



Settlement Council of Australia

AT A GLANCE



Target Participants

Students aged 14-25 from refugee and other migrant backgrounds



Aim

To provide homework assistance, practice English conversation and assist with general learning



Organisations Involved

CatholicCare Tasmania – Multicultural Service Programs



Location

Glenorchy, Tasmania



Funding

Unfunded - supported by CatholicCare Tasmania, volunteers and private donors



CASE STUDY

CatholicCare Tasmania

Light the Way Study Club (LTW) is a study group run by CatholicCare Tasmania (CCT) at Guilford Young College Catholic School. LTW provides educational support for students, as well as the opportunity to build social connections and access mentoring and other support.

About the program

LTW is a study group that now operates under the auspice of CCT's Multicultural Service Programs (MSP). LTW is an inclusive program with broad eligibility which reaches out to students from various backgrounds, visas, and from both public and private schools.

The group meets once a week, from 4pm – 5:30pm during school term. Participants can bring their homework or other study, or can participate in English practice and conversation. All participants are mentored one-on-one, or in small groups, by volunteer tutors. LTW was first initiated by a core group of volunteers in April 2015, who became known as the LTW committee, many of whom are still actively participating.

Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and ages, with a variety of visa types. There are students from Afghanistan, Iran, Burma, Nepal, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Japan, Kenya and Syria. The students come from both public and private schools, as well as from Tas TAFE's Young Migrant English Program. At the beginning of each session students are given a few minutes to settle in, socialise with one another and prepare for the session. Their volunteer organises pre-packaged snacks and drinks for the students.

Whilst students are settling in, LTW coordinators talk to each student to understand what they might like assistance with—assignments, studying for a test, exam preparation etc. They then match each student to the best suited volunteer tutor, depending on the tutors' area of expertise, and subjects they are most familiar with. Generally, a couple of students will work with a tutor on the same topic in a small group, but if numbers allow, students receive one-on-one support.

As a fun activity, students participate in a lucky door prize at every session. The prize is usually a small treat, like a chocolate or sweet. This part of the session allows for the students to wind down and interact with one another in a more casual and recreational manner.

Due to the late finishing time (5:30pm), CCT offers transport home using designated volunteer drivers and CCT vans. This makes students and parents feel safe and comfortable knowing they do not have to find their own way home at the end of a long day.

LTW also organises a small celebration on the last session of each term, where students have the opportunity to play games and socialise, as well as study (for those who want to). Pizza or ice cream is usually purchased to mark the special occasion.



Collaboration has ensured the success in supporting students' educational and social needs. For example:

- The sessions have been held at Guilford Young College since the program first started. The school has provided the program with a large room, and permission to use their wi-fi each week
- LTW has collaborated with CatholicCare Tasmania's Multicultural Services – SETS program to run School Holiday programs each term. The School Holiday program is free, and transport is offered to and from activities for the day. Activities include both recreational and educational such as: bowling, ice skating, bushwalking (with Get Outside), activities with Youth Arc, service visits (PCYC, Pulse), rock climbing, art and crafts, movie days, and sport days. They have found that students look forward to the holiday program and it encourages participants to regularly attend the sessions.
- LTW invites guest speakers to their sessions to provide information about their services and programs. SETS workers from CatholicCare regularly pop in to provide settlement and case management information, and check in to see if any students need assistance with anything. They run information sessions throughout the year, on topics such as employment (held by staff at the Safe Haven Hub) and driving and licensing (facilitated by the Greenlight Program).
- The Department of Education has provided information sessions for parents about the education system.
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) staff from local high schools and colleges will often refer new students to the LTW program, and host LTW at their schools to promote the program.

Challenges:

CatholicCare Tasmania has faced several challenges running the Light the Way Program. These include:

1. Accessing resources including digital equipment and platforms, due to the program being unfunded.
2. When the program was first implemented, it quickly became clear that more structure and guidelines were required to ensure the needs of the students were met, and volunteers were retained. This was addressed by implementing attendance records for students and volunteers, group guidelines and expectations, introducing extra activities into the sessions (fun and social elements), and making transport arrangements more streamlined.
3. Recruitment of suitable volunteer tutors has been a challenge, particularly volunteers that are able to provide support in advanced college level subjects such as advanced mathematics and science.
4. Ensuring volunteer retention, and therefore creating stability in the program and the familiarity needed for positive mentoring relationships to form between students and volunteer tutors.
5. COVID-19 presented a number of challenges which impacted LTW. Sessions ceased during Tasmania's brief lockdown period (of about 3 months) and students were faced with significant changes impacting on their education and had no face to face access for study support from LTW during Term 2. LTW has since developed an online study support option, which could be utilised if needed in the future. Since resuming, LTW has had to adjust to COVID-19 limitations by limiting student and volunteer attendance. There have also had a number of volunteers who have not been able to continue due to COVID-19 concerns.

Outcomes

The LTW program has supported young people to succeed in their education and created strong positive social connections important for settlement.



Key Learnings

This experience has generated three key learnings for CatholicCare Tasmania

1. The high levels of participation numbers (15-20 students per week since 2015) highlights the need for extra educational support for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
2. Feedback and comments from volunteer tutors indicate that generally students only need a little support to be able to understand and complete the work required of them. Their difficulties seem to stem from the language barriers, and difficulty with comprehension of the English language. This reiterates the need for increased EAL support in schools. EAL support is limited and not available to all students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The eligibility for EAL support needs to be more flexible. The demographic of our students shows that the need for educational assistance continues well after the early arrival stages and often past 5 years of settlement.
3. Students and their families place high value on education and schooling. The students understand the value of homework but don't necessarily have access to support to be able to complete what is required to the best of their ability, and parents may feel incapable of assisting. Students have often expressed a high level of pressure from parents to excel in their education, with the expectations that after the completion of school they should go on to University. As a result, students are often hesitant to reveal to their parents if they are struggling. There is a greater need to support students and parents to better understand the education system, education pathways and to better support the student's educational needs.



Pictures (left to right): School Holiday program – Waterfall Bay (Tasman National Park) Term 3, 2020; Light the Way – GYC Glenorchy; School Holiday Program – Mt Field National Park, Jan 2020.

