of 27 students;
- Programs are run out of a wide range of venues, including community halls or neighbourhood houses (25%), on school premises (22% - all primary schools), municipal libraries (19%) and at the offices of community agencies (19%);
- A total of 43 staff were employed across the 33 programs in 2006;
- The majority of programs cited a 1:1 tutor-student ratio as the ideal form of assistance in sessions, but in practice most adopted a mixed approach of one-to-one tutoring and group activities in sessions;

- A total of 1273 volunteers were assisting programs during 2006, mainly as tutors. The median number of volunteers was 10 in each program;
- Only a minority (30%) were in receipt of specific funding from government sources, with most reliant on internal agency resources and philanthropic trust monies or donations.

A recurring theme raised by LSP providers has been the importance of the tutors as positive role models for students. Tutors come from diverse backgrounds themselves, but the majority have tertiary qualifications or are university students. Their interest in and support to students clearly fills a gap in the latter's social development. LSP providers stressed the benefits of these relationships on student confidence, self-esteem and their commitment to learning.

Seven LSPs (21%) said that they measured student achievement whilst the same number had undertaken an evaluation of their program in the past. The low level of formal evaluation is reasonable considering the developmental nature of many programs and their lack of recurrent resources. **This finding supports the case for a comprehensive evaluation to document outcomes and inform the next phase in program development.**

The outcomes evidence that is available suggests that LSPs are effective in making a substantial contribution to learning outcomes for disadvantaged students. This is supported by case study material.

Despite the resource constraints mentioned by many providers and their reliance on one-off community funding, the majority (79%) considered their program to be sustainable in the long term.

Based on our audit in the northern and western regions, it is evident that there has been substantial growth in the availability of community-based learning support over the past few years in Melbourne. These programs are playing an important role in strengthening attachment to learning, leading to better education outcomes.

The rapid growth of these insecurely funded education support initiatives within the community sector raises questions about the capacity of the education system to ensure engagement and retention of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The recent development of this community-based response should stimulate policy debate and discussion to understand more fully why there has been such growth, where LSPs fit in the broader suite of formal education programs and how governments might take a more proactive approach to supporting their future development and sustainability, as has occurred in the UK.

The growth in this sector, the diversity of auspice organisations and range of support models evident from our audit also suggests an imperative for information exchange to ensure that best practice approaches are shared to maximise quality and outcomes. The Melbourne Citymission evaluation to be completed in 2007 will offer a contribution to this objective.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

During the 2007 school year, Melbourne Citymission will be evaluating four of the seven Learning Support Programs (LSPs) it provides in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne.

As part of the groundwork for this study, Melbourne Citymission has conducted an audit of community-managed LSPs in northern and western Melbourne in the latter part of 2006.

This first report documents the profile of these programs, provides an overview of the different service models and assesses the growth of LSPs in the community sector. It provides context for the broader 2007 study and will provide a point of comparison for the four Melbourne Citymission programs being evaluated.

1.2. Learning Support Programs – Aims and Objectives

In general, Learning Support Programs offer out-of-school hours tutoring or homework assistance with the aim of improving educational outcomes for students of all ages. The goal of most LSPs is to prevent the disengagement and early school leaving of children in disadvantaged circumstances. This is achieved by:

- assisting them to catch up with their learning
- instilling enjoyment of learning and commitment to school
- strengthening learning skills to perform more effectively in the school environment, and
- encouraging greater support for learning by their parents.

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 focus 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 levels. LSPs aimed at older secondary students tend to be more focussed on tuition in specific subjects or on exam 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 levels by community support agencies outside the formal education system.

Whilst the service models vary significantly, these programs have been introduced to specifically address the educational needs of children in disadvantaged circumstances.

Many of these new 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.

Melbourne Citymission has developed and operated a range of LSPs in the northern and western regions of metropolitan Melbourne over the past 10 years.

The Northcote Homework Support Group is a typical example of how an LSP develops and operates. The group was started in 2003 after Melbourne Citymission's Disability Case Management Team, which provides support to families where one or both parents have an intellectual disability, had identified that some of the children were falling behind in their education, impacting on their self-esteem and social development. These families are dependant on Disability Support Pension as their main income source. The parents often have limited education and struggle to support their children with learning, such as regular reading. These children do not qualify for specialist educational support.

Children in the group are aged between 6 and 13 years. A limited review of the support group after 2 years indicated substantial benefits including:

- Increased confidence of the children
- Increased motivation and interest in school, and
- Positive experience gained through the relationship with their volunteer tutor (Melbourne Citymission 2004).

The success of this initial program and growing community needs led Melbourne Citymission (North Western Region) to establish additional homework support groups, based on the same model with local variations.

The model includes the employment of a teacher as coordinator, a support worker and volunteer tutors who work on a one-to-one basis with participants (middle to senior primary 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 share their experiences and act as positive role models. Participants do not pay fees and each group is limited to a maximum of 15 students.

An overview of the LSPs operated by Melbourne Citymission in 2006 is provided in Appendix 1.

1.3. Context for the Evaluation of Learning Support Programs

Growth:

The growth in Melbourne Citymission's interventions in the area of education and learning have been driven by local community needs and aim to give children in disadvantaged circumstances the best possible future. Melbourne Citymission's developments are not unique in Melbourne. There is emerging evidence of substantial growth in the extent and range of LSPs over the past decade.

A survey of LSPs by the Refugee Education Partnership Project (REPP) documented 51 programs across Melbourne catering specifically for refugees and new migrants (Luizzi 2006). A proportion of these programs are provided by state high schools at school facilities after school by teaching staff. However, two-thirds of those surveyed in 2005 were community-provided programs operating outside the formal school system.

This study was limited to projects supporting refugees and new migrant students. **However, it indicates a significant and increasing level of resources provided by community support organisations that are filling a much-needed gap in the mainstream education system.**

Benefits and outcomes:

Recent preliminary analysis of one Melbourne Citymission LSP has shown very positive results across both primary and secondary age groups (MCM 2004; Westland 2005). An earlier limited evaluation by Hanover focussed on children in families who had experienced homelessness: it found significant positive outcomes for tutoring program participants (Horn and Parkinson 2004).

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' (MacBeath 1995:4).

More recently, the Brisbane City Council has undertaken a project to document the success and challenges facing homework clubs in their jurisdiction. Fifteen programs were documented in their 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 (Brisbane City Council 2005).

Our review of the literature has concluded that no substantive evaluation has been undertaken in Australia to measure the outcomes for participating children and their families.

Despite the benefits attributed to the growing number of LSPs, a well-considered outcomes evaluation is now required to inform their further development and ensure their effectiveness.

Program funding:

None of the Melbourne Citymission's LSPs receive recurrent funding from the Education Department. They rely on internal resources (donations), grants from Trusts, or one-off submissions to local or state governments, such as the School Focussed Youth Service (DHS). A common theme reported in recent studies is the insecurity and inadequacy of funding for LSPs (for example Brisbane City Council 2005).

The rapid growth of these insecurely funded education support initiatives within the community sector raises questions about the capacity of the education system to ensure engagement and retention of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Victorian Government has committed itself to significant improvements in education outcomes as measured by higher retention and Year 12 completion rates. However, the growth in LSPs outside the mainstream education system suggests that too many children from disadvantaged circumstances at primary and secondary levels are struggling to keep up with their peers and stay attached to school.

This view is supported by the range of data on the stubbornly high levels of poor education achievement in some parts of our community (for example Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2006; Melbourne Citymission 2005). This is perhaps another indicator that more emphasis needs to be placed 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.

Melbourne Citymission's evaluation project:

In the latter part of 2006 Melbourne Citymission approached philanthropic trusts seeking financial support to enable a full evaluation of its LSPs to be undertaken in 2007.

The overall aim of the evaluation is to measure the extent to which LSPs are effective in improving the broad educational outcomes for participants. A priority for this project is the measurement of participant outcomes. This emphasis on outcomes is important. Melbourne Citymission's literature review has revealed a lack of robust data on program outcomes.

The earlier study undertaken by the Refugee Education Partnership Project provides valuable insights into the needs of refugee and migrant students, and ways to strengthen the capacity and skills of LSPs supporting those particular population groups.

The Melbourne Citymission research will round out the picture by gathering quantitative and qualitative data on participant outcomes, using four Melbourne Citymission programs as a basis for evaluation.

The evaluation framework (Appendix 3) has been designed to enable critical reflection on the service models operated by four selected Melbourne Citymission programs in order to disseminate the key elements of good practice, based on program experience and measured outcomes, as part of a commitment to quality improvement.

The evaluation will also assess the sustainability of LSPs generally and the potential to further replicate best practice principles in other community settings. It will also seek to improve community understanding of the role of LSPs in the education system, informing policy reform to better integrate education and community support services.

Mapping survey of community managed learning support programs:

Developmental work undertaken as part of this project has shown that there is substantial variance in the support models operated by provider organisations across this sector. This in part reflects the individualised nature of their evolution. In recent years, programs have sprung up across Melbourne as a diverse range of community organisations and church groups respond to local needs.

It was considered important to have an updated profile of community-managed learning support programs operating within Melbourne Citymission's geography as context for the broader outcomes evaluation in 2007. Given that the earlier REPP survey was aimed at programs supporting refugee and asylum seeker children, a further mapping survey was required to provide a more complete profile of LSPs catering to other student groups.

The Melbourne Citymission mapping survey complemented the REPP by:

- updating the list of operational LSPs since the REPP survey in 2005;
- extending the coverage of the audit to all LSPs in the north and western suburbs of Melbourne; and
- focusing the audit on community managed LSPs, rather than school provided assistance.

The mapping survey is therefore considered an important first stage of the broader evaluation project. This report provides our analysis and findings from the mapping survey.

2. Survey Methodology

2.1 Objective

The mapping survey has sought to document the extent and nature of LSPs provided by community organisations in north and western metropolitan Melbourne. The specific questions to be addressed were:

- i) How many programs were operating in 2006?
- ii) How long have these programs been operating?
- iii) Who do they assist?
- iv) What are key elements of their service model?
- v) How are they funded and resourced?
- vi) How sustainable are they?
- vii) Are any closing at the end of 2006?
- viii) What outcomes are being achieved?

2.2. Scope

The scope of the survey was defined by the following criteria:

- Programs operating in, or taking students from within the northern and western metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne (Department of Education boundaries)
- Programs supporting primary or secondary school students that are managed and run by organisations or support groups. School organised out-of-hours tuition sessions and parent organised home tutoring classes were not included
- LSPs include out of hours study support programs that are neither compulsory nor a part of the school curriculum. LSPs may include homework clubs, learning clubs, after hours groups or tutoring programs
- Breakfast clubs and recreational groups were not included as their primary aim is to foster the social, recreational or personal well being of students. Whilst these goals are clearly linked to school attachment and educational achievement, these programs do not provide structured learning opportunities either to complete homework, prepare for exams or catch up to expected education levels.

2.3. Method

The Refugee Education Partnership Project undertook a survey of 51 LSPs in 2005 to document those programs that include refugees or asylum seeker students. Foundation House and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues generously provided their database to Melbourne Citymission as a starting point for developing a full list of community-managed programs in the defined geography and scope for the audit. Since the time of their survey, an additional 20 contacts had been added to this database.

The approach adopted for the survey comprised:

- i) Extract from the REPP dataset a list of contacts of all eligible programs that operate within N&W metropolitan regions;
- ii) Undertake a telephone survey during 4th term 2006 to obtain an up to date profile of all eligible LSPs;
- iii) Use a range of communication strategies to build a complete list of LSP's through local councils, schools, libraries, other LSPs and via the Homework Help Network;
- iv) Conduct additional survey interviews with newly discovered programs; and
- v) Data entry & analysis.

Each of the 71 programs on the REPP database were contacted by phone to check on their current circumstances (ie still operational in 2006), confirm eligibility and to seek their participation in the Melbourne Citymission survey. Initial review of the database determined that 15 of the contacts were not in the northern or western regions. These programs were not included in the mapping survey.

The survey questionnaire was derived from the original REPP with permission. A number of revisions to individual questions were made, and several new questions were added, to reflect the broader scope and purpose of the Melbourne Citymission project (See Appendix 4 for the full Questionnaire). The interviews were all conducted by one person – Deborah Fewster, who was undertaking her student placement within the Research & Social Policy Unit – during 4th term 2006. The interviewer phoned the named contact on the REPP/CMYI database to explain the purpose of the survey and, if consent was given, to undertake the survey or make another time to phone back when convenient. In cases when the named contact was no longer with the organisation, the interviewer sought to make contact with the coordinator or team leader responsible for the learning support program. The interviews averaged 20 minutes.

2.4. Survey participation

The initial follow up with the contacts list extracted from the REPP/CMYI database found that 22 of the 56 programs were provided by schools and were thus out of scope for this project which is focussed on community managed and provided LSPs (see above discussion on scope).

As stated above, 15 programs operated outside the northern and western regions of Melbourne.

The communications strategy yielded an additional 6 programs - all of whom participated in the survey.

Several eligible programs could not be interviewed for the reasons described in Table 1 below. A final total of 33 programs were interviewed.

Table 1: Program eligibility and participation in the survey (October 2006)

Program category	Number	%
Out of scope:		
Out of N&W region	15	
School provided	22	
No longer operating (Oct 06)	2	
Advocacy group (not a provider)	2	
In scope:		
Interviewed programs from REPP database	27	75.0
Additional interviewed programs via communications strategy	6	16.7
Unable to be contacted or interviewed	3	8.3
Total of eligible programs	36	100.0

2.5. Data entry

Primary data collected through the survey was entered into Excel and then imported into SPSS for analysis following appropriate coding by the researcher of responses and cleaning of data. Quotes from open-ended questions were transcribed by the researcher to inform and explain the quantitative data.

2.6. Ethics

Informed verbal consent to participate was obtained from program coordinators or members of staff prior to conducting the interview, after the purpose and context for the survey had been fully explained.

Research materials relating to participant responses are stored in accordance with Privacy Legislation provisions. Computer files are password protected and contain no identifying information. Copies of the findings will be made available to participating programs.

2.7. Limitations

A conscientious attempt has been made to include in the audit all learning support programs operating in the defined geography in 2006 and which met the eligibility criteria defined for the evaluation. However, it is acknowledged that there may be a few programs that we did not find out about through the 'word of mouth' approach we adopted.

It should be noted that there is no registration process or institutionalised support structure that would provide an up to date listing of all such programs in Victoria.

We also point out that the survival of many of these programs is a term-to-term or annual prospect as very few appear to have a stable source of recurrent funds. In carrying out the audit, we discovered that several programs operating in 2005 were no longer operating at the start of 2006 and two more from the database interviewed in October had closed during 2006. Our assessment of growth may be masked to some degree by the possible degree of turnover of programs, which we were unable to quantify through the audit process.

Despite this dynamic pattern we are confident that the final sample of 33 programs provides a representative picture of LSPs not just of the NW region but also across Melbourne. Whilst we cannot be certain that we have a complete audit of LSPs, the extent and coverage of those participating gives a reliable estimate of the level of support now offered to students through this support model.

3. Findings: Profile of Learning Support Programs

3.1. Overview of programs

The 33 programs that took part in the survey are delivered by 20 different auspice agencies and community support organisations. They include:

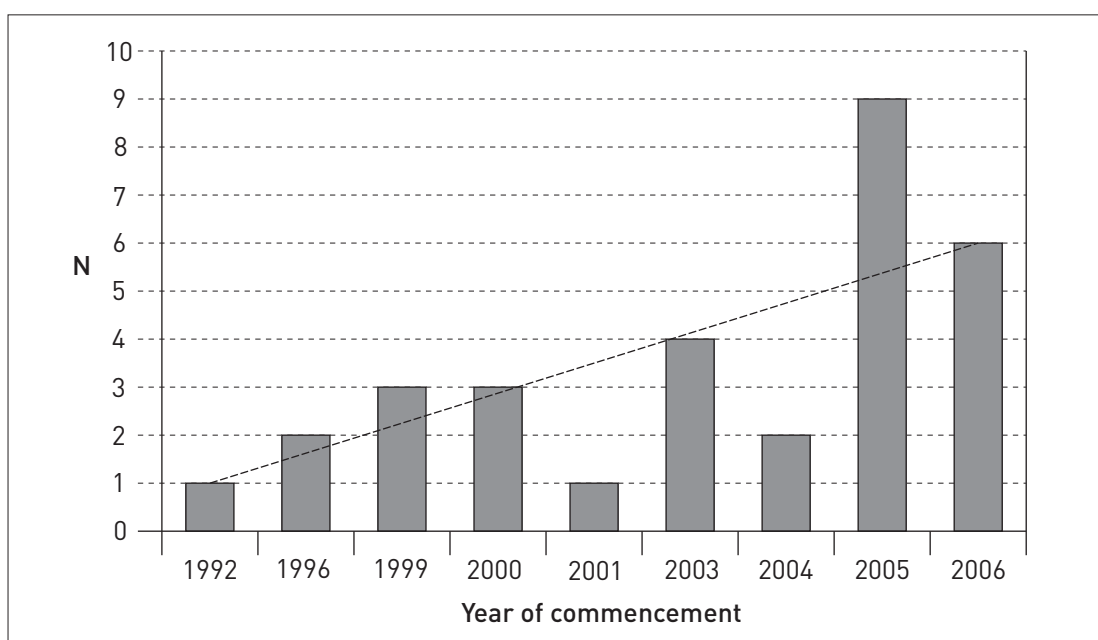
- well-established and relatively well-resourced agencies such as the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and Anglicare;
- local councils and municipal libraries; and
- small, largely volunteer-run, incorporated associations representing emerging migrant communities (such as the Brown Roots Pacific Arts Collective, representing Polynesian communities in Hobsons Bay).

The programs operated in 26 suburbs ranging from inner-city Melbourne, North Fitzroy and Carlton through Footscray, Reservoir and Coburg to outer suburbs such as Hoppers Crossing, St Albans and Wyndhamvale.

In several cases, 2 or 3 programs are based within a single suburb, including Broadmeadows, Carlton, Footscray, North Fitzroy and Reservoir. It should be noted that this geography does not fully represent the catchment for these programs as most accept students attending the range of schools in neighbouring suburbs and municipalities.

Nearly half (48%) of programs have been running for 1 or 2 years (commenced in 2005 or 2006). One third have been operating for between 3 and 6 years, whilst 6 programs commenced before 2000. The longest running program (Meadow Heights Learning Shop) was reported to have commenced in 1992. Two respondents were unable to report when their programs commenced. The profile of program longevity based on year first started is shown in Figure 1. The growth in LSPs especially over the past 2 years is clearly evident.

Figure 1: Community managed LSPs in NW Melbourne: Year of commencement



It should be noted that the above profile does not include any LSPs that may have operated in previous years but discontinued before 2006. It may be possible that some programs operated for a few years in this period but then closed. We did not hear of such cases however, so we are reasonably confident that this profile does represent a real growth in programs in the geography. However, feedback on funding security and sustainability may point to some degree of 'turnover' in programs over time.

3.2. Student profile

The programs surveyed cover a broad range of ages and school grade levels. When first established:

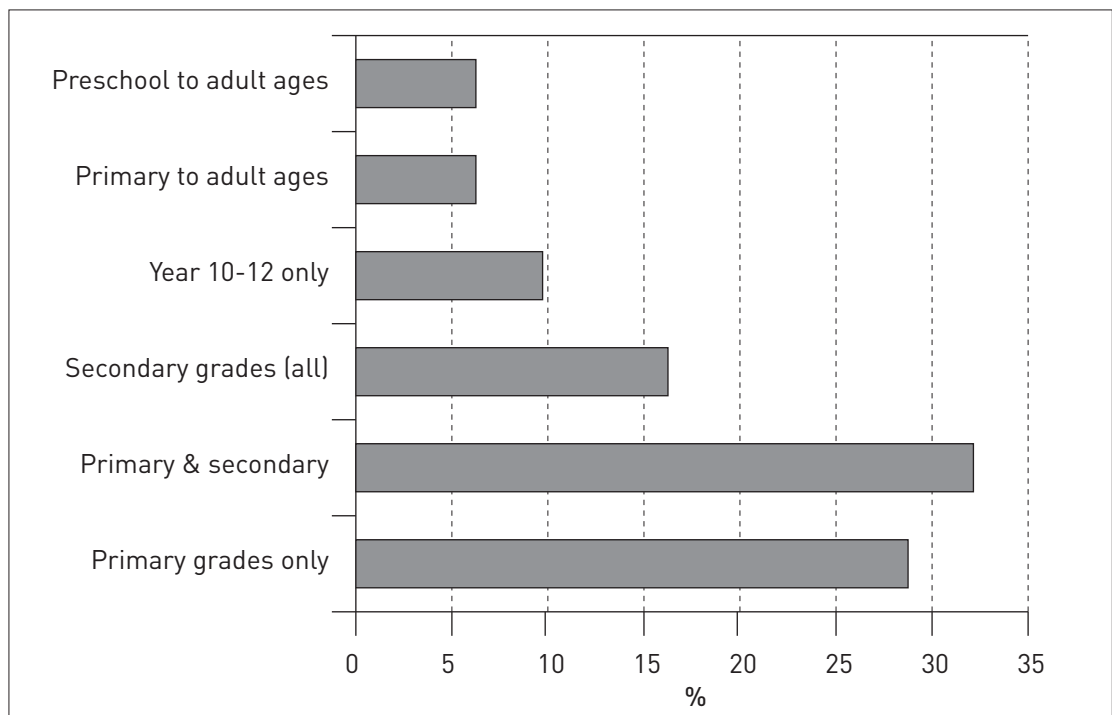
- one third (10 programs) catered for primary and secondary students;
- eight catered for primary students only;
- nine catered for secondary students from Years 7 to 12;
- two catered for senior secondary students only (ie. Years 10 to 12); and
- three catered for preschoolers through to adult learners (predominantly mothers of younger students, needing language support or assistance with TAFE studies).

A number of LSPs (7) reported a change in focus on student ages/year levels over time:

- four broadened their scope (three of these now cater for primary, secondary and adult learners); and
- three narrowed their focus – two programs now focus exclusively on primary students and one focuses exclusively on secondary students.

The student focus of operational LSPs in 2006 is shown in Figure 2 below. The majority (74%) of LSPs include primary school age children in their sessions.

**Figure 2: Community-managed LSPs in NW Melbourne:
Student focus in 2006 (%)**



In terms of student background, half (52%) of the LSPs cater specifically for students from a refugee or CALD background. Thirteen programs (42%) accept any student needing educational support.

Those LSPs focussed on students from CALD backgrounds were more likely to target primary school age children: 44% of these programs focus on CALD background students.

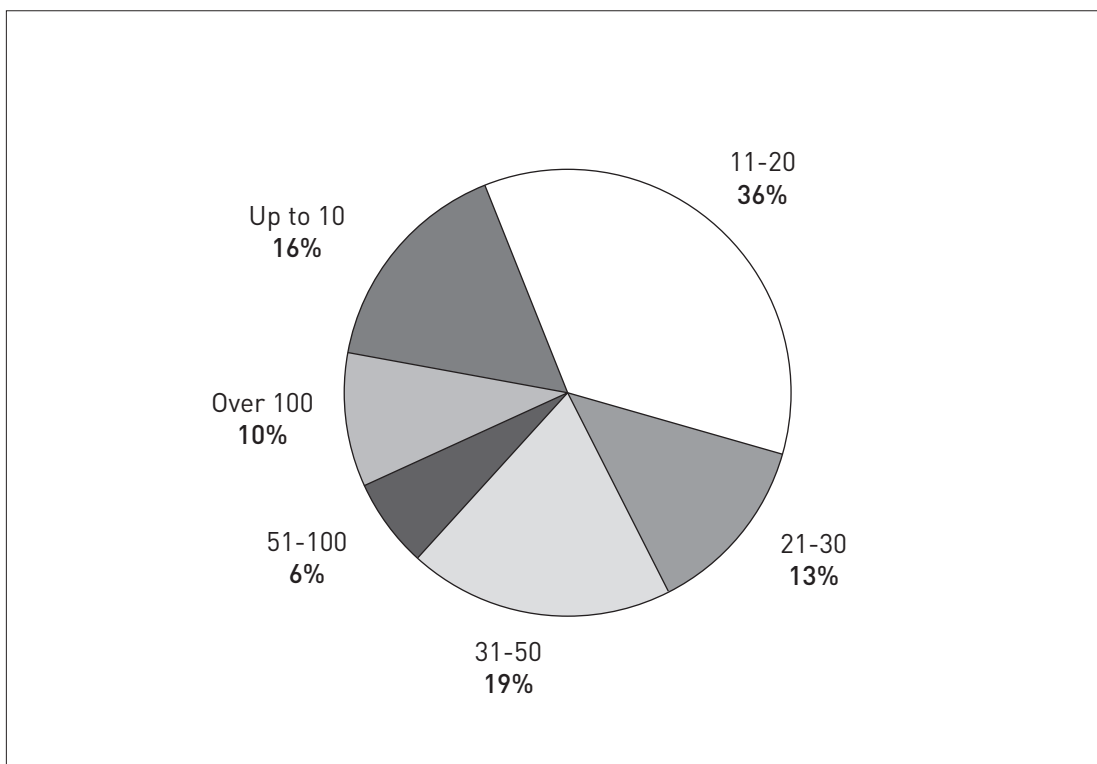
One Melbourne Citymission program in Northcote caters only for students whose parent(s) have disabilities and one St Vincent de Paul-sponsored program is open only to students living in a high-rise public housing estate.

3.3. Program operations

Enrolments

Over 1300 students were enrolled in the 31 LSPs operating at the time of the survey in 2006. There was substantial variation between the LSPs in terms of student enrolments. Some programs cater for as few as three students, while the biggest program attracts 200 students to a single session. The distribution of enrolment numbers in 2006 is shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Community managed LSPs in NW Melbourne:
Student enrolments in 2006 (%)



The median number of students enrolled in 2006 has been 20 (average: 42 students). These figures are based on 31 LSPs as 2 programs had closed during the year.

- Fourteen (14) programs reported a growth in enrolments since start-up. The most significant growth was from eight students to 200 students at the Friday Night Homework Club auspiced by St Vincent de Paul at an inner-city church hall over 10 years;
- Nine (9) reported that enrolment figures had stayed about the same since their program's inception, although two (2) of these programs were turning away new students as there is no space or staff to accommodate any growth; and
- The remaining ten (10) programs were not able to advise how many students were initially enrolled because of incomplete records/staff changeover or because the programs had closed.

The comparison between enrolment numbers at start-up and in 2006 for those programs providing full data is shown in Table 2 below. Although this data shows a substantial five-fold increase in total enrolments, it should be noted that programs commenced operations over a long period (from 1992) and some were unable to report original enrolment figures.

Table 2: Comparison of student enrolments between first year and 2006

Enrolment year	Total number of students	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Number of programs
First year of operation	261	10.4	8.0	7.3	25
2006	1312	42.2	20.0	60.6	31

Subsequent analysis of the data was undertaken excluding the group for which no original enrolment data was available to provide a more reasonable assessment of growth in enrolments for LSPs. The number of enrolments in 2006 was 1006 students across these 25 programs – **a substantial fourfold increase since commencement.**

Attendance

Eleven (11) of the 33 programs distinguished between the number of students 'on the books' and the number who attend regularly. In each of these cases, as would be anticipated, the number of regular attendees was less than the enrolment figure. Given that most of the programs operate 'drop-in' models, the difference was not a concern to providers.

The comparison between enrolment and attendance numbers in 2006 for those programs providing full data is shown in Table 3 below. The total number reported as attending regularly, that is, on a weekly basis, was 819 students. Analysis of this data shows that, on average, attendance rates have been 62% of total enrolments. Whilst we would expect significant weekly variance in attendance rates at program sessions, this percentage provides an informative overall indication of what we consider to be a high average attendance rate.

Interestingly, attendance rates at those LSPs targeting primary school students were significantly higher at 96% compared to 52% across the LSPs focussing on secondary school students. Possible explanations for this difference might include increased responsibilities on parents for attendance by the younger cohort, location of sessions (eg. at schools) and other competing commitments or interests for older students. This finding will be followed up during the main evaluation.

Table 3: Comparison of student enrolments and regular attendees in 2006

Student category	Total number of students	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Number of programs
Enrolments	1312	42.2	20.0	60.6	31
Regular attendees	819	27.3	19.0	36.9	30

Program Model

The great majority of LSPs (74%) offer one session of tuition or support per week. Most sessions last for 1 hour, however some sessions continue for 2 hours. The structure of sessions varies according to the age group of students (for example, primary versus secondary students), the objectives of the program and service model (drop-in versus set times).

Case study: The Edmund Rice Centre

The Edmund Rice Centre runs two drop-in programs: one at St Albans and one at Sunshine. At St Albans, enrolments have grown from four students in 2001 to a present enrolment of 275 students, with 300 volunteers. Between 50 and 60 students attend on weekday sessions, while 20 to 25 attend on weekends.

Enrolments have grown, in part, through word of mouth.

“Once we got a few students from three of the local schools, we got everyone. With St Albans Primary School the Sudanese students almost came across en masse.”

“For the Ethiopian and Tigrayan communities, enrolments grew once trust was built. It’s a safe place for students.”

Parent, peer and/or community support for the program was deemed critical to success. Of those programs that reported an increase in enrolments, the majority cited a 'build-up of trust' with families and local communities as the reason for their growth.

For most LSPs, tutor numbers determine how support is provided to students. For some programs, this is a week-by-week proposition.

The majority of programs cited a 1:1 tutor-student ratio as the ideal form of assistance in sessions and something they aspired to as 'best practice'. In practice, staff reported a mix in the type of support offered during sessions:

- Seven (7) LSPs consistently provide a 1:1 ratio for the whole session;
- Eleven (11) LSPs consistently provide a 1:1 ratio in a group setting – that is, individual support is provided by tutors moving between students around the room;
- Seven (7) of the programs reported that the type of support depends on student numbers and tutor availability – at some sessions it might vary from a 1:1 tutor-student ratio to 1:3; in other sessions group support only may be offered.

The remaining programs are deliberately structured to provide a mix of individual support and group activities (educational games). Two LSPs operate on a group support model – both of which have a focus on primary school students.

As might be expected, the approaches to learning support differ according to the target group across programs. Thus, LSPs working with primary school aged children only were more likely to utilise group activities or a mixed approach in preference to 1:1 individualised tutoring. None of these programs provided 1:1 support exclusively. In comparison, 7 out of 8 LSPs focussed on secondary school age students utilised 1:1 tutoring, even though some also included group activities during sessions.

It should be noted that a 1:1 tutor-student ratio does not necessarily mean one tutor is matched to the same student for the whole year or term – in fact this only occurs at two programs.

The survey sought information on the content of sessions across the programs. Responses indicate that half of the LSPs are fairly flexible about the type of assistance provided to students, in that they provide a mix of homework help and more general support to build study skills determined by student need.

Over one-third however (37%) provide homework support only. To quote one respondent:

'the tutors are not trained to support children with literacy and numeracy concerns. That's what the school is there for. We provide help that can't be provided at home with homework.'

One LSP now provides study skills support only and commented that:

'the homework focus didn't work because the tutor discovered students didn't have basic literacy and numeracy skills. There was no point trying to assist with homework – we needed to get back to basics.'

The remaining programs seek to engage students with group educational activities, supplemented with individual support as required.

LSPs working with older secondary school students were found to focus on specific subject homework and exam preparation, as might be expected, whereas those targeting primary school aged children emphasise general learning support and building commitment to and interest in learning.

Venue and staffing

Programs are run across a wide range of venues, including community halls or neighbourhood houses (25%), on school premises (22% - all primary schools), municipal libraries (19%) and at the offices of community agencies (19%).

Most respondents were neutral when questioned about the effectiveness of the venue or the adequacy of facility resources. Those who ran programs in libraries were the most effusive about their facilities. They were particularly positive about the range of resources available to tutors and students - access to information technology and photocopying was highly valued.

The number of paid staff ranged from 0 to 3 across the LSPs. All but 4 programs (88%) operated with at least 1 paid employee, with nearly half (42%) employing 2 staff. The survey did not seek information on the number of hours worked by paid staff. However, in discussions we found that, whilst many programs employ a casual or part-time coordinator or sessional tutors, a large proportion of paid staff appear to take on responsibility for a LSP in addition to their 'core work' as a librarian, youth worker or community development worker.

A total of 43 staff were employed across the 33 programs. About one-third of the staff had a teaching or education background. The remainder were from a variety of community work backgrounds.

Volunteers

Over 80% of programs used volunteers as tutors. Of the 6 LSPs that did not use volunteers as tutors, four (4) reported this as a deliberate policy. Each of these cited different reasons for this policy, including one local council that preferred to recruit paid tutors to create employment, rather than use volunteers. Occupational health and safety issues and accountability are also particular issues faced by programs.

A total of 1273 volunteers were assisting the programs during 2006, the overwhelming majority of whom were helping as tutors. Several LSPs operated with hundreds of volunteers on their books. However, the median number of volunteers was 10 people in each program (mean of 44 volunteers).

Over one-third of the tutors (38%) are university students and 15% are high school students. A significant 26% have a teaching qualification.

While many programs would not survive without volunteers, agencies frequently cited recruitment, training and retention of volunteers as a time-consuming task, burdened with difficulties. A key issue was the inability of many volunteers to make a long-term or regular commitment to the program due to study, work or family commitments. Comments made by two program staff typify responses on this issue:

'The worst case has been a few weeks where we had one tutor to 10 students.'

'Management of volunteers is a massive job from a risk-management perspective and takes up a lot of time.'

In some cases, volunteers' lack of cultural awareness was a problem and the agencies often lacked the resources to provide volunteers with training:

'Tutors need to be trained. If the schools are going to provide regular tutors, they need to be prepared by the school. Not sure if that happens in a systematic way at the moment.'

That said, program staff overwhelmingly expressed their appreciation for the contributions of volunteers and many cited positive stories of tutor/student interaction.

Case study: Carlton Parkville Youth Services YMCA

Carlton Parkville Youth Services YMCA provides four sessions a week of homework support to primary and secondary students and some adult learners. Participants are largely from Horn of Africa backgrounds and the tutors are all volunteers.

Student-tutor interaction is helping to build relationships across different cultures and sub-cultures:

'Often the tutors are not much older than the students, however, they come from very different backgrounds. The tutors from the residential colleges [at the University of Melbourne] live just down the road from the students, but come from quite privileged backgrounds. It's a very powerful experience for the tutors, but also for the kids.'

3.4. Contact with schools

Twenty-five (81%) of the LSPs said they had contact or a relationship with local schools. The nature and extent of this varied significantly from program to program. In some cases, coordinators or volunteers had established 'excellent' relationships with teachers or welfare coordinators and provided informal feedback to one another on students. In other instances, there was no relationship with teaching staff, but the school was happy to promote the LSP in the school newsletter.

In six instances, LSPs are provided on school premises. The other main link with schools is through referrals of students to individual programs by teaching staff or school Principals. Three-quarters of programs received referrals from schools, with the majority of these receiving referrals on a regular basis.

The following comments from 2 respondents perhaps typify development of relationships with schools over time:

'The program's success in engaging students has encouraged the local primary school to make referrals.'

'Enrolments have increased since the program has been located at a school – it is more accessible for students to attend because they go straight after school on a Tuesday.'

3.5. Funding and expenditure

Respondents were asked for the main source of funding for their program:

- Forty per cent were currently funded through internal agency resources, although it was rare to hear of a dedicated budget for their program;
- Fifteen per cent were funded by local government;
- Fifteen per cent were funded by the State Government: 2 currently have a grant from the School Focussed Youth Service (DHS) and another 3 programs receive other contributions, such as through Neighbourhood Renewal;
- Four (12%) programs receive funding from a philanthropic trust; and
- The remaining programs operate on the basis of local community donations and business support, private donors or corporate sponsors.

From the above it can be seen that only a minority (30%) were in receipt of funding from government sources.

The majority of programs (84%) cited staffing as their main operational cost. Other items specified as their main cost included the venue, student resources (consumables), food, transport and tutors. Police checks and administrative overheads were also often reported by respondents. One LSP (Melbourne Citymission's Footscray Tutoring Program) stated that its main cost was its employment of tutors, who are mainly university students, through the generous long-term support of a philanthropic trust. This program is included in the full evaluation, which will enable some assessment to be made of the benefits or otherwise of using paid tutors.

A recurring theme amongst LSPs were comments about the lack of resources and budget - 'we run on the sniff of an oily rag' or 'we operate on a shoestring budget' typify their response on the subject of funding and costs. It is perhaps indicative of the situation faced by these LSPs that only one coordinator was able to articulate their budget for the year.

Case study: The Wednesday Night Homework Club

The Wednesday Night Tutoring program in Richmond has been operating since 2000. It assists 35 students and has 46 volunteers. It is entirely volunteer run – including its Committee of Management and co-ordination. The tutoring is conducted in homes of participating students.

The program receives funding from St Vincent de Paul for some excursions; the program library is comprised primarily of donations from Dymocks bookstores; and IBM (the employer of one tutor) has provided a grant to fund activity packs (packs of work books) to help the tutors. It has no recurrent resources.

3.6. Sustainability

Respondents were asked if their program was sustainable in the long-term. Twenty-six (79%) of the programs were described as sustainable.

Interestingly, when this issue was explored further, several respondents acknowledged that their answer was not given on the basis of a long-term plan or funding commitment for the program, but on the basis that the organisation (or an individual within the organisation) was 'committed' to or supported the program.

In these cases, at the end of each year, or every few years, the agency needs to find new sources of funding. It is difficult, but somehow most have managed to pull it off so far. As one respondent stated:

'We'll just continue to apply for grants.'

Four reported that their program was not sustainable. One closed in the third term (Victorian Arabic Social Services in Newport) due to funding difficulties. Another in Hoppers Crossing was closed during the year because of low attendance, but the agency (Islamic Women's Welfare Council) replaced it with a program in Lalor. Another agency considered its program was not sustainable in the long-term as:

'The program depends solely on philanthropic funding. The funding comes from [name of Trust] so the sustainability is at risk each year.'

Three LSPs were unsure of their program's future. For example, one program said it would be sustainable if they could convince one of the local schools to take it on. This response is perhaps indicative of the reliance programs have on coordinators and management committees to successfully advocate for one-off resources and support to keep going.

3.7. Program outcomes and benefits

There has been little measurement of student outcomes or program evaluation amongst the LSPs surveyed. This largely comes down to resources – lack of time, money or in-house capability to develop or undertake evaluation work. Another factor is the developmental phase of many LSPs, which have only been operating for one or two years.

Only seven LSPs said that they measured student achievement. Fifteen (48%) relied on informal feedback and discussion to monitor the progress of students. The remaining nine respondents reported that their program did not measure student achievement, but two of these planned to do so.

The respondents were also asked if their program had undertaken an evaluation: 19 LSPs (58%) had not undertaken or been involved in any evaluation. However, seven of these planned to evaluate their program, whilst three reported that they were a new program. Seven stated that they had undertaken an evaluation and another seven relied on anecdotal evidence and feedback.

One agency, which runs two LSPs, holds a reflection session with tutors in the middle of each year. The session is overseen by an external facilitator.

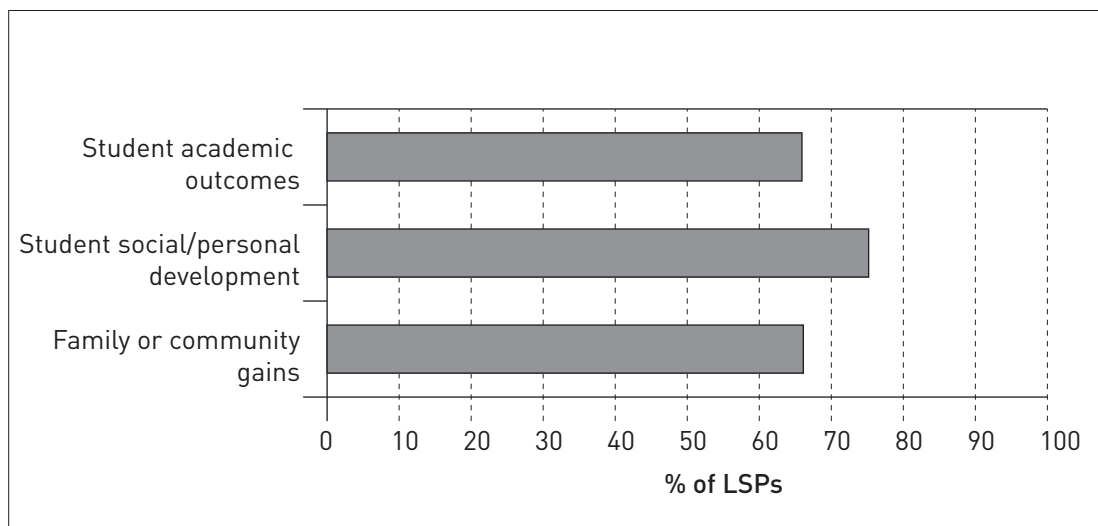
One respondent observed:

'There's no formal measurement of participants. [We] measure results by gauging the response of kids, whether they continue to attend and are enthusiastic. Also interaction with parents – for example, parents tell us their children are doing much better at school or that the pressure is off at home because of the program. Sometimes staff are also asked by parents to accompany them to parent-teacher interviews ... [I] don't have time to evaluate the program – I only have 1.5 hours a week allocated to the program.'

Benefits of the Program

Each LSP cited a range of program benefits spanning academic outcomes and individual social/personal development for students as well as community/family gains through participation of students. On average, respondents reported at least 2 categories of benefits (Figure 4 below). Overall, participating programs indicated an even distribution of impacts across the above 3 outcome categories.

Figure 4: Community managed LSPs in NW Melbourne: Benefits for students in 2006 (%)



In terms of academic outcomes, while some LSPs cited anecdotal 'evidence' of an improvement in grades, a significant number of LSPs said the fact that certain students were still at school was a major achievement. Others reported that students were now more engaged in their learning, and whilst this hasn't necessarily translated into academic results, it is laying the foundations for future success.

Student access to IT facilities at sessions being held in public libraries was also a significant benefit of LSPs:

'In a community of low socio-economic status and high unemployment, the program provides children with access to state-of-the-art information technology and gives them opportunities to experience things they might not otherwise experience.'

Benefits to individual students included improved confidence and self-esteem, better language skills and adjustment to their adopted country and community. In terms of community/family gains, several LSPs reported an improvement in students' relationships with their parents – the homework club had in some cases diffused tensions at home – or within schools:

'... great to have a mix of students from different schools. For some students who may be outsiders or struggling to cope with school, the club represents a positive social experience – they can be a different person in a different setting. The club provides an ego boost for many of the participants ... creates an environment where students are willing and happy to achieve.'

Case study: Brown Roots Pacific Arts Collective

The Brown Roots Pacific Arts Collective, based in Altona Meadows, established a learning support program in 2006 for students from a Pacific Islander background. Part of the impetus for the program came from local schools concerned about the disproportionate number of Polynesian students dropping out of school, or attending but not succeeding academically.

'We're supporting a group of young people who have a lot of complex issues. In some cases, both parents may be working two jobs. These parents can't provide any support for their kids at all. Others have very supportive parents, but they have language barriers and don't know how to help with study.'

Through the program, Brown Roots has identified cultural issues as one of the major barriers to learning for Polynesian students. As a result, the agency has run sessions for school welfare coordinators about how to work effectively with Pacific Islander students.

'Students were not looking into teachers' eyes when spoken to, they were looking down or looking around. They copped a lot of flak for this [but] in Pacific Islander culture, it is disrespectful to look people – particularly elders – in the eye. The young people didn't understand why the teachers were getting upset.'

The young people are starting to feel a lot better about themselves because the coordinator is contacting the schools and explaining the culture.

UPDATE: Brown Roots has funding to offer one more term of homework support but has had to suspend the program until it finds a new coordinator.

3.8. Program limitations

Lack of evaluation capacity to measure outcomes or monitor performance was cited by the majority of LSPs as a limitation:

'There is a real problem with quality assurance. We run on the sniff of an oily rag.'

Others cited the inability to take on more students, even though they were aware of additional need in the community. In most cases agencies struggled to meet demand because of a lack of funding, a lack of space or lack of tutors.

'It is great to have this program supporting young disadvantaged women, but on the other hand the male group miss out on such great support to improving their tertiary education chances.'

Several agencies found it hard to engage secondary students because of the perception that the homework club was not 'cool'. Another agency found younger students difficult to engage:

'We struggle with younger kids who have shorter attention spans – as a result we give preference to older kids.'

Such responses are indicative of the need for increased peer support and advice between service providers in this growing sector, to ensure the dissemination of good practice leading to improved performance and better outcomes.

Case Study: Banksia Gardens Neighbourhood House

Banksia Gardens Neighbourhood House in Broadmeadows has been running a learning support program for Somali secondary students since 2003.

The popular program is 'run on a shoestring'. As a result, 'there's no evaluation, no quality assurance, no resources to undertake proper volunteer training, no ability to expand to meet demand.'

'We would love to make the program two sessions per week ... but it's hard to manage volunteers. Because we are a community organisation, we have no resources to support them [volunteers].'

'We can maintain the program at this level, but it is very difficult.'

4. Discussion

4.1 Key learnings from the survey

Growth

Our audit supports the anecdotal information about the recent growth and spread of community-managed and provided learning support programs, especially over the past 5 years in Melbourne.

In the northern and western regions (including eligible CBD suburbs), the audit yielded a total of 33 programs operating in 2006 delivered by 20 different auspice agencies. Two programs ceased operations during the year. The total enrolment consisted of over 1,300 students across all ages with a regular attendance of over 800 students. Whilst the longest running program commenced in 1992, nearly half the programs have been running for only 2 years, indicating the extent of recent growth in the region.

The programs primarily focus on students from a range of disadvantaged circumstances or backgrounds, but notably those from refugee or new migrant households.

We cannot claim that the survey is a complete audit because there is no documentation or listing of all such programs. However, there is clearly an evolving model of learning support in Melbourne responding to a growing level of community need.

It is likely that our audit undercounts the coverage and extent of community managed learning support being provided in the region. Based on these figures, we estimate that between 3,000 and 4,000 students across metropolitan Melbourne are annually receiving learning support outside of the formal education system.

Student profile

Individual participant demographic data was not collected by the survey interviews. The LSPs have developed in response to emerging local level community needs. Hence there appears to be broad coverage across all ages and school grades.

A significant number of larger programs cater for all levels of students. The majority (74%) of LSPs include primary school age children – indicating that auspice agencies and referring schools have identified the need for catch-up learning outside the formal education system at a relatively early age.

Half of all LSPs have been established to support the learning of CALD background students of all ages, particularly for younger children at primary levels.

Program model of support

The survey indicates a mixed model of support with the great majority offering 1 session per week lasting between 1 and 2 hours. Most LSPs utilise volunteer tutors to provide either 1:1 educational assistance with homework, exam preparation (for older students), targeted learning (specific subjects, literacy, numeracy) or group learning and developmental activities. Many programs (especially those assisting primary age students) also offer a snack meal during sessions, which apart from topping up energy reserves of the participants serves to build social skills.

Most of the LSPs aspire to 1:1 tutor to student support as best practice. However, it was evident that difficulties in engaging or retaining tutors through the academic year necessitated a mixed model to provide support at many programs. A flexible approach is often adopted to respond to attendance rates of both students and tutors at particular sessions.

A recurring theme raised by LSP providers has been the importance of the tutors as positive role models for students. Tutors come from diverse backgrounds themselves, but the majority have tertiary qualifications or are university students. Their interest in and support to students clearly fills a gap in the latter's social development. LSP providers stressed the benefits of these relationships for students' confidence, self-esteem and commitment to learning.

Most programs were managed and run by a paid worker, however, in many instances they were either part time or shared program coordination with other responsibilities. The majority of the 43 paid staff had a community work background, with one third having teaching or education experience.

Over 1,200 volunteers were 'on the books' of the surveyed LSPs in 2006 representing a substantial community commitment to the educational development of disadvantaged children.

Most of the programs have developed links with local schools within their geography and target student group. Three-quarters received referrals directly from schools of students considered to be well placed to benefit from the additional support offered by the LSP. Clearly schools consider that these programs provide an extra source of education assistance for students with particular learning needs or who require catch-up learning unable to be provided within the formal school setting.

Funding and resources

Another key theme emerging from the survey is the ongoing struggle for secure resources for providers to enable them to offer the full level of assistance to students. It is indicative that only one LSP was able to cite a monthly budget for their program. LSPs appear to be opportunistic each year in obtaining funds through one-off government grants, philanthropic trusts or donations. Many rely on top-ups through internal discretionary or untied budget dollars.

Whilst no budget figures were sought during the interviews, it is evident that many programs consider they are under-resourced with significant staff time having to be spent in fundraising. Previous research at Hanover Welfare Services analysed the costs of tutoring support provided to children in families who had experienced homelessness. Their evaluation found that the unit cost of assistance through their model averaged \$72.00 per student per session, with an average cost per session of \$1,080.00 and average annual cost

per participant of \$1,300.00 (Parkinson and Horn 2004). Clearly other programs will have different unit costs as overall expenditure is tied to specific elements of the service model (for example, paid staff or tutors).

Sustainability

Despite the resource constraints mentioned by many providers, the majority (79%) considered their program to be sustainable in the long term. Analysis suggests that the smaller local community organisations were less confident of their sustainability compared to those provided or managed by large agencies. Confidence about the auspice agency's commitment to their program was clearly an important factor in how this question was answered, rather than a narrow focus on budget issues. Apart from the 2 LSPs that closed during 2006, 5 others reported that they were not sustainable or were unsure about their sustainability.

Outcomes

The survey has found that only a small minority of the programs have undertaken evaluation work to measure outcomes, with most relying on anecdotal feedback, or follow-up focussing on specific aspects of student achievement or benefits. The low level of formal evaluation is reasonable considering the developmental nature of many programs and their lack of recurrent resources. **This finding does support the case for a comprehensive evaluation to understand the outcomes being achieved and to inform the next phase in program development.**

Overall, programs consider that they are achieving substantive benefits for students across both academic domains and broader areas of social and personal development that will contribute to stronger commitment to learning in the future. A survey undertaken for Melbourne Citymission's Tutoring Program in Footscray in 2005 found that 40% of the female secondary school students identified increased ENTER scores as a perceived benefit of participation (Westland 2005). The evaluation of the Hanover Tutoring Program (mentioned above) included independent feedback from teachers and parents on a relatively small number of children. The report concluded that:

'The analysis of independent reports found that all the 12 children had made significant or substantial gains in learning or educational achievement, attitudes to learning, self confidence or social skills. Over half (58%) had made substantive gains directly attributable to the program in at least two of these areas, whilst the remainder were assessed as having made significant gains in at least one of the above areas.' (Horn and Parkinson 2004:26)

The outcomes evidence that is available suggests that LSPs are effective in making a substantial contribution to learning outcomes for disadvantaged students. This is clearly the perception of provider staff interviewed in the survey. A key issue in any evaluation is the assessment of the contribution made by programs to individual outcomes. To what degree are the gains made by students attributable to their participation in learning support program activities?

4.2 Implications for the evaluation

A question for the evaluation to examine will be the nature of the relationship with schools, in particular the referral process for students referred to LSPs, and feedback from teaching staff on learning needs and progress through the year. Consultations with school principals would inform the selection of students and help to identify unmet needs within schools.

The evaluation will seek to document the unit costs of providing assistance at the 4 participating programs in order to make some indicative assessment of the cost benefit of LSPs.

The evaluation needs to include assessment of the broader set of goals, such as attitude to learning, commitment to school, confidence and social development, each of which contributes to the overarching objective to improve education attachment and outcomes.

Attendance rates at programs supporting secondary school students are significantly lower than for primary-aged children. Examination of the patterns of individual attendance and reasons for low or irregular attendance should be included in the data collection.

5. Conclusion

The objective of the mapping survey of community-managed learning support programs has been to document their coverage and map their growth as a targeted community-based response to the broad educational needs - mainly of children from disadvantaged circumstances. There are of course other forms of assistance which may be available to children in such circumstances, for example, school provided tutoring after hours and integration aides to assist teachers with students who have eligible specific learning barriers.

It is evident, however, that there has been substantial growth in the availability of learning support over the past few years in Melbourne based on our audit in the northern and western metropolitan regions. These programs are playing an important role in strengthening attachment to learning, leading to better education outcomes.

This growth of a significant resource base supports the implementation of the planned evaluation by Melbourne Citymission to better understand the outcomes being achieved and to ensure that good practice is developed within Melbourne Citymission's current and future programs, as well as more broadly across the emerging sector.

In addition to providing a current profile of LSPs in the region, the audit has yielded some additional issues for inclusion in the evaluation to be undertaken in 2007.

The recent development of this community-based response should also stimulate policy debate and discussion to understand more fully why there has been such growth, where LSPs fit in the broader suite of formal education programs and how governments might take a more proactive approach to supporting their future development and sustainability, as has occurred in the UK.

The findings from this survey have helped to shape the evaluation being undertaken within Melbourne Citymission in 2007.

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Appendix 1: Overview of Melbourne Citymission's Homework Support Groups

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 Melbourne Citymission's 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 one-to-one 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. 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. The funding came initially from both the Uniting Church and Melbourne Citymission, however Melbourne Citymission has continued to fund the group, which is now in its second year. It 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.

Brunswick Learning Club

The Brunswick Learning Club has been 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.

The School Psychologist attached to the associated government schools approached Melbourne Citymission regarding the possibility of Melbourne Citymission sponsoring the establishment of a homework group in the Brunswick area. Melbourne Citymission and the relevant schools successfully sought funding from the Moreland School Focussed Youth Service and the group became operational in August 2005. The group targets children who have a diagnosed or undiagnosed specific learning difficulty or learning disorder. Referrals are made by the School Psychologist or the school directly.

An advisory group comprising the schools Principals, School Psychologist, Melbourne Citymission staff and School Focused Youth Services staff has overseen the implementation and direction of this group. The School Focussed Youth Service funding ceased in June 2006. Melbourne Citymission has continued to fund the group since then. The group 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.

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. The participants were chosen by the Principal and Vice Principal. The group commenced in 2006 and is currently funded by Melbourne Citymission.

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 participants are chosen by the Principals of both schools.

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 is for a year and will end on 30 June 2007.

Footscray 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 there have been a total of 46 enrolments with a regular attendance of 30 students each week. The majority of students are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many have refugee 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's.

The program has been funded by the Invergowrie Foundation for 10 years with the main budget cost being payments to the tutors who are generally university students. The program is run at MCM's Footscray offices. Student feedback at the end of the academic year has shown that participants gain through increased confidence and self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved language skills and better adjustment to their new country.

Melbourne Citymission and City Library Homework Group

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 17 sessions held with an average of 3 or 4 tutors (university students) assisting 18 participants. The program is now based on a one to one volunteer tutoring model with weekly sessions at the City Library.

Appendix 2: Evaluation of Learning Support Programs: Research Questions and Methodology

The specific research questions to be addressed during the project include:

1. To what extent have community managed LSPs grown in the Northern and Western regions of Melbourne and what is their current coverage?
2. What is the profile of participants in LSPs?
3. What are the key elements of Melbourne Citymission LSPs that contribute to outcomes for participants?
4. What outcomes (short-term) are being achieved for participants?
5. What changes and resources are required to ensure long-term sustainability of LSPs?
6. What are the broader policy implications for improving educational achievement of students in disadvantaged circumstances?

A Steering Group was convened in late 2006 to guide the development of the evaluation and oversee its implementation. Membership includes representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, the Centre for Program Evaluation in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne and the Learning Support Program Coordinator at Foundation House.

The methodology for the evaluation used a program logic model to design an evaluation framework (Appendix 3) following consultations with key stakeholders based on the 3 main goals:

1. To assess and identify student strengths and learning needs
2. To strengthen student attachment and commitment to learning
3. To address specific learning difficulties, improve competencies and academic results

In summary, the key elements of the evaluation comprise:

1. Select literature review focussing on program outcomes, good practice and policy settings
2. Mapping survey to profile and enumerate community managed LSPs in NW Melbourne.
3. Primary data collection (during 2007):
 - Analysis of participating LSP student profile and attendance data
 - Interviews with program coordinators and staff to document models of support to students
 - Focus groups with tutors on the strengths and weaknesses of LSPs and feedback on the benefits for themselves and the students.
 - Feedback from participating School Principals and staff on program operations
 - Outcomes measurement:
 - Tutor assessment of students
 - Feedback from students and parents on outcomes and satisfaction
 - Feedback from school teachers on student gains attributable to participation

Appendix 3: Evaluation Framework for Learning Support Programs

Program Goals/Objectives	Outcomes	Evaluation Tool/Data Instrument	Measures	Timelines
<p>Goal 1: To assess and identify student strengths & learning needs:</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that support is targeted to individual capacities & needs • Provide student with better understanding of learning strengths & gaps 	<p>Student understanding of learning strengths and needs increased</p> <p>Each student has an individual learning plan that documents strengths & needs</p>	<p>Age appropriate interviews with students</p> <p>Program documentation/database</p>	<p>Participant understanding of strengths & gaps</p> <p>Proportion of participants who have ILP's (or equivalent assessments) that identify strengths & priority needs</p>	<p>Conclusion of Program in 2007</p> <p>Ongoing in 2007 to document LSP enrolments</p>
<p>Goal 2: To strengthen student attachment and commitment to learning</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise participation in the Program • Improve self confidence and attitude to learning • Strengthen performance at school 	<p>Each student attends program regularly</p> <p>Student confidence & attitude to learning/school improved</p> <p>Student attendance at school improved</p> <p>Increased homework activity</p>	<p>Program documentation/database</p> <p>Age appropriate interviews with students & parent feedback</p> <p>Tutor questionnaire & focus groups</p> <p>Teacher feedback</p> <p>Age appropriate interviews with students & parent feedback</p>	<p>Attendance rate of participants in program</p> <p>Participant satisfaction with program</p> <p>Attitude to learning & school</p> <p>Improvement in confidence</p> <p>Assessment of participant change in confidence/commitment</p> <p>Change in attendance/attitude during school year</p> <p>Increased rates of homework completion</p>	<p>End of each semester in 2007</p> <p>Conclusion of Program in 2007</p> <p>Terms 2 and 4 in 2007</p> <p>Conclusion of Program in 2007</p> <p>Conclusion of Program in 2007</p>
<p>Goal 3: To address specific learning difficulties, improve competencies & academic results</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve specific skills and competencies • Enable catch up to age -relevant learning levels • Improve achievement of academic results 	<p>Improvement in identified learning or skill areas</p> <p>Achievement of student's academic goals for the semester/year</p>	<p>Age appropriate interviews with students & parent feedback</p> <p>Age appropriate interviews with students & parent feedback</p> <p>Tutor questionnaire & focus groups</p>	<p>Assessment of participant change</p> <p>Participant academic outcomes</p> <p>Assessment of participant change in competencies</p>	<p>Conclusion of Program in 2007</p> <p>End of school semester/year</p> <p>Terms 2 and 4 in 2007</p>

Appendix 4: Melbourne Citymission Evaluation of Learning Support Programs in northern and western Melbourne: Mapping Survey Questionnaire

1. Tell me about how the program was initially set up:

- What year was the program established?
- What age group/year level was the program set up for? (eg. primary and/or secondary, VCE only?)
- Was there a particular target group you had in mind? (eg. refugee, CALD or indigenous students – or any student needing extra support?)
- How many students were enrolled initially?
- How many sessions were run each week?

2. Now tell me about the program as it is today:

- Has the age group/year level you cater to changed? If so, how and why?
- Has the target group (student background) changed? If so, how and why?
- How many students are currently enrolled in the program?
- How many sessions are run each week?
- Are you able to accommodate all students who want to join the program?
- If no, do you have a waiting list? How many students are on your waiting list?
- If enrolments have significantly grown or shrunk, what reasons do you attribute to this change?

3. Tell me about the program content:

- Does the program provide individual and/or group support?
- What types of things are covered? Eg: general English, concepts that students haven't been able to grasp in class, homework, assignments, exam preparation?
- How do you measure students' achievement in the program?
- Have you undertaken a formal evaluation of the program? If so, would it be possible to obtain a copy of your findings?

4. Relationships with schools:

- Does the program have contact with the students' schools? What form does this take?
- Have schools ever made referrals to the program or asked for feedback on students? If so, is this a regular or rare occurrence?

5. Now looking at funding and resourcing issues:

- How is the program funded?
- What are the main costs involved in running the program?
- Where do you run the program?
- Is the venue effective in meeting the program's needs? If no, what are the difficulties/challenges?
- What resources do you have access to (eg computers, consumables, photocopying)? Are the resources adequate?
- How many paid staff does the program have?
- How many volunteers does the program have?
- What qualifications and/or training do staff have?
- What qualifications and/or training do volunteers have?

6. Finally, in your opinion:

- How does your program benefit students, parents, families, schools and the community?

Prompts:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Improved academic performance
- Improved language skills
- Adjustment to a new country
- Other
- Can you give an example?
- What do you see as the program's limitations?
- Is the program sustainable long-term?
- If yes, how do you keep it going? If no, what are the challenges?
- Apart from sustainability, what are the other issues confronting the program?
- Do you have any other comments to make?



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