

Digital Literacy Program

Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC) in
conjunction with Macquarie Community College (MCC)



Settlement
Council
of Australia

AT A GLANCE

Target participants:

Armenian Syrian Refugees aged between 40 and 80 years; CMRC clients.

Program aims:

The Digital Literacy Program (DLP) assists older Australians to learn the basics of digital technology and helps them to connect with the wider community. This is an Australian Government initiative.

The DLP learning outcomes include using a digital device, sending emails, using Facebook and other social media platforms, online shopping and banking, online safety and security, using myGov and Centrelink, and general access to online information.

Organisations involved:

Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC) in conjunction with Macquarie Community College (MCC)

Location: Sydney, NSW

Funding: Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) – Client services and Adult Community Education, Department of Education



INTRODUCTION

CMRC, in partnership with MCC, designed the DLP program to provide digital literacy skills to members of the Armenian Community, all of whom are refugees, so they could become better connected with the wider community.

The digital needs of the participants varied, some were keen to enhance employability while others just wanted to learn how to access services such as myGov, and banking, etc. We recognised that many of the participants had fairly low levels of English language proficiency, so MCC engaged English teachers with some level of digital competency in order to incorporate elements of language training.

The program used units of competency from the Foundation Skills and Certificate of General Education for Adults at basic levels, combined with digital and language-based components. Initially the focus was on enabling students to feel comfortable using computers and other technology, and as this occurred, we gradually incorporated more tasks to build a broader range of skills.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

The program was built on a strong partnership between CMRC and MCC. Both organisations are funded for the provision of different services to the same target group. CMRC continued engagement with participants, remaining on site, delivering casework, so that participants were individually supported throughout the activity by the caseworker and other staff with various perspectives. MCC has access to funding from the Department of Education that is not tied to courses providing full qualifications. Therefore, we had the flexibility to offer units that would stretch some students while others were able to work at their own pace.

The activity took place in a scout hall maintained by the Armenian broader community, which provided a sense of safety, comfort and ownership for the group. The group was divided into two, those for whom the social interaction was an equally important element, and others focused on developing skills to enhance employment opportunities and with higher level of English language proficiency. The lunch break provided opportunities for other external organisations (such as Legal Aid) to deliver information sessions as the group sessions overlapped.

Casework: Alongside the Program, the Casework included assistance in-language in making housing, disability support financial hardship applications, and access to a range of other services. The parallel casework helped make the program meaningful, practical and successful given that actual needs were addressed while developing their digital skills.

Citizenship: Australian Citizenship Test sessions were also delivered during the program. This helped participants to improve related English language skills which will hopefully result in a higher success rate on their tests into the future.

Social Inclusion: For the Digital Literacy Program outcomes to become more practical, educational tours were conducted with an emphasis on social inclusion and community engagement. The tours that took place had an enormous impact on the clients' wellbeing by decreasing their social isolation and increasing self-confidence and self-esteem. These excursions took many participants out of their comfort zones, while exploring their local communities and learning and connecting with others. The tours had huge uptake and included visits the Tooronga Zoo, Lane Cove National Park, the Blue Mountains and Sydney Aquarium. Other tours funded by CMRC and/or partly funded by clients were visits to Harbord Diggers and the Sydney Symphony.

CHALLENGES

- 1. Variation in participant skills:** The major challenge was that participant skills varied, and so a one size fits all program was not appropriate. Participants also had range of different obligations that made attendance challenging for some more than others. It would have been easier to stream the students based on English proficiency, but we judged that would have limited the levels of social and community engagement amongst the groups, which was a very valuable outcome of the program overall.
- 2. Transport:** Most participants use public transport and the costs associated with travelling to class are significant for many. Some participants are unable to sit for driving licences, due to cost. We recognised that any assistance to cover transport costs would have further supported participants and overcome additional barriers to participation.
- 3. Experiences of torture and trauma:** Participants felt very comfortable and secure in the learning environment provided for the DLP program. We understand that for some, the classrooms could trigger past trauma experiences and the participants were supported with this sensitivity in mind.

OUTCOMES

The following units are from the Certificate of General Education for Adults and the Foundation Skills Training Package. The units are basic but are nationally accredited and have strict competency requirements.

- VU22375 Apply basic computer skills to language learning
- VU22376 Access the internet for language learning
- FSKDIG01 Use digital technology for basic workplace tasks
- FSKLRG001 Prepare to participate in a learning environment

By the end of 2020 we issued a Statement of Attainment to 37 students in at least one of the above units of competency. Many of the students had previously never completed any accredited training so the graduation ceremony, and the presentation of the Statement of Attainment was a moment of great pride and contributed greatly to students' levels of self-confidence as well as to motivating many to continue future training.

There have been multiple positive outcomes measured by observation and through feedback from participants including:

- Most participants now have both the skills and confidence to access important and up to date information online. This has helped reduce isolation and exclusion, especially during COVID and has increased participants' ability to link regularly with CRMC and other organisations' services.
- The program's first objective was to teach individuals to use Zoom and Microsoft Teams which has helped build digital competence and self-confidence and has helped increase social connection and inclusion.
- Many participants now routinely access MyGov services online since they learned how to do this through the program. This means that participants are routinely reporting online to Centrelink, which is more efficient for them and increases their independence.
- Other examples of the ways that digital literacy have helped improve settlement outcomes for participants include accessing information around public transport, timetables, maps and directions, and an increased ability to make enquiries, source information and make online bookings. This has directly influenced participants' ability to join in community events and activities.
- One of the important outcomes of this program is the increase in awareness of email and phone scams, and strategies to recognise and avoid them. This contributes to participant online safety and general sense of safety and well-being.
- Overall participants have increased levels of confidence and enthusiasm for using digital devices, beyond mobile phones, to access online information and to connect with family, individuals, organisations and community and other services. This enhances language skills, general knowledge about Australia, civic participation and social connectiveness – all of which are indicators of successful settlement.



KEY LEARNINGS

A major lesson was that with a comfortable environment and sometimes a slower paced relaxed approach to learning, confidence can be built more readily. Self-confidence is hugely valuable in getting students to try different computer-based activities, especially for those with little or no prior experience.

Activities focused on digital skills can incorporate work to progress a wide range of other settlement outcomes such as employment, family and social support, justice, finance and civic participation.

Assessing the mixed abilities, prior education and exposure to computers within the group, we focused the initial outcomes on personal engagement and developing confidence and functional levels of English language to achieve better overall successful outcomes of achieving digital literacy.

This program is managed by CMRC's Northern Region Office.

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For more information visit the CMRC Website at www.cmrc.com.au