

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 30 April 2014

#### Members

Mr C. Brooks

Mr P. Crisp

Mr N. Elasmar

Mrs J. Kronberg

Mrs A. Millar

Chair: Mrs J. Kronberg

Deputy Chair: Mr C. Brooks

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Mr M. Baker

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#### Witnesses

Ms S. Quek, manager, knowledge and advocacy,

Mr P. Jayasuriya, acting coordinator, education support, and

Ms S. Nicholson, acting manager, sector and community partnerships, Centre for Multicultural Youth.

**The CHAIR** — I welcome both of you, and we equally welcome Mr Jayasuriya, who will arrive soon. For the record, we have with us Ms Sarah Nicholson, acting manager of sector and community partnerships, and Ms Soo-Lin Quek, manager, knowledge and advocacy, of Centre for Multicultural Youth. There are some formalities we need to go through before we invite you to participate in this process. In welcoming you to this public hearing of the Education and Training Committee’s inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools, it is important for you to appreciate that the evidence captured here today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which gives you the opportunity to speak more freely than you would outside of this environment. However, that privilege does not continue once you leave this environment; it is only while we are in this setting. A transcript of your evidence will be available in two weeks time, and you will have the opportunity to correct any typographical errors. You can make alterations or request that alterations be made.

I invite whoever would like to lead off to make some opening remarks. We are very keen then to have a good interactive session, because there are a number of questions we would like to ask you. Who will lead off with some opening remarks?

**Ms QUEK** — I will. Thank you all for having us here today. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to have this conversation with you. To start off and to let you know, the Centre for Multicultural Youth has been around for about 25 years now, and education has always been quite a big area for us in terms of the work we do. We have about 25 years experience of developing an understanding and knowledge base around what is happening for refugees and migrant students in the Victorian education system. Having said that, we know in terms of this cohort of young people or students from migrant and refugee backgrounds that there are particular educational needs for them, or they face particular challenges within the education system. Often they come into Australia or Victoria with very fragmented education, so they may be 13 years old and get slotted straight into year 7 without having much formal education prior to coming. They may have spent years in a refugee camp or in various countries before coming to Australia.

What we do know, though, is that this group of young people are highly motivated because they have had the opportunity to come to Australia. Their parents and their families are very keen for them to do well, and they want to do well too, but what we are finding is that often they get very frustrated or disillusioned, I suppose, because of that very different educational background. The families do not understand the education system, or the families may not be able to help them with homework. For example, in primary school, where families are encouraged to read to the children, families may not be literate in the English language, so the students may miss out on a whole lot of family support there. Families may only know other families from their countries of origin, so their kind of social networks or their kind of social capital is very limited in that sense to help support students to do well. Having said that, the families are very keen to find other ways to help their children do well in school. Families do not understand the school education system here either, and the teaching pedagogy is very different. For instance, where I come from, you send your kids to school and the school does everything. To be called up to the school means you have gotten into trouble rather than being called up to school meaning ‘We want to work in partnership with you, as families, to help your students to do well’.

Over the last six or so years we have started to work around homework clubs in the state of Victoria, and we have started to support homework clubs to be able to support refugee and migrant young people to manage and cope with homework, because a lot of the students do not even understand what the homework is about and do not understand what is required of them to complete their homework. We have over 250 homework clubs in Victoria. They are not only for refugee and migrant students; they are for everyone. However, most of them are attended by students of this cohort. The demand for these clubs is outpacing the supply of places in these kinds of homework groups. They are all voluntary in that sense. They are voluntary tutors. We have a volunteer base. What would the number be?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Of the volunteers? We probably support 1600 to 1800 volunteers across Victoria.

**Ms QUEK** — The volunteers are tutors, so we train them up and then the homework groups go, ‘Yes, I want a tutor in English for Maroondah’, and then there is a database so that we can match tutors to what

homework groups are wanting to do. I know I have only got 5 minutes, but I want to really emphasise that this group of students do need support outside the schools. It is critical to have school partnerships with families, students and community agencies like us, who help this group of young people to do well in schools and to engage them well in schools. Once this group of young people, who are highly motivated, want to get the solution and get too frustrated, there is a tendency for them to disengage from schools. We know with this cohort what the stats are telling us: that there is a high potential for this group of young people to disengage. The homework groups are doing a fantastic job and we want to be able to continue to support the groups that are helping this group of young people.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for that briefing, and we welcome you as well.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Thank you; I apologise.

**The CHAIR** — We understand. I just want to let you know that what you have to say here is protected by parliamentary privilege, but that would not be extended to you outside of here. Things are being captured by Hansard and whatever you say you can have a look at in about two weeks time and make typographical error changes.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Okay, no worries. Thanks.

**The CHAIR** — So welcome.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Would somebody else like to make some opening remarks from their own perspectives, before we start putting questions to you?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — No.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — No, I think — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Ms Quek — —

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Actually I will just say something. We have brought some resources that may be of assistance to the committee outside of the public hearings today.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — There is just some general information about the programs in education that CMY runs, some case studies around homework clubs and a lit review. There is also a training DVD that we use.

**The CHAIR** — Is that for the volunteers?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Yes.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — And also for anyone who wants to know about the homework club sector. This is about various models.

**The CHAIR** — From my perspective — and I am sure I am speaking on behalf of the committee — we look forward to having a look at that with great anticipation, so thank you very much for bringing that material. We do appreciate that. Are you able to explain the actual funding, who you are funded by and when?

**Ms QUEK** — Yes. We are funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. We have got just under \$1 million a year — sorry, just over \$1 million. Actually, why do you not explain the funding?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — We have a service agreement with the department that continues to the end of the next calendar year, so December 2015. That provides funding for our core staff. We have five staff based in the regions — four in metro and one staff member based in Ballarat who covers rural and regional Victoria. Those staff support the homework clubs in those regions. In addition, out of that funding we provide funding in turn to homework clubs to develop themselves in accordance with our best practice guides and to assist them to get ongoing funding outside of that initial grant.

**The CHAIR** — What would they receive when they are looking at funding to top up what you are able to offer?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — A typical homework club would need a paid coordinator. Depending on how many sessions they run a week, the coordinator would be at those sessions and then have some time outside of the sessions to coordinate volunteers, tee up the venue, arrange food and refreshments — often that is done in partnership with community organisations, so we get a lot of in-kind support for that sort of stuff — and to develop the program with teachers for what happens at the homework club, so it is linked into what is happening in the classroom as well. That would be typically a paid position ideally, and then we have all the volunteer tutors that are related to that. The resources primarily go to the coordinator, and some resources as well perhaps for teachers to backfill so they can spend some time with the coordinator integrating back into the school.

**The CHAIR** — Can you tell me a little bit about the facilities that you actually operate out of?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Homework clubs are — —

**The CHAIR** — No, for your coordinating hub, where do you operate from?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — CMY has an office in Carlton, an office in Sunshine, an office in Dandenong — —

**Ms QUEK** — Ballarat and Gippsland.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Ballarat and Gippsland. Our staff are based — —

**Ms QUEK** — Scattered across, depending where the demand is. We have got a staff member in Dandenong who will service that region, and in Ballarat. Where else Placid?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — The western region. All the metropolitan regions are covered, so yes, there is a staff member for eastern metropolitan, northern metropolitan, southern metropolitan and western metropolitan, and we have a rural and regional position.

**The CHAIR** — Across 250 homework clubs. It sounds like an amazing logistical exercise.

**Ms QUEK** — We run on the smell of an oily rag.

**The CHAIR** — I am dazzled by what you have achieved.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — They are not our homework clubs in a sense.

**Ms QUEK** — That is right.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — They belong to the community that set them up and they are collaboratively managed by that community. Our role is resourcing and supporting them to provide a best practice club basically.

**The CHAIR** — It is still a huge task.

**Ms QUEK** — And maybe as background comment to this, years ago when homework clubs started popping up to support this group of students there was a very different consistency, and schools were

saying, 'Oh no, the homework club is teaching the students different things to what we are teaching'. We did a lot of work with the department of education asking how do we build a consistent benchmark standard across all homework clubs so that schools are confident in sending the students to the homework clubs? That is our role: to build the consistency and the benchmarking, and to resource those homework groups to be able to interact well with the schools, and the schools will feel confident.

**The CHAIR** — The schools then have confidence and maintain the confidence, but you are actually running to support the curriculum?

**Ms QUEK** — That is right.

**The CHAIR** — It is not like the experience that we have had described to us where people who are going to coaching centres and tutoring environments. They are actually running things from their own perspective and it is often outside the curriculum.

**Ms QUEK** — That is what was happening years ago and now we have standardised them across so that schools have the confidence now.

**The CHAIR** — That is amazing as well. I am terribly impressed with what you are achieving. I think we will open up the questioning to other members of the committee.

**Mr BROOKS** — I was going to follow on from that point, because I notice your submission says that there are still issues around consistent standards, and you cite student safety, tutor quality and long-term financial sustainability, which is an obvious one if funding seems to have come and then be assured through to the end of the next year. Do you want to describe in a bit more detail the work that needs to be done, particularly in relation to the standards? We have heard in evidence, for example, around the benefit of having, certainly in the secondary years, specialist teachers available for students rather than general tutors, in particular areas — for example, in maths or science — where there is probably a need for a specialist. It is obviously an issue that you picked up in terms of tutor quality. Do you want to explain a bit more about it?

**Ms QUEK** — Absolutely. Placid, do you want to explain our tutor training coordinator training?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes. We have the tutor training and we do work with pre-service teachers as well. There are some homework club models we are engaged with. Monash University has a program.

**Mr BROOKS** — Their students come in to that.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Students come in. Monash is a big university and there are different departments.

**The CHAIR** — Do the courses recognise that as some sort of a credit, an internship, to the course as well?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — That is right. There are some programs — for example, out at Noble Park Primary School they have a partnership with the Monash University education department. As part of the agreement, pre-service teachers come into the school and run specialised learning support. It is not necessarily a homework club, but it is learning skills and learning support out of school hours. Hours are counted towards their placement hours and so on. There is assessment involved. This type of partnership is very difficult to organise. There is such a demand for that support, and it often takes a lot of relationship building.

**The CHAIR** — Who drives that?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — In that case it was the principal, who had a contact at Monash. It is like a win-win, I guess. Monash wanted to do something supporting newly arrived young people and have the opportunity for their education students to have an experience working with newly arrived students, because often those communities do not have that sort of teaching skills built into their curriculums.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any direct relationship with the unis?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Not personally. These are some things that we have talked about, but it is a very difficult space because there is a big demand for collaborations from a lot of services, community agencies and schools with the universities. The ideal is to have that with not just universities but even the TAFE system, which has qualified, more specialist youth work, community development and social work students — not necessarily even education students. We are working with a high-needs group, so having that specialised training is an advantage.

**The CHAIR** — Do they match up so that there are individual relationships? Are they available for the students, where the needs are high?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — I believe there is a program. I am not sure if it is still running, but at La Trobe University, Bundoora, they had a sort of a mentoring matching where they would come into the schools and work with school students. I believe that was more of a matching, close to one-on-one sort of support. Most programs are group based. It is very hard to get the one-on-one, because we are depending on volunteers. We are recommending a one-to-three ratio at least, but some programs do one-on-one. Some mentoring programs, like one out at La Trobe, Bundoora, was a one-to-one, I believe, and targeting newly arrived and disadvantaged schools as well.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — We do try and encourage the clubs, if they have the capacity, to develop individual learning plans for the students, though. Whilst the activities might take place in small groups, there is that individual learning plan for the students.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — That is right. Again, this comes back to the consistency and standards of the homework club. Some programs are run by former teachers; the coordinators are former teachers. There is one coordinator out in Dandenong who is a former teacher. She is running a homework support program on a Saturday. With her teacher experience, puts a huge effort to work with school teachers directly: working with school reports, putting together learning plans, and providing feedback to the families and to the teachers.

**The CHAIR** — Is this a volunteer role, at this point?

**Ms QUEK** — Yes.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — The coordinator was paid to run the homework program. She is allowed a certain number of hours.

**Ms QUEK** — It is not a full-time role, though.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — It is not a full-time role.

**Ms QUEK** — They are paid some hours.

**The CHAIR** — How many hours would be allocated for that on a Saturday? I am assuming that we are looking at 2-hour opportunities for people to attend these homework clubs? Is that what we are looking at?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Exactly.

**The CHAIR** — Is it normally a 2-hour block?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — It ranges. For primary you can get 45 minute sessions. If you are looking at after school, the younger ones, it may not be. At the end of the day it is sometimes hard to keep the younger students for the whole 2 hours or so, so primary tends to be 45 minutes to 1 hour and secondary can go up to 2 or 3 hours. Some of the VCE ones can go up to 3 hours. It varies.

**The CHAIR** — Is it in that format for the Saturday? What are we looking at?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — That one was run out of Dandenong. It was a partnership between St Vincent de Paul and St Mary's primary school, which provides the venue in kind. They use the space, and they use volunteers. We are looking at 2 hours for the program, and they are getting 100 students coming in, so there is a high demand. I think if there was more funding and more of that coordinator role, there would be more students attending. It is about 2 hours. Regarding prep time, she probably spends at least 4 hours on the day and then she will probably have another half a day or a day during the week — —

**The CHAIR** — Correcting material.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes, and during the week making contacts, volunteer resource recruitment, reference checking — all that sort of stuff.

**The CHAIR** — That is a very big responsibility.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Huge.

**The CHAIR** — Regarding checking the background, it just occurred to me that tutors, as volunteers, all have police checks.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Of course, it is mandatory.

**Ms QUEK** — Absolutely. It was one of the benchmarks that we put in place that every homework group, tutor and coordinator must have those basic minimum checks. Previously it was very ad hoc; now everyone has them at the very least.

**Mrs MILLAR** — Leading on from that, I was interested in the breakdown of the venues for homework clubs. What percentage of them are based within schools, within libraries, within global learning centres, within churches or within other service organisations across the state?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — It is a real mix. I do not know the data off the top of my head, but it is a real mix.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — We find that generally they are based at the schools, especially for the primary level. The primary students are very hard to move to external programs. A lot are in the schools themselves; a lot of community members are coming into the schools to run them. We found that is probably the best model and most successful model — where the community comes in and supports the school. School staff usually have to be there, but all the coordination is run by an external community coordinator. There are libraries. I am actually doing a presentation on Friday for all the state librarians out in Doncaster. Libraries are very important stakeholders. There are some programs in church halls and so on, but again there are always issues around OHS, and there are no standards around that. We know school venues have all that certified and — —

**The CHAIR** — Who looks after the insurability of this?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — It all, again, depends. I go back to the St Vincent de Paul program at Dandenong at St Mary's. St Mary's actually covered the insurance for St Vincent de Paul.

**The CHAIR** — For public liability?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — That is right. There is actually another, Hazara student group. They run another homework support program for newly arrived students from an Afgan Hazara background. Again that program is also covered by the school; it is pretty fantastic for the school to offer that sort of support. A lot of these programs are run by grassroots or just starting up organisations, so they need some support and guidance with that sort of stuff. In that case it is funded.

**The CHAIR** — That is very generous of the St Mary's community, isn't it — to offer that type of support?

**Ms QUEK** — Absolutely.

**Mrs MILLAR** — Is there much support from the local government level?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — At Dandenong Library there is a one-to-one, really good, very different learning support program that is happening out of there. That is a small one-to-one program where they will work with that young person for six months. This program supports high-risk students; provide concentrated focus with the same tutor, which is of benefit to the young person, over a long time. There are some great results from there. They are looking to even work with some of the families of the kids who attend as well. Sometimes the parents will hang around the library while the students are being supported, so they are looking to do some family support as well. That has been government funding, but not huge amounts; you are looking at \$5000 for topping up some sorts of programs.

**Ms QUEK** — Local council has different arms to it. The council may say, ‘Yep, you can use the library space because it is connected to us’. There may be a youth worker who can supplement a homework group, because one of the things we find too is that it is not just homework. What is really useful for young people, especially after hours when they are tired after a long day — maybe it is basketball, and then you sit down and do the homework. We may have someone from local council coming in — their sport and rec person — to run a basketball group, and then everyone gets all the energy out and then they sit down and do the homework. What we find too is that it is not just homework. The outcomes and the benefits of this are that it also gives the young people social connections which previously they did not have. They are starting to build a bigger friendships network and getting to know young people from a whole range of other cultures as well. That is one of the beauties of those homework groups. Education outcomes by themselves are giving students and families bigger connections in their own community, whether it is in Dandenong, Doncaster or wherever else.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — On the volunteers and the links to universities, it might be useful for you to know that there is a program run by the Western English Language School — WELS — in Footscray that is linked with VUT, and that uses pre-service teachers. We also have a couple of student non-teacher groups that provide volunteers. In Bendigo it is called Crossing Borders Volunteering. That provides medical students to the homework clubs there. Monash has a program called Embrace; is that right?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes, Embrace Education.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — That provides a lot of students who are not necessarily teachers to volunteer —

**The CHAIR** — This becomes a whole series of portals, doesn’t it, for all the disciplines?

**Mr NICHOLSON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — It is extraordinary.

**Ms QUEK** — There is a lot of very generous incoming support within the communities to allow that to happen, whether it is insurance or whether it is time. Our struggle, I suppose, is that there has to be some benchmark around solid coordinator hours because, if you have a volunteer coordinator, sometimes it is so overwhelming that people leave. To keep people and to reimburse them for the work they do in coordinating all the different kids — —

**The CHAIR** — Coordinators need support. You need an EFT and a 0.5 or something like that.

**Ms QUEK** — That is right.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — There is a model in Bendigo at the secondary school where kids are bussed after school from a number of the secondary schools to the — —

**Mr BROOKS** — We heard that yesterday.



**The CHAIR** — We heard about that. We had a representative from the Bendigo Senior Secondary College here yesterday. That was brilliant because that is covering a number of students from the Indigenous community as well.

**Ms QUEK** — That is right, yes.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Soo-Lin, in your opening remarks you talked about the parents, especially those who come from different backgrounds. How do you support them and what is your advice? Do you get the school involved as well? Can you elaborate on that?

**Ms QUEK** — It is a struggle, I think, for schools and for communities to have stronger parent engagement. We all know the research tells us that good student outcomes need good parent engagement. One of the growing areas for homework groups is that they are starting to think much more about how to attract parents into the homework groups and therefore get them into the schools.

One of the things, for example, that some homework groups may do is very informal learning of English. If mum or dad or uncle or whoever else is looking after that student wants to learn a bit more English, there is an opportunity for them there, as well as homework for the children, but that is not across all homework groups. Some schools are doing it well, but I think schools have to be better at engaging parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds. One of the things we are starting to look at is how we can support principals in doing this — for example, by giving them good ideas and good tips about how to engage parents. One of the resources we put out, for example, is called Opening the School Gate. It is targeted at schools to give them a whole lot of ideas and resources about how you can get parents in the school gate and engage parents in that sense.

I think schools often say, ‘We haven’t got a lot of time to do things differently’, or, ‘We haven’t got a lot of resources to do things differently’. What we are seeing is that sometimes you do not need a lot of money or extra money to engage migrant refugee parents, but there are some things you need to be more flexible about. Rather than having a formal student-parent-teacher night, do we open up the school gates by having a community day that engages parents and students with the school so that parents get to know who the teachers are and feel more confident in talking to them, rather than saying, ‘Oh, no, that’s the school. The school will look after my student’?

I think the teaching pedagogy is very different, as you probably gather. There are some places where people think that the duty of the school is to teach their kids — ‘What do I know? I send my kids to school, and they should be taught’. Whereas I think in Australia we have a much stronger culture in the sense of engaging parents and having parents as part of the education process. How do we skill up families to do that? I think there are a whole lot of ways that we can do it, but I think we are still not very good at it.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Do you need more work to be done?

**Ms QUEK** — We absolutely do need a lot more work on it. One of the things, for instance, in relation to the program that we run is that we used to run an annual forum that brings together all the homework group coordinators, tutors and young people. One of the things that we were starting to think about doing was asking how we focus that forum on family engagement and get different ideas across the different regions of Victoria about what can work and what will work.

**The CHAIR** — Have you approached, say, the peak bodies for principals and asked to present at their conferences and things like that so that you can perhaps pick up some champions within the cohort of school principals and they can have the understanding and sort of evangelise things?

**Ms QUEK** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Within that professional cohort they can capture the imagination of a number of their colleagues in that way, so you have sort of internal salespeople, to use the marketing vernacular.

**Ms QUEK** — Yes. Often we need a few tips around marketing. Yes, I think we have had contact, and Placid will tell you the experience perhaps.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes, I think we have had minimal contact, mainly because — —

**The CHAIR** — Is it a time thing?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — It is hard to get on their agenda, I think, and that has been one of the challenges in the past. There have been changes to the department, so it is one of those things where we probably have not got there just yet, but in saying that, there are a couple of principals out in City of Casey that I have worked with. David Finnerty is a regional leader for that area, I believe, so he is involved in our conversations, and he has been for three or four years. He knows that we are doing this, and we have been getting his advice and support for some of our program delivery and partnerships. I am working with him and will hopefully work with him to form a partnership with Monash Uni, for example, because he is on the board of the education department at Monash Uni. He is one of the principal leaders, and he is the principal at Hampton Park Secondary College.

**Ms QUEK** — I think one of the challenges in working with schools — and this applies not just to us as an organisation; I think a whole lot of other organisations find it too — is that everyone seems to think that schools are the answer to a whole lot of things, whether it is drug and alcohol issues or mental health and bullying services. There are a whole lot of us lining up at the school gate wanting the school to do things with us, and I think sometimes schools feel that they are too busy or have enough on their plate, so it is really hard, like Placid is saying, sometimes, though not always, to get this agenda onto the principal's radar, or even onto the welfare coordinator's radar or even a teacher's agenda. I think the school curriculum is full, very full.

**The CHAIR** — We understand that, but there is a possibility for mutual problem-solving here that ultimately would solve some of the problems within the school structure itself.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — What we have done, however, is work with some of the champion principals that we know in the area. For example, at Keysborough College they have been running a homework club for a while, and their principal is a champion of the cause. We have worked with Anglicare Parentszone, the school and the homework clubs so that they come together. We ran a parent information group. Parentszone at Anglicare runs a parenting program, but we sort of put in the educational support element to them and came up with a term program. It took real perseverance, and it was difficult working with parents, who had to find a time when they could come. That was not necessarily after school — it could be in the morning — so we would provide some child care and some interpreters. We provided access. That program was taken up slowly and it is still running, even after the programs had finished, because they still want to come. They are still attending once a month or so, and a couple of the parents have joined the council at the school. We have used that model in our travels. We have talked about that opportunity with other schools.

**The CHAIR** — That is a brilliant model.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — We have shown what has actually worked. If you look at the other stakeholders, there is expertise out there; you do not have to reinvent the wheel. There are really good facilitators. Anglicare has a long-running and long-term support programs for parents.

**The CHAIR** — What sort of benchmarking do you need to undertake, and do you have a regular evaluation process so that you get your continuity with the funding?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — We have an audit tool that assists coordinators to audit their own programs, and then we will work with them to address any deficiencies there or any issues that need improvement.

**Ms QUEK** — We have had two lots of evaluation already. An external evaluator was contracted to look at the work that we do and the effectiveness of the work that we do, so we have that evidence, I suppose, to go back and talk to the department of education about the value and the efficacy, I suppose, of

homework groups. So we have some of the evidence there. I think we have finished the second round of evaluation. It is something that we need to spruik, I suppose, much more than we are at the moment.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — If I can touch on a couple more models around the parent engagement, now we are working under RESP, the refugee education support program. There is more information about that in the materials. As part of that program we work in clusters of schools. In the north metro region, for instance, we are working with Brunswick Secondary College. They are running information sessions with parents to try to engage them better with the school. Those information sessions involve interpreters and developing written materials in multiple languages to try to engage those parents and to get those parents to better understand the school and how they can support their kids.

Another one in that area is Preston North East Primary School. We are working with them on developing a family learning club. It is like an after-hours homework club that the parents come to. We all sit around on cushions or chairs and do the homework or primary school reading together so that the parents are engaged and can find out a bit more about what is going on.

**The CHAIR** — How long has that model been operating?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — The family learning club model has been around for probably a few years, but that is a new thing for them at that school.

**Mr ELASMAR** — On the homework club, some students do not do well at school and they need assistance, of course, after school, but they have a strong commitment to their activities in sport. Is that being considered, or do they miss out? How is that being worked around?

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Do you want to talk about that fantastic soccer program in Dandenong?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes. There are a few programs out there that combine recreation — sports — and literacy and numeracy support. For example, there is one program out in Springvale that is actually a basketball club, but as part of being part of the team you do homework support as well before you train. They do a bit of a roster, so some students will go and train and once they are finished they come and do their schoolwork. Part of being part of the club is actually getting stuff done, doing their homework.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Some are put on the side?

**Ms QUEK** — Yes, that is right.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — We are also hoping to work with Dandenong High and Football Federation Australia to run a referee course but as part of it to provide a lot of tutor support to complete it. Some of the students we are trying to target for this program are the ones who only come to school at lunchtime because they know there are sports happening. These are very high-risk students who are probably not engaged with school to the degree necessary.

**The CHAIR** — When we are talking about high-risk students, are there security or safety issues that you need to be aware of or plan for or resource around or have a code of practice to deal with in terms of people's emotional reactions while they are in those settings?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Yes. I guess that is where we rely on the coordinator's advice. It has not really come up, but in terms of training for the volunteers we talk about the cultural experiences and the journey of some of these young people and for them to keep that in mind. But in saying that, they are not counsellors. We tell them how to report things in this space and how to work with a coordinator to support a young person and that it is not for them to shoulder everything and about stepping back.

**Ms QUEK** — We do a lot of training before the volunteer teachers get out there, and part of their training —

**The CHAIR** — So they know what to expect. They can face a whole range of situations.

**Ms QUEK** — is about how to identify torture, trauma and what is the refugee experience so that at least in the back of their minds they can say, ‘I saw that behaviour. I need to report it’, or, ‘I need to talk to someone else about how to deal with it’. You are right, we do not expect them to deal with everything at the same time.

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — Our focus with that sort of support is on the coordinators. Part of our support include running professional development for coordinators. We ran one on child protection. We had Child Wise come in to talk about some of the things that could be related to a homework club and general child protection. We have talked about that as part of our support. There are certifications that you can do for the venues and the programs to be child safe. We provide a lot of support for the coordinators for them to then support the volunteers and the other staff in the program.

**Mr BROOKS** — I notice that in your submission you highlight access to technology in the home as one of the issues. We heard evidence yesterday around the importance of people in low-income families having access to technology at home — the internet — to complete homework.

**Ms QUEK** — That is right.

**Mr BROOKS** — We also heard that it can be isolating and people can feel excluded if they are not able to complete homework when the rest of the class is given homework to be done at home. You have linked that to the education maintenance allowance and the fact that that is going at the end of this year. What will be the impact of that on families who are not able to provide internet access at home?

**Ms QUEK** — Do you want to talk about that, Placid?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — I guess we find that in the group we are working with often there are a couple of families in the one household. There are a lot of kids and maybe only one computer, so the demand for that computer is quite high. A lot of young people, especially at the VCE level, rely on the homework club or staying back after school and using the library or the computer rooms to have that access, even for technology like graphics calculators and all the other IT devices such as iPads. There is a lot out there. I assume it will be even higher in the future.

**Ms QUEK** — I think the impact will be felt quite deeply, especially for some of the families that are quite big. We need to find ways to tap them into existing resources in the community, but it is very hit and miss. It is not often that we can guarantee that, yes, you will be able to access the equipment that you need all the time. It is going to be a hard one for families to manage on their own.

**Mr BROOKS** — Were you consulted about the removal of the EMA?

**Ms QUEK** — Were you consulted, Placid?

**Mr JAYASURIYA** — No.

**Ms QUEK** — No, I did not think you were. Can I go back to sport and make a quick comment about it? I think you are absolutely right. I think it is critical. We have so many young people who are starting to disengage from school, so we use sport and we say, ‘If you want to become a referee or a coach, you have to sit a written exam’. It hooks them in. Even though it is not homework, if they want to be a coach or a referee, they have to learn to read and write and count. That is one way we hook them back into the schools through their interest in and passion for sport. You may not want to go to school, but you want to become a coach or a referee, so you still have to sit the tests. It is how we balance it and bring the right combination of ingredients into that student-centred approach that we often have.

**The CHAIR** — That is just marvellous. We were almost getting to the point where we were indulging ourselves in hearing from you. We have gone over time, and I want to thank you all for your contributions today. It has been amazing for us to receive this information. I want to congratulate you all on your work.

**Ms QUEK** — Thank you.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure I am looking at some unsung heroes who do go above and beyond.

**Ms QUEK** — Plenty of them.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — We will take that back to the team too.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, please do. I want to congratulate you all. It is wonderful to hear these stories. It is totally inspiring, so thank you very much for performing your roles.

**Ms QUEK** — Great!

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Thank you.

**Ms QUEK** — Thank you for your time today.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for providing that supplementary material.

**Ms NICHOLSON** — Yes, and please advise us if there is anything further you need.

**The CHAIR** — We might want to chase up on evaluation reports and things like that. That will add weight to our arguments.

**Ms QUEK** — All right. We will pass that on to you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**