



## *Improving education outcomes for Queensland's refugee and CALD school students: Submission to the State Budget 2012-2013*

**MDA Advocacy and Social Policy Unit  
December 2011**

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### **Overview**

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) provides settlement services, systemic advocacy and community development to people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Improved access to education is a key systemic advocacy priority of MDA's Advocacy and Social Policy Unit. MDA supports the right of all primary and secondary school students from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds settling in Australia to enjoy accessible, equitable and quality education which addresses their learning and social needs in supportive, responsive and flexible learning environments.

In this submission, MDA outlines four key priorities for the 2012-2013 State Budget to improve education for Queensland's refugee and CALD students in state primary and secondary schooling. These priorities for budget investment seek to address some of the disadvantages, inequities and challenges many refugee and CALD students experience in the Queensland education system.

This submission has been informed by consultation with MDA clients and staff, community leaders and members of refugee and CALD communities, key stakeholders in the education and multicultural government and non-government sectors in Queensland and the Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) network.<sup>1</sup> MDA wishes to thank the individuals and organisations who have informed this submission.<sup>2</sup>

This submission has been endorsed by:

- Queensland Association of Teaching English as a Second or Other Language
- Queensland Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

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<sup>1</sup> Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) is a statewide advocacy network funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland. CAMS works to strengthen multiculturalism throughout Queensland and to address the needs and issues experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse communities. See [www.camsqld.org.au](http://www.camsqld.org.au).

<sup>2</sup> In particular, MDA acknowledges the contribution of the following CAMS members to this submission: ACCES Services Inc, Ethnic Community Council of Queensland, Queensland Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Mercy Family Services Toowoomba, Spiritus Inala, Multilink, the Nambour Neighbourhood Centre and Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre.

- Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland
- Queensland Council of Social Service
- Mercy Family Services Toowoomba
- ACCES Services Inc
- Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc
- Bundaberg & District Neighbourhood Centre
- Nambour Community Centre Inc

## Key priorities for improving education for refugee and CALD students

Education and English language learning are critical to the successful settlement, development and wellbeing of Queensland's refugee and CALD youth. On arrival in Australia refugee and CALD students confront challenges in education due to historical, environmental, cultural and social factors, resulting in barriers to accessible, equitable, quality education responsive to their needs. The unique education needs of Queensland's refugee and CALD students are often compounded by inadequate funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and related support in schooling.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 1 in 10 Queenslanders speak a language other than English at home, and about 1.2% of Queensland's population do not speak English well or at all.<sup>4</sup> It is understood the exact number of Queensland primary and secondary school students currently receiving ESL support is not collected centrally and is not publicly reported, but as of August 2011 approximately 8% of enrolments in Queensland state primary and secondary schools were students from a 'Main Language Other than English background'.<sup>5</sup> These numbers are likely to increase into the future given increasing numbers of refugees and migrants settling throughout Queensland.<sup>6</sup>

The difficulties and challenges experienced by students from refugee backgrounds in education are well documented.<sup>7</sup> NAPLAN results from 2008 and 2009 also demonstrate students from LBOTE in Queensland are falling behind Queensland students from English speaking backgrounds, as well as LBOTE and English speaking background students in some other Australian States (in particular, New South Wales and Victoria).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These issues and recommendations about future funding allocation and resources to alleviate disadvantage and improve the educational outcomes of Queensland's refugee and CALD school students are detailed in the MDA's and the Community Action for a Multicultural Society's April 2011 Submissions to the Australian Government's Review of Funding of Schooling (Appendices A and B).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census*, referenced in *A Multicultural Future for Us All – Queensland Multicultural Policy 2011* (2011) 15.

<sup>5</sup> Information obtained from MDA by the Queensland Department of Education and Training, December 2011.

<sup>6</sup> For example, from 2009 – 2011 Queensland's share of Australia's overall settler arrivals increased by 2.3% (from 18% in 2009-2010 to 20.3% in 2010-2011). From 2009 – 2011 Queensland's share of Australia's overall Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program arrivals increased by 1.8% (from 13% in 2009 – 2010 to 14.8% in 2010 – 2011): DIAC, *Immigration Update 2010 – 2011* (2011) 19; DIAC, *Immigration Update 2009–2010* (2010) 19 .

<sup>7</sup> For detailed information and research regarding educational challenges for refugee and CALD students in Australia, see MDA's *Submission to the Review of Funding for Schooling* (April 2011), particularly pages 7 – 13.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth of Australia *Report on Government Services 2010 Volume 1: Early Childhood, Education and Training; Justice; Emergency Management* (2010) sections 4.47- 4.5; Commonwealth of Australia (2011) *Report*

There are high levels of need for ESL and other education support in Queensland primary and secondary schools, particularly for students from refugee and Pacific Islander backgrounds. Increased funding for ESL and targeted support programs and initiatives is vital to improving refugee and CALD students' educational outcomes and reducing disadvantage and inequity in schooling.

While MDA recognises there are multiple areas of education and social support for refugee and CALD students requiring significant resource allocation, the following areas are submitted as key priorities for urgent budget investment in 2012-2013:

- 1. Introduce a centralised ESL Coordinator or ESL team in the Department of Education and Training's Central Office to improve statewide coordination of ESL funding, program and service delivery**
- 2. Introduce more specialised teaching and support staff to address refugee and CALD student needs**
- 3. Resource school-based initiatives to address the social and psychological needs of refugee and CALD students**
- 4. Improve information provision to refugee and CALD parents, families and communities about education in Queensland**

Every effort has been made to cost these priorities based on information available to MDA. However, MDA recognises further costing by Government and Government consultation with stakeholders in the education and multicultural sectors, as well as refugee and CALD communities is necessary to inform final funding decisions.

**Priority One: Introduce a centralised ESL Coordinator or ESL team in the Department of Education and Training's Central Office to improve statewide coordination of ESL funding, program and service delivery**

**Cost: \$135,000 - \$147,500 per position per annum<sup>9</sup>**

A funded ESL Coordinator or ESL Team within the Queensland Department of Education and Training's (DET) Central Office is needed to provide consistent, centralised coordination and leadership around ESL policy, program and resourcing; and to coordinate other educational support for students from refugee and CALD backgrounds in Queensland government schools.

Some teachers, schools and communities feel there is a lack of centralised support and leadership around ESL and multicultural education in Queensland and that ESL is not prioritised or an ongoing commitment of government.<sup>10</sup> For some years there

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on *Government Services 2011 Volume 1: Early Childhood, Education and Training; Justice; Emergency Management* (2011) sections 4.24- 4.54.

<sup>9</sup> Calculated on the basis of one Coordinator position at a Queensland Government A08 - S02 level, plus salary on costs of 25%.

<sup>10</sup> MDA's *Submission to the Review of Funding for Schooling* (April 2011).

has not been an ESL Coordinator or similar ESL-specific role (relevant to ESL for CALD students) within DET's or education Queensland's Central Office to coordinate ESL resource, policy, program and service delivery across the State. It is understood there is currently no specialised team or unit within the Department with a focus on ESL policy and program development.

Although ESL Coordinators exist in each region, there appears to be no centralised leadership or coordination to oversee ESL programs, service delivery and support for refugee and CALD students statewide, resulting in inconsistency across the regions. Prioritisation of ESL at the regional level often does not occur, affecting allocation of funding and resources to address student needs.<sup>11</sup> By comparison both Victoria and New South Wales have ESL and Multicultural Units responsible for statewide policy, program and resource coordination and provision of strategic advice and support to their state governments, schools and regions.<sup>12</sup>

A centralised Coordinator or Team in the Department of Education and Training's Central Office could have functions including:

- Coordinating ESL policy and program development and implementation, and service and resource delivery at the state level;
- Providing strategic advice to the Department and Queensland Government on the education, ESL and support needs of students from culturally diverse communities
- Development of ESL curriculum, teaching resources, assessment and whole of school approaches to support ESL students
- Coordinating data collection around refugee and ESL students in Queensland and profiles, trends, issues and needs<sup>13</sup>
- Coordinating Education Queensland's response to its key actions in the *Queensland Multicultural Action Plan 2011-2014*
- Overseeing provision of information and training to schools in relation to accessing interpreters
- Coordinating professional development for teachers/schools around ESL and cross-cultural training<sup>14</sup>
- Coordinating/overseeing provision of information to new arrivals about education in Queensland (see Priority Four below)
- Exploring use of technology and web based learning, particularly for teachers

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<sup>11</sup> Issues for students in regional areas are discussed further in both MDA's and CAMS' submissions to the Review of Funding of Schooling: Appendices A and B.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yrk12focusareas/multiculted/contacts.php> (New South Wales) and <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/contacts.htm> (Victoria).

<sup>13</sup> 'Better inform programs and services for people from CALD backgrounds by strengthening the availability of data to inform multicultural policy, programs and services' is a key action under the *Queensland Multicultural Policy and Multicultural Action Plan 2011 – 2014*.

<sup>14</sup> 'Improved cultural competence of staff' is a core action for Queensland Government Departments in the Queensland Multicultural Policy and Action Plan 2011 - 2014. All departments must report on this action in their annual reports.

and ESL students in regional and remote areas

- Engaging and consulting with refugee and CALD students, families and communities to identify needs
- Identifying and developing responses to support the needs of students with more complex ESL needs, including students from refugee, humanitarian and Pacific Islander backgrounds.

**Key advantages** of establishing a centralised ESL Coordinator position or team include:

- Improved ESL support and coordination for schools and students from refugee and CALD backgrounds
- Better capacity of schools and teachers to address the unique needs of CALD children, families and communities and to ensure appropriate service delivery
- Improved data collection, contributing to improved statewide ESL policy, planning and service provision
- Better communication and engagement of regions, schools and teachers in relation to ESL resourcing, policy, program and service delivery
- Enhanced consistency in ESL delivery across Queensland's education regions
- Improved outcomes for students from refugee and CALD backgrounds
- Greater prioritisation of ESL and the needs of students from refugee and CALD backgrounds at the regional and state level
- Improved transparency and accountability for ESL at the Central Departmental level.

**Priority Two: Introduce more specialist teaching and support staff to address refugee and CALD student needs**

**Cost: \$3.03 million in 2012 - 2013<sup>15</sup>**

Further resources should be dedicated to the introduction of more specialist ESL teachers and support staff (including teacher aides, community liaison officers and

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<sup>15</sup> This figure has been calculated on the basis of funding for:

- An additional 20 full time equivalent ESL teachers across Queensland in 2012-2013 (at an average salary of approximately \$70,000 (Department of Education and Training Teachers' Certified Agreement 2010 Band 3(1) salary) per teacher plus salary on costs of 25% (total of \$87500). \$87,500 per teacher x 20 new teachers = \$1.75 million; and
- An additional 500 teachers aide hours per week at an average of approximately \$25/hour (based on TA3(L4) of the *Department of Education, Training and the Arts Teachers Aides' Certified Agreement 2008*) = \$650,000.
- An additional 10 full time equivalent Community Liaison Officer and Home School Liaison Officer positions across Queensland in key settlement and Pacific Islander student regions in 2012 – 2013 (at an average A03 salary of \$52,131/ worker plus salary on costs of 25% (total of approx \$65,200). \$65,200 x 10 new positions = \$652,000.

home liaison officers) to better support students from refugee and CALD backgrounds in schooling.

From 2010 –2011 the number of full time equivalent ESL teachers increased by just 9.5 teachers (from 189.8 to 199.3), and the number of teacher aide hours by only 129 hours per week across state primary and secondary schools throughout Queensland.<sup>16</sup> During that same period funding to regions to support the needs of students from refugee backgrounds decreased by \$100,000.<sup>17</sup>

Teachers and schools consistently report that current need and demand for ESL tuition is not able to be met by existing numbers of specialist ESL teachers and teacher aides, and that there is a shortage of specialist staff across Queensland. Increased migration and settlement under Australia’s Migration and Humanitarian Programs will likely result in further demand for ESL support provided by appropriately qualified, specialist teachers and teachers aides into the future.

Additional bicultural support and specialist workers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and Home School Liaison Officers are also urgently needed to provide essential educational and social support to assist students to settle effectively into schooling, and to improve engagement and participation of diverse families and communities in education. Currently in the Brisbane region there are CLOs employed by Education Queensland whose role includes:

- Developing effective linkages between home, school and community to provide information and support on education related issues, facilitate partnerships and encourage greater interest and participation in schooling
- Providing assistance to students and their parents/caregivers in school, including support in transitioning to mainstream schools and further education and /or employment.
- Undertaking home visits with students and their families to facilitate consultation and provide strategies for improved educational experiences.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these responsibilities CLOs also assist and support students around difficulties at school or home; career pathways and subject selection; ESL planning and behavior management. They support schools by strengthening links with community members from culturally diverse backgrounds and work across communities, rather than with specific communities.

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Education and Training, *Annual Report 2009 – 2010* (2010) 65; Department of Education and Training, *Annual Report 2010 – 2011* (2011) 77.

<sup>17</sup> Refugee program funding decreased from \$2.5 million to \$2.49 million: Department of Education and Training, *Annual Report 2009 – 2010* (2010) 65; Department of Education and Training, *Annual Report 2010 – 2011* (2011) 77.

<sup>18</sup> Home visits are essential for many families who do not have private transport or access to public transport, and have no other means to access information about their child’s school or education. The Community Liaison Officer Role Description (DET) is available on request from MDA.

At present there are only three CLO positions across some primary and secondary schools in Brisbane, with workers visiting multiple schools with large refugee student populations in Brisbane each week. It is understood there are similar positions in some other Queensland regions, however exact numbers are not known, and vary across schools and regions. Brisbane CLOs' time is currently stretched and they do not have capacity to support the substantial numbers of students and parents/families requiring assistance. It is also understood that CLOs are funded on a semester by semester basis and are therefore not permanent positions.

Similarly, Home School Liaison Officers (HLOs) from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are needed to address welfare issues of students who are deemed most at risk, to involve student's families in school-related matters and welfare concerns and provide an essential link with communities to ensure that the families are well supported not only through the school but through their own cultural communities.<sup>19</sup>

Bicultural support workers such as CLOs and HLOs are vital to the support of students, families and communities from both refugee and humanitarian entrant backgrounds and Pacific Islander backgrounds, who experience complex and multiple disadvantage in schooling.<sup>20</sup> Recurrent funding should be allocated to maintain such workers on a permanent basis within schools with high refugee and Pacific Island student populations.

**Anticipated benefits** include:

- Better ESL and social support for students from refugee and CALD backgrounds, and improved learning outcomes
- More effective links between schools and home
- Improved engagement and participation of parents and communities in schooling
- Better support for teachers and schools.

**Priority Three: Resource school-based initiatives to address the social and psychological needs of refugee and CALD students**

**Cost: \$900,000 over 3 years**

Ongoing social, psychological and emotional support, in addition to specialised, continuous intensive learning programs is required as a foundation for many refugee and CALD students for satisfactory and meaningful participation in education.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> There is currently a Home School Liaison Officer based at Milperra State High School.

<sup>20</sup> The educational barriers experienced by students from Pacific Islander backgrounds are detailed in Community Action for a Multicultural Society's Submission to the Review of Funding of Schooling (2011): Appendix B.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 26-27, 29-30.

Such support is particularly vital for students from refugee backgrounds who have had disrupted, limited or no previous education and have suffered trauma and instability, dislocation, loss of family members and/or extreme violence, and who arrive in Australia against a background of conflict, insecurity and persecution. Such experiences may result in emotional and health challenges, impeding learning and wellbeing.

MDA welcomes the key action in the *Queensland Multicultural Policy 2011-2014* and Multicultural Action Plan to *Develop school-based initiatives for refugee students that support their learning, social and psychological needs.*<sup>22</sup> It is understood however that no additional resourcing has been committed by the Queensland Government towards this action.

A number of successful school based initiatives currently exist to support students (both in Queensland and other jurisdictions) and are detailed in **Appendix C**. They include:

- Counselling, therapeutic and support services
- Art, drama and music therapy
- Out-of-school learning support, such as homework clubs and tutoring
- Transition programs to support students to transition from intensive learning programs/schools to mainstream classrooms/schools.

However, these programs are primarily limited to a few secondary schools in the Brisbane region. Traditionally such programs have been reliant on volunteer support, non-recurrent government funding, grants and philanthropy.

It is understood that in most Queensland schools there are no specialised staff qualified to assist students to address such issues, and that guidance counsellors may not be well-equipped to support refugee students. Presently in Queensland there is also only limited support available to students from refugee backgrounds to transition from intensive language learning into mainstream education, a move which can be challenging, frustrating and distressing for some students.<sup>23</sup>

Dedicated resourcing for school-based initiatives for refugee students which support their learning, social and psychological needs is required, and should be extended to primary schools and all Queensland regional settlement areas.

It is crucial that these programs be adequately funded and resourced with culturally competent and professionally qualified staff; interpreters, teacher aides and bicultural support workers. These programs could be delivered in conjunction with community organisations specialising in refugee support, such as the Queensland Program for Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, which currently provides outreach services to Milpera State High School.

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<sup>22</sup> Queensland Government, *Queensland Multicultural Action Plan 2011 – 2014* (2011) 12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

**Anticipated benefits** include:

- Improved literacy, numeracy and English skills and ability to learn
- Early intervention and prevention
- Improved health and behaviour, including mental health and wellbeing
- Enhanced support for parents, families, teachers, schools and communities
- Better educational, settlement and social outcomes for students.

**Priority Four: Improve information provision to refugee and CALD parents, families and communities about education in Queensland**

**Cost: \$300,000 over 3 years**

Parents, families, communities and schools have a vital collective role in supporting the education of children from refugee and CALD backgrounds. Parental and family support in education is essential to achieving positive educational outcomes for students.<sup>24</sup>

While the majority of parents and families from refugee and CALD backgrounds highly value education and wish to make a positive contribution to the education and development of their children, they face challenges in doing so. Many families from refugee backgrounds have little or no educational experience themselves, often lack English language proficiency and may be illiterate in their own language. Many parents wish to be involved in their children's schooling but feel they are excluded, not understood or not welcomed. As a result they experience difficulty in understanding and confusion about the Australian school system, curriculum and the role of parents and teachers; are unsure how to engage and communicate with teachers and schools; are not aware of their child's progress at school and may struggle to support and advise their children in learning.

At present limited information about education and the school system is provided by schools, the government and community sector to parents and families new to Queensland. There are limited translated resources available to provide information to parents and families about schooling, and anecdotal evidence indicates some schools continue to fail to engage interpreters.

Funding and resourcing for programs, services and resources is required to improve information provision to refugee and CALD parents, families and communities about the Australian school system and education in Queensland and home/school engagement.

For example, information sessions should be provided which include information about the Australian education system; parental and school roles and

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<sup>24</sup> Refugee Education Partnership Project, *The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria* (April 2007) 31.

responsibilities; how to support students in schooling; how to request an interpreter and language services policy; and post-compulsory schooling pathways. Schools could also provide opportunities for refugee communities to provide information sessions to teachers, school staff and students about their cultural background and experiences.

Information sessions could be delivered by state schools in key settlement areas across Queensland, either independently or in partnership with community organisations and new and emerging communities.

***Example of whole-of-school information sessions for new and emerging communities***

In 2012 Toowoomba's Agencies CALD Action Group (comprising key regional agencies and service providers) and Mercy Family Services Toowoomba, in collaboration with Education Queensland, local schools<sup>25</sup> and new and emerging communities will commence *Transition into Australian Schooling*, a 3 hour early intervention workshop at local high schools. This whole-of-school initiative will provide information to new arrival parents, families and students to increase participants' understanding of teaching and learning practices in Australian schools and develop parents understanding of the role they can play in schooling and assists student and parents cross-cultural understanding on 'how to be a student' in Australia.

Topics will include the role of parents, students and teachers in the educational process; education in the home and supported learning; using interpreters at school; learning and classroom arrangements; homework learning and policy; respecting others at school; school rules/administration procedures; further education/pathways and goal setting; discussing problems with teachers and seeking extra help; what to do about bullying or harassment; and services available in schools.

The workshop will be delivered by a specialist ESL teachers, community based facilitators, school administration members, community leaders and school guidance officers.

Similar initiatives<sup>26</sup> could be developed in conjunction with Education Regional Offices, schools and communities in key settlement regions across Queensland.

**Anticipated benefits include:**

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<sup>25</sup> The *Transition into Australian Schooling* workshop will be delivered at Lockyer District State High School, Harristown State High School and Darling Heights State School in 2012.

<sup>26</sup> The Foundation House (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture) resource *Talk's In: Families of refugee background and schools in dialogue* (2009) details a range of useful strategies to improve parent/family and school engagement. This resource can be accessed at [http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications\\_and\\_resources.htm](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/resources/publications_and_resources.htm) .

- Increased understanding for parents/families of the Australian school system and post-compulsory schooling pathways
- Enhanced parent, family and community participation and inclusion in their child's learning, schooling and the school community
- Ability/opportunity to address and dispel:
  - diverging cultural perceptions and misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents/families and teachers/schools in educating children.
  - unrealistic expectations of some parents/families of educational outcomes and long term career pathways available to their children.
- Stronger, positive relationships, engagement and communication between schools and parents, families and communities, particularly during the initial stages of settlement.
- Better support for families to settle in Queensland and better educational outcomes for refugee and CALD students.

### **Supporting refugee and CALD students: An investment for Queensland's future**

MDA welcomes the ongoing commitment of the Queensland Government to an education system which provides all students with a flying start and ensures our children are well-equipped to tackle the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Strong investment now in refugee and CALD students will not just improve their educational outcomes, but will provide them with the best possible chance in life and prepare them for success, while providing economic, social and cultural benefits to Tomorrow's Queensland.

MDA commends these four key priorities for the 2012-2013 State Budget to the Queensland Government as a significant step towards accessible, equitable and quality education for refugee and CALD primary and secondary students and an important investment in Queensland's future.