



Settlement Council of Australia

AT A GLANCE



Target Participants

Newly arrived individuals and families, residing on the Central Coast.



Aim

To provide a relaxed environment to practice English conversation at a pace suitable to the participant's needs; provide essential life skill information; and facilitate connections and friendships to address isolation.



Organisations Involved

Northern Settlement Services



Location

Erina Trust Hall, Erina, Central Coast



Funding

Northern Settlement Services' SETS program and community donations and grants

CASE STUDY

Northern Settlement Services Talking Around the World

The Talking Around The World program, starting in 2016, offers free weekly conversation classes that focus on discussions and information in line with the National Settlement Outcome Standards (NSOS). Participants can learn and practice language and vocabulary around the 10 NSOS topics in an Australian context. They also discuss and reflect on how the systems on each topic worked in their countries of origin.

Students are placed in small groups at a level that is consistent with their ability and needs.

The program is coordinated by a settlement worker and the group conversation is guided by NSS volunteers, who have wide life experience. Most are retired from their working life. Many of them have been teachers.

Mothers and fathers from multicultural backgrounds can bring their pre-school-age children along as they will be supervised by an accredited childcare worker and provided with age-appropriate activities with their parents nearby.

The program also focuses on building self-esteem and confidence to talk in front of a group and be proactive in their speaking.



Over the years the program has seen participants from 36 cultural backgrounds who not only enjoy the classes but also the morning tea and the special events we celebrate throughout the year.

The volunteers are an exceptional part of the program. Their patience and warmth make the group special. The participants regard the volunteers as the wise elders that they may have in their family back home. The volunteers say they get far more from the class than they give, and their lives are enriched by the program.

The program is fun and light-hearted and participants are made to feel welcome and comfortable, particularly mothers who may be isolated or feeling unsafe.

The cultural exchange of information around the settlement topics is also beneficial to improve participant's understanding of other cultures, and articulating their own cultural experience supports their understanding of Australian systems. The multicultural exchange of experiences reinforces what they have in common as well as what is unique.

Before COVID restrictions many participants would bring along some home-baked goods for morning tea. This kind gesture was a way of saying thank you and contributing. It was also a great way to show off their cooking, talk about it and feel proud. Some participants are not receiving any income at all and feel that cooking is a way they can contribute.

Challenges

Initially, NSS sought to respond to a newly identified, significant need and so the group was formed quite quickly through the successful application for a Central Coast Council Grant. Their main challenge is continuing to find funding to supplant the SETS contribution to maintaining the program.

Outcomes

The program has contributed to a number of positive outcomes:

- Forming new friendships and making connections.
- Providing the community participants with factual information about their legal rights and health information, among other life skill information.
- Empowering the participants to feel confident to go to the doctor or access a service and ask for an interpreter.
- Breaking down isolation through things like participants bringing in their homegrown vegetables to trade and give to their new friends, and making arrangements to meet outside the group for a catch-up.
- Having a settlement caseworker on hand to address any settlement issues has empowered participants to deal with emerging needs as they arise. This provides high-level accessibility to SETS support.



- Isolated mothers can have a break from their young children and meet other like-minded adults. Participants can feel proud to talk about their home country and family while others listen intently, no matter what level of English they have. The exchange of cultural information between cultures is most rewarding.
- Some volunteers have met community members from multicultural backgrounds and invited them to attend Talking Around the World.

Key Learnings

This experience has generated five key learnings for Northern Settlement Services:

1. That the model is effective - one key indicator is that most referrals are from word of mouth from the participants.
2. Effective support and commitment from volunteers, can greatly enrich a program and the community members they work with.
3. Support for and recognition of volunteers is an important element of the program. They are the backbone of the success of the group, and should not be taken for granted.
4. Volunteers involved report regularly that they get as much from the program as the participants, and that it is a highlight of their week.
5. The model can be a platform for other skill development, including Computer skills and citizenship test preparation

More information

For more information you please visit the Northern Settlement Services [website](#) or contact the Central Coast office on 02 4334 3877 or at sgpcc@nsservices.com.au

