

Hoppers Crossing Refugee and Migrant Elders Group community garden



Project overview

The project used community gardening as a way to break down social isolation by connecting seniors from refugee backgrounds with the Werribee Environmental Community Park Garden Group.

It also provided participants with information about local support services.

Project description

The Horn of Africa Communities Network (HACN) has been running social support activities for elders from refugee backgrounds from Africa for many years. It also runs a number of social support groups for elders from a number of communities from Burma.

This project was developed to attract new members and expand the range of activities for existing members.

Most participants had long been involved with gardening and growing their own vegetables. The community garden setting allowed them to meet and socialise with existing community plot holders, and to establish their own plots.

Participants were encouraged to undertake other activities organised by the HACN, including excursions, information sessions, English classes and various cultural celebrations highlighting members' cultures.

Project model

- Gardening and growing vegetables was identified as a shared activity that participants from various culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds could undertake together.
- The Wyndham Environmental Community Park (WECPP) was originally established by volunteers to promote the growing of vegetables in a community setting and facilitate engagement with local groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Some members of the HACN social support group had existing plots at the WECPP, and they initially supported new plot holders to participate in the garden.
- Each participant was given their own plot to promote a sense of ownership and provide them with an opportunity to grow their own food.
- Participants discussed issues of common interest with other plot holders, including what to grow during different seasons, how to maximise production using minimum watering, when to harvest and how to cook unfamiliar crops.
- Guest speakers provided information sessions on a number of topics during breaks, and activities such as lunches and outings were also organised for participants.
- Bi-lingual facilitators assisted with all aspects of the project and ensured activities were culturally appropriate.

Budget

Total project cost	\$10,000
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Project challenges

None reported.

Project outcomes

Participants included:

- 35 seniors from the Chin, Karenni, Kachin and Karen communities (Burma)
- 14 South Sudanese seniors
- 12 Somali seniors
- 14 Ethiopian seniors.

In addition to the direct benefits of engaging in a healthy outdoor activity, other outcomes included:

- opportunity to practice English
- access to fresh healthy food for participants and their families
- increased awareness of support services including Senior's Card and Home Care Services
- increased confidence using public transport and visits to places of interest, including regional Victoria
- increased social connectedness
- better understanding of different cultures
- a Senior's Festival celebration.

Project sustainability

The strong ongoing partnership with the WECP has ensured that project participants can maintain their garden plots and continue to grow their own vegetables.

The HACN established a number of other partnerships during the project with organisations such as Australian Unity, the City of Wyndham's aged services team, Annecto, the Australian Karen Association, the Ethiopian Community Association, the Sudanese Community Association in Victoria and the Somalian Association in Victoria.

These partnerships will ensure participants will continue to be provided with information, support and networking opportunities.

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