



WELLSPRINGS FOR WOMEN

**ANALYSIS OF NEEDS
FOR
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION
IN
THE CITIES OF
GREATER DANDENONG AND CASEY**

March 12, 2008



SPRINGBOARD

Social Planning

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACFE	Adult Community and Further Education
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CoGD	City of Greater Dandenong
DE	Doveton - Eumemmerring
DVC	Department of Victorian Communities, which has now been amalgamated with the Department of Planning to become the Department for Planning and Community Development.
ESL	English as a Second Language
HVP	Wellsprings Home Visiting Program
LGA	Local Government Area
MSD	Melbourne Statistical Division
NR	Neighbourhood Renewal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Springboard Social Planning would like to record its appreciation of all who have contributed to this report, to the participants of Wellspring's English Language and Computer Literacy Classes, to Wellsprings staff: Veronica Hassett, Jessica Goddard, Linda Morrison, Rose Elias, Gulgothai Bezan, and June O'Doherty, to the staff working in community service organizations in the Cities of Greater Dandenong and of Casey, to the many staff working in a range of Federal, State and Local Government positions who gave most generously of their time, and particularly to the Manager of Wellsprings, Sr. Ann Halpin, for her helpfulness, knowledge and, above all, her wisdom.

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February 2008



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1. INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1 The Organisation: Wellsprings for Women Incorporated

Wellsprings for Women Incorporated is a non-profit community development organization, auspiced by the Presentation Sisters Victoria and has been operating since 1994. Its priority has been work with women isolated by disadvantage, family function, or the dislocation that is the experience of migrants and refugees.

Its goal, encapsulated in its Vision and Mission Statement:

“...seeks to empower women to live their lives more fully.

‘Together we create a welcoming, supportive environment which promotes companionship, encourages confidence, provides access to information and opportunities for life-long learning and well-being.

‘Wellsprings draws on the life experiences of those who gather from all parts of the world, welcomes their diversity and promotes the potential of each woman’s gifts.’

It seeks to achieve this goal through being a warm, supportive and friendly meeting place for isolated women and to provide on-going experiences of respect and dignity and an environment for sharing ideas, skills and resources so that each can continue along life’s journey equipped with enhanced self-confidence and skill.

1.2 The History of Wellsprings¹

The Presentation Sisters have worked in the Dandenong area since 1912. For many years their contribution was through Catholic school education and their involvement in the community as they moved to outlying areas offering religious education to more isolated families.

¹ The information presented here has been drawn from an unpublished ‘Needs Analysis’ report (p4-5) prepared by Marie Alexander for Wellsprings in August 2007.

During 1995, Sr. Ann undertook research into the causes of the social isolation and into the agencies and groups which were attempting to respond to emerging conditions. Some of the causes which were identified included marriage breakdown, domestic violence, caring for family members with disabilities, invalidated and ageing parents, lack of availability or prohibitive costs of childcare, lack of public transport, underemployment and unemployment which led to dependence on social security.

Also explored were the enormous changes in migration patterns to Australia, which are reflected in a dramatic way in the multicultural nature of the local community, as indicated in Figure 2 below, and in turn, in the Wellsprings community. The large number of refugee and asylum seeker families who have moved into the Dandenong area require new and creative responses to a wide variety of needs.

In response to this reality and after consultation with the many services offered by the public and community sectors, Sr. Ann, with the support of the Presentation Sisters, decided to set up Wellsprings as a place which attempts to meet the need not already being met by existing agencies.

The programs offered have gradually increased to the point where the centre is open 5 days a week and caters for around 600 attendances per week. Wellsprings has a staff of one full time person, 20 part-time staff and sessional facilitators and approximately 60 trained volunteers.

1.3 The Project Brief

This project aims to provide an overview of the needs of the women in the community of City of Greater Dandenong and Casey who are living with disadvantage, as identified in published and unpublished literature, and as perceived by government, health and non-government service providers, Management staff at Wellsprings and participants in some of the programs, in order to produce evidence useful in guiding decisions on:

- The future program direction, including addressing the needs of isolated women in CoGD and Casey living with disadvantage, migrants, refugees and members of new and emerging communities;

- The future program balance between community strengthening (including 1:1 mentoring programs) and the more cognitive education programs;
- Potential future partnerships.

In this research, the word ‘community’ refers not just to the Wellsprings participants, as the cohorts of these can change from year to year, including the changes in the new and emerging communities. Thus in the late 1990s there were significant numbers of women from the former Yugoslavia and China, and in the early ‘noughties’ from Afghanistan and Iraq, and more recently, from the Sudan. Rather, in this report, the term ‘community’ refers to the residents of the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Casey, from where the majority of Wellsprings participants are drawn.

Finding a term that covers the parameters of the education and learning that occurs at Wellsprings has been more challenging. One suggestion was ‘non-accredited’ but this can be seen as narrowly ACFE-focused and furthermore, some of the learning at Wellsprings, such as the Certificate 3 in Social Services, is or can be accredited. The term ‘non-formal’ education settled upon suffers from the latter constraint but does capture something of a lower key, community-based ambience to broad ranging learning programs that are concerned to enhance people’s confidence in their ability to manage their lives.

Much of the information presented focuses more on vulnerabilities than on strengths in the general communities of Dandenong and Casey. In focusing on need, this report does not so much wish to focus on deficits but rather to identify the range of supports required by marginalized women, in order that they have the space and opportunity to recognize and build on their strengths and to move with confidence and a renewed sense of wellbeing, towards the realization of their giftedness.

1.4 Research Methodology

A briefing from Linda Morrison, the Education Co-ordinator at Wellsprings was followed by a survey of the literature covering relevant Adult Community Education Board (ACFE) documents, the ABS website with regard to the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Casey, and websites of

these municipalities with regard to Community Profile data sets.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with Wellsprings Management team and some staff members, and a focused discussion was conducted with two of the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with federal, state and local government service providers, including management staff from two neighbourhood or community renewal areas of relevance to Wellsprings, namely Doveton-Eumemmerring and Hampton Park, with the Manager of the Cranbourne community development project in Casey and with migrants.

The data was then analyzed for trends in:

- Community level vulnerabilities, particularly of the new and emerging communities, and in education and income
- The need for formal and non-formal education
- The need for social connection
- The need for personal development
- The suggestions received to meet these needs

A preliminary report was prepared for the Manager of Wellsprings, Sr. Ann Halpin, before work began on the final Report.

1.5 Report Structure

Because Wellsprings receives significant funding in its role as an ACFE provider, this report will first consider ACFE priorities, the fit of these priorities with the ‘communities’ of Greater Dandenong and Casey, including the new and emerging communities, and the fit of these priorities with those who choose to participate in the programs at Wellsprings. The report will then turn to the suggestions received from informants external to Wellsprings for its programs and perhaps its future program partners.

2. THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION CONTEXT

2.1 ACFE Priorities

In working towards its range of goals, Wellsprings includes in its program a range of opportunities for participants to engage in accredited and pre-

accredited adult learning, for which it receives funding from the Adult and Community Education (ACFE) Board.

Nationally, ACE (adult community education) is defined as

“not for profit community based organizations with a local or regional focus that offer adult learning programs.”

In Victoria, the ACFE Board works to the Victorian *Policy Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians*, (State of Victoria, 2006), which emphasizes the importance of effective education and training for the success of the economy, but also for individuals and the community. Bowman (2006)² reported that ACE providers achieved its aims through performing at least six roles, all of which, with the exception of accredited training, can be seen at Wellsprings:

- **“Platform builders** – *re-engaging adults with basic education and support services;*
- **Bridge builders**- *providing pathways into formal tertiary education and paid work;*
- **Work skill developers**- *offering accredited vocational training in their own right;*
- **Facilitators of adult health**- *improving mental, physical and emotional wellbeing;*
- **Promoters of citizenship**- *achieving adults active in community activities;*
- **Community capacity builders**- *facilitating local community networks and community development at various levels.”*

ACFE funds

- Vocational education and training that assists people to start working, go back to work or change jobs;
- Adult literacy and numeracy training, including teaching English to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

² Volkoff, Veronica and Walstab, Anne (2007), **Setting the Scene: Investigating learning outcomes with a view to the future**, Centre for Post –compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, p29-30

- Basic skills training to support work or further learning, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving;
- VCE and VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) for adults³

ACFE is experimenting with funding these programs in a range of contexts including:

- **Learning towns:** where local partnerships have been formed between businesses, community-based adult education organizations, other training providers, community organizations and government agencies, which aim to build stronger communities through learning e.g. Mt Evelyn.
- **ACE Cluster Programs:** where ACE providers are developed into clusters to share infrastructure, support each other, strengthen their administration, management and planning capacity, and increased opportunities for training and professional development.
- **ACE Community Building Hubs Project.** These are funded through the government, Community Support Fund, where community-based adult education organisations offer training, support and advice about government issues to community groups.

A Possible Point of Discussion

These experiments may have relevance to future State Government policy and could therefore be of relevance to Wellsprings.

2.2: ACFE Priority Learner Groups

In the conduct of its role, ACFE has set a number of guidelines and priorities for the programs it funds. ⁴ These priorities have guided the adult community education sector to effectively engage with the most disadvantaged people in the primarily local community including older

³Kosky, Lynne, MP, Victorian Minister for Education and Training, (004), **Future Directions for Adult and Community Education in Victoria**, Communication Division for the Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Melbourne, p6

⁴ Ibid.

workers, unemployed people, people not in the labour force, people with a disability, and people with incomplete schooling, providing them with a pathway to further study, employment, links to other service providers and social outcomes. It has been identified that this effectiveness, in organisations such as Wellsprings, is the result of effective adult learning pedagogies and the wide-ranging support for the non-educational issues of learners.⁵

More specifically ACFE Priority Learner Groups⁶ include the following:

1. Young People 15-19 years
2. Men aged 45+ years
3. People aged 55+ years
4. Indigenous people
5. People with a disability
6. CALD (speak a language other than English at home)
7. People with highest school level Year 9 or below
8. People without qualifications (without Year 12 or Certificate II)

3. ACFE PRIORITIES AND THE CONTEXTS OF DANDENONG AND CASEY

3.1 ACFE Priorities And The Residents In The City Of Greater Dandenong

With a SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indicator for Area) Index of One, the City of Greater Dandenong is home to more people living with disadvantage than any other area of Victoria. In the mid 20th century many were drawn to the area by the work available at the large factories of Holden, Sunshine Harvester and Heinz Foods, and when these closed, many of the thousands who were plunged into unemployment, stayed, clinging to the lower cost housing that was available.

Housing in the City of Greater Dandenong continues to be more affordable than elsewhere in Victoria but in recent years the extent of this advantage has reduced, with house prices rising sharply in 2006/7.⁷

⁵Volkoff, Veronica and Walstab, Anne (2007), op. cit., pvi-vii

⁶ Volkoff, Veronica and Walstab, Anne (2007), op. cit., p. 56

⁷ i.d consulting, (2007) www.greaterdandenong.com.au/community-profile [accessed online 12/12/07]

In the post WWII years to the present time, migrants and refugees have been drawn to the municipality by the availability of jobs, the extensive range of migrant support services and low cost housing. 71% of Australian-born residents own or are buying their homes in the CoGD in comparison to 77% in the MSD (Melbourne Statistical Division) compared with just 5% of Afghanis and 4% of Sudanese⁸, two of the newest emerging communities, who are thus vulnerable to the recent rises in house rents.

Accommodation and housing are under significant pressure because of the shortages of both short term and long-term government housing. Many refugee families have complained of discrimination against large families, of the unaffordability of private rental, the difficulties of transitional housing and the length of waiting lists for government housing.

Wellsprings is not in a position to engage significantly in housing issues but women fleeing family violence have needed assistance here, and the rising costs of shelter have put pressure on the capacity of some participants to pay for its courses, and have perhaps functioned as a deterrent to others who might otherwise be interested.

Figure 1: Enumerated Population Characteristics of the City of Greater Dandenong (excluding overseas visitors)⁹

	Number	CGD 2006 %	MSD ¹⁰ %	2001 CGD %	2001 MSD %
Indigenous pop'n	495	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Australia born	50,564	40.4	64.2	42.8	65.7
Overseas born	64,304	51.4	29.0	51.0	28.6

Since the post WWII period, the proportion of overseas born people living in the CoGD has been higher than the MSD, and the data in Figure 2

⁸ ABS file 071210_1550. My thanks to Haydon Brown, Community Research Officer, City of Greater Dandenong, who provided access to this file as T12.

⁹ <http://203.84.234.220/Profile/Danden.5ong> [accessed online 22/11/07]

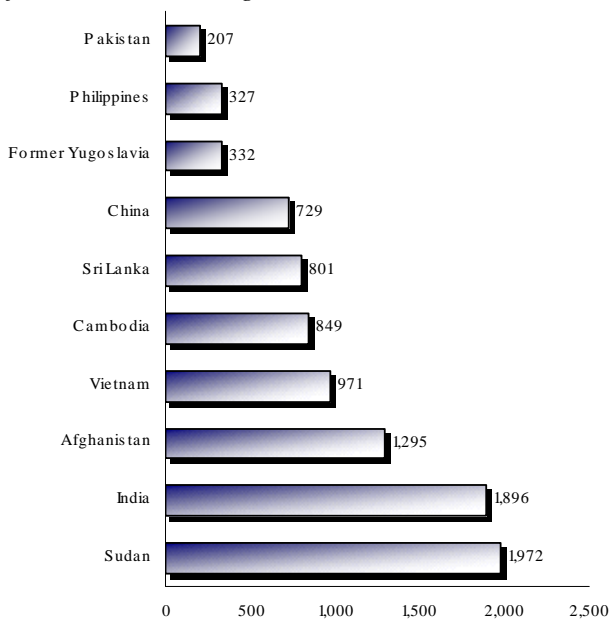
¹⁰ MSD Melbourne Statistical Division

indicates that this trend not only continues but is increasing, increasing at such a rate in fact that by April 2007, the Sudanese in the CoGD were estimated to number 2,500¹¹. This rapid increase in the numbers of residents born overseas, confirms the priority in Wellsprings programming, given to women from migrant and refugee communities.

Not featured in this table, nor in the ABS files kindly made available by the City of Greater Dandenong, are refugees from Burma, but there is anecdotal evidence that these are now beginning to move into the CoGD.

Housing is just one of the many issues of significance to the residents of the CoGD, but after identifying the various communities living in the municipality, this report will focus on just two, Education and Income, as these have a direct bearing on the Mission and Vision of Wellsprings.

Figure 2: Country of Birth: Top 10 overseas birthplaces ranked for 2006 Census (persons) City of Greater Dandenong 2002-2007¹²

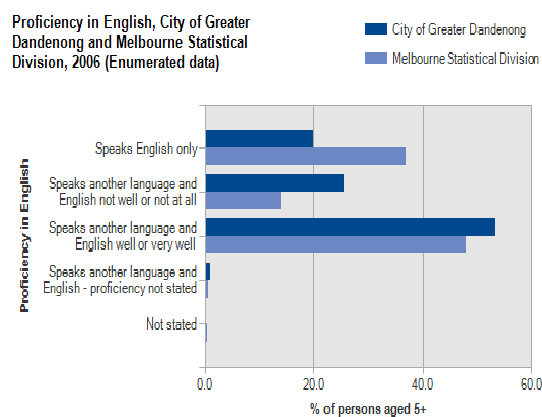


¹¹ Nuer Community in Victoria Inc., (2007), **Only Mountains Don't Meet**: Connecting Community Forum: 6 & 7 April, 2007, Dandenong, p.4

¹² ABS, (2006), <http://203.84.234.220/Profile/Dandenong> [accessed online 22/11/2007]

Within the migrant communities there are new and emerging communities from Sudan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Iraq in the Middle East, from Sri Lanka and Cambodia, and from the former Yugoslavia, who are refugees. Their stories reveal that they have suffered deeply pre-flight, suffering which can affect their physical and mental health and their capacity to focus in class and acquire skills in the English language, as can be seen in Fig 3 below¹³.

Figure 3: Proficiency in English City of Greater Dandenong¹⁴



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Enumerated)

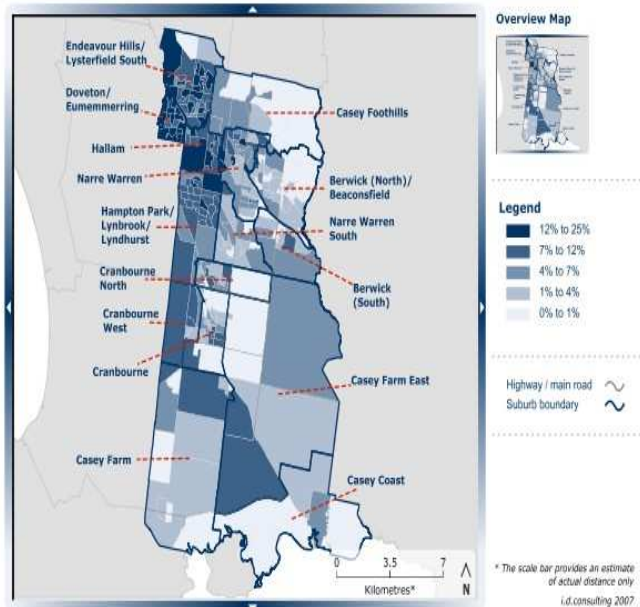
Figure 4 below indicates that there are significant cohorts of people in Casey, close to the border with COGD and therefore close to Wellsprings, with relatively low proficiency in English. The struggle to gain proficiency in English can affect the ability to negotiate their way around education, employment, housing, and the confidence to connect with others. Thus lack of proficiency can be an indicator, (one among many), of social isolation.

¹³ Department for Victorian Communities, (2005) **CALD Women's Project Final Report**, SuccessWorks, Melbourne, ch. 4.

¹⁴ i.d. consulting <http://203.84.234.220/Profile/Dandenong> [accessed online 23/11/2007]

Figure 4: Proficiency of English, City of Casey 2006 (www.id.com.au/casey/atlas)

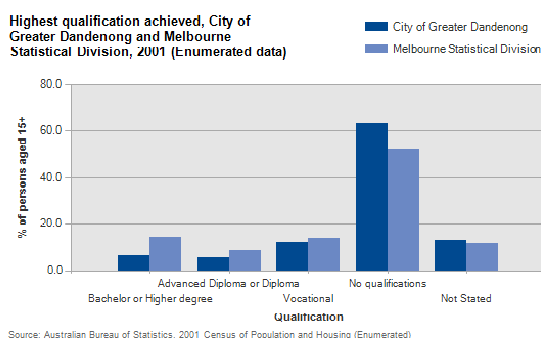
City of Casey - Persons not fluent in English
(As a proportion of overseas born)



Education

Nationally, education levels impact on employability. ABS 2006 data indicates that nationally, whilst only 41% of employed people had no post-school qualification, this rose to 61% for the unemployed.

Figure 5: Indications of Post School Qualification, CoGD

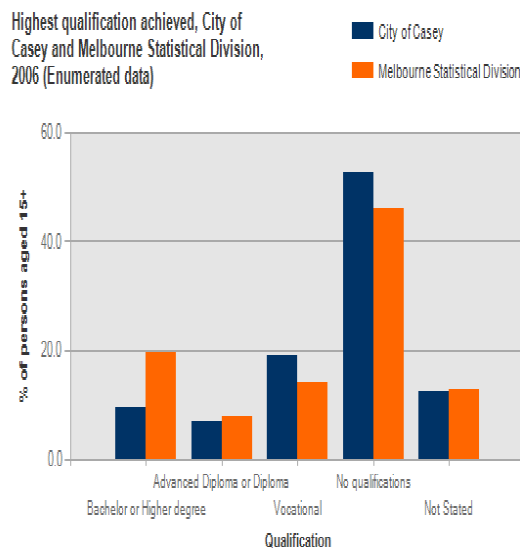


Within the CoGD the indications of post-school qualification point to significant disadvantage. With an Educational Index of 4 (compared to 193 for Boroondara, the most advantaged municipality

in Victoria)¹⁵, residents of CoGD are the most disadvantaged in the State.

The indications for Casey also point to educational disadvantage, with less than 50% with post-school qualifications.

Figure 6: Indications of Post School Qualification City of Casey,



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Enumerated)

Income

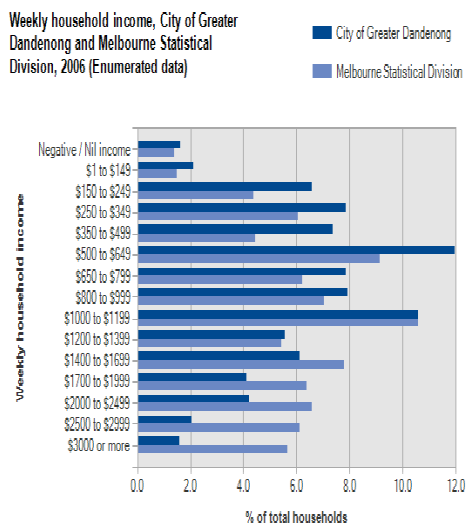
Overall, just 12.0% of the households in the CoGD access a high income, and 25.6% were assessed as low income households (in a process that excludes the lowest decile, and thus may under-estimate the extent of financial hardship in CoGD), compared with 24.7% and 17.9% respectively for the Melbourne Statistical Division.

For the last decade, unemployment in the CoGD has remained substantially higher than the metropolitan level. The 2006 Census recorded rates of 5% across Metropolitan Melbourne, compared with 9% in Greater Dandenong. Within this City the highest rates were experienced by residents from the Sudan (39%). Afghanistan (20%), Serbia, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia

¹⁵ ACFE, (2007), **ACFE Evidence Guide**, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne, p.23

13% each)¹⁶ A substantial number of participants at Wellsprings are drawn from these groups.

Figure 7: Weekly Household Income in the CoGD



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Enumerated)

Access to paid employment varies widely amongst different segments of the community. Whilst more than half (56%) of 15-64 year old residents work, this ranges from 70% of Indian born residents to 21% of Sudanese.¹⁷

ABS data reveals that in the 2006 Census in the CoGD, 38% of women aged 35-44, accessed income of less than \$250 per week.¹⁸ Of those in employment in the CoGD, both men and women, 34% worked either in trades or as unskilled labourers, which in comparison to the Melbourne Statistical Division (19.1%) was high.¹⁹ The picture for the City of Casey, (see Figure 9 below) is similar.

A report by the Fair Pay Commission found that over the last decade, the wages of people working in hospitality grew by just 3.3%, in retail, by 3.5%

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), Summary Sheet : Social Conditions in the City of Greater Dandenong: Findings from the 2006 Census, p4

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), Summary Sheet : Social Conditions in the City of Greater Dandenong: Findings from the 2006 Census

¹⁹ Id Consulting, (2007), City of Greater Dandenong, Community Atlas, Dandenong, p55

and in basic clerical positions by 3.6% compared with an increase of 4.2% across all positions for the same period²⁰.

Participants of Wellsprings programs are overwhelmingly drawn from cohorts earning considerably less than \$799, and whilst details of household income are never asked at Wellsprings, it is evident from what is revealed, that a significant number, including those from new and emerging communities, access much less than \$799, the sum considered close to the average in the MSD. 10% of CoGD residents (in contrast to 6% for the MSD) indicated that they ran out of food at some point in the last 12 months and could not afford to buy more²¹. Wellsprings staff report that participants are prepared to go without in order to ensure the wellbeing of their children.

As stated above (p7-8) ACFE priorities are

- Vocational education and training that assists people to start working, go back to work or change jobs;
- Adult literacy and numeracy training, including teaching English to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Basic skills training to support work or further earning, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving;
- VCE and VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) for adults²²

Whilst some of the Wellsprings participants from the City of Greater Dandenong have had good opportunities to access education in their home countries and benefit considerably from the ACFE-funded programs Wellsprings offers with regard to literacy and numeracy training, basic skills training and training, such as in office skills that assists people to start working, or in community development that assists people to engage in pathways to TAFE courses, the majority have not.

²⁰ Schneiders, Ben, Pay gap grows as low skilled staff lose out” **The Age**, Tuesday February 28, 2008, Fairfax, Melbourne, p 6

²¹ Social Conditions op.cit.

²² Kosky, Lynne, MP, Victorian Minister for Education and Training, (004), **Future Directions for Adult and Community Education in Victoria**, Communication Division for the Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Melbourne, p6

Significant numbers, are in a sense “pre-ACFE” that is, ‘learning to learn’ in their stages of education. They need the ACFE priority of basic skills training to support work or further learning, but before tackling the challenges of communication with mainstream Australian society, teamwork and problem-solving, there are many barriers to learning that they must overcome. These are many and complex, including lack of access to primary schooling, the low expectations associated with trans-generational poverty, the trauma of war and/or childhood abuse and/or family violence, and low levels of confidence and self-esteem.

3.2: ACFE PRIORITIES AND RESIDENTS IN THE CITY OF CASEY

Since the late 1990s, Casey has been one of the fastest growing Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Australia, at one stage, growing from 175,000 to 214,000²³ in 5 years. When Cranbourne West was being built, 20 families on average were moving in each week and on one estate, 50 families in a weekend, which was a huge influx to which the longer term residents needed to adjust.

Not all the residents of Casey are newly arrived. Some have lived in what were once villages at Cranbourne, Hampton Park, Berwick and Narre Warren for 30 years or more. There are others who settled in the five villages near the coast of Western Port Bay and others again who settled in suburbs that developed after WWII, such as Doveton Eumemmerring, which is now a Neighbourhood Renewal area. However the Sri Lankan, Indian, Afghan and Sudanese communities are growing.

Whilst 44.8% of Casey residents are aged less than 54,²⁴ in many families the parents are young, with young children, and big mortgages.

The 2006 employment profile of Casey residents reveals what service providers have known for some time, that whilst numbers of unemployed are roughly in line with the state average, many residents could be classified as ‘working poor’,

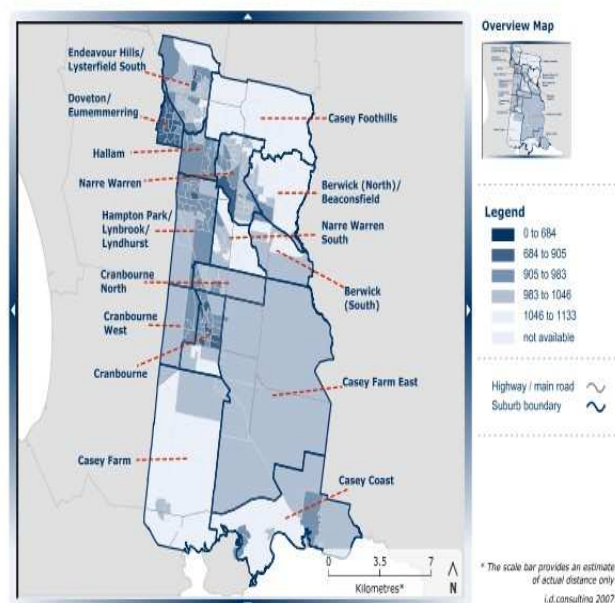
²³ ABS, (2001), 2001 Census Quickstats :Census, www.censusdata.abs.gov.au [accessed online 7/12/07]

²⁴ ABS, (2006), 2006 Census Quickstats :Census, www.censusdata.abs.gov.au [accessed online 7/12/07]

employed in unskilled or at the poorly paid end of the trade sector. Many do shift work in factories, and take the one car to get there, which can make transporting children to school a major issue, as many families cannot afford the bus. This can also restrict the access of women aged 35 or more, the majority of Wellsprings catchment, to adult and further education.

Figure 8: City of Casey, SEIFA Index²⁵

City of Casey - SEIFA Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage



The financial stress is a driver for housing stress in Casey where more than 30% of household income is spent on accommodation²⁶. Community service providers report that housing stress leads to homelessness, lack of food, drug and alcohol issues in the community, to strained marital relations that frequently result in family breakdown, poor quality intra-familial connections, lowered outcomes in education, and in physical and mental health. The women are very private about this, and about the family violence many constantly contend with, fearing being judged, but the teachers are

²⁵ For Australian Census Collector Districts (CCDs) the average SEIFA index of disadvantage score is 1000. Therefore areas with an index above 1000 are above the Australian average and so relatively less disadvantaged, while index figures below 1000 indicate areas of relatively greater disadvantage.

²⁶ www.casey.vic.gov.au/communityprofile [accessed online 7/12/07]

Figure 9: Occupation Employed Persons Aged 15 years and over, City of Casey

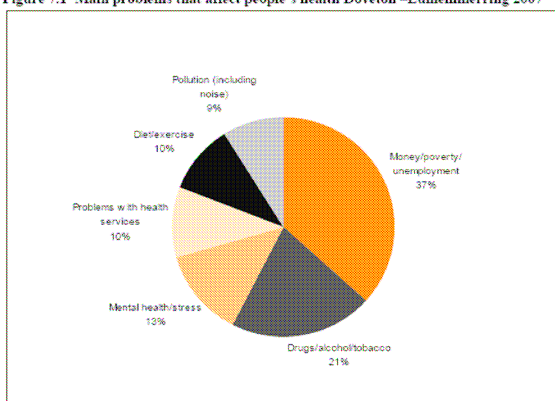
OCCUPATION	Casey	% Region	% Aust
Technicians & Trades Workers	17,725	17.6	14.4
Clerical & Administrative Workers	16,453	16.3	15.0
Labourers	12,611	12.5	10.5
Professionals	11,846	11.8	19.8
Machinery Operators & Drivers	11,234	11.2	6.6
Sales Workers	10,980	10.9	9.8
Managers	10,167	10.1	13.2
Community & Personal Service Workers	7,390	7.3%	8.8

aware of this through the violent behaviour of the children and the nature of their responses to situations they find challenging.

The high levels of stress reduce the inclination of residents to mix socially, to become acquainted with their neighbours and to develop social supports that are local. Thus if there is sickness or the car breaks down and the marriage is strained, residents find there are few people they can comfortably turn to, which can compound the

Figure 10: Main Problems that effect people's health, Doveton-Eumemmerring 2007²⁷

Figure 7.1 Main problems that affect people's health Doveton –Eumemmerring 2007



²⁷ Metan, Kemran, (2007), Doveton Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Survey Report 2007, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, p9

stress they feel and further exacerbate their isolation.

Local schools²⁸ report high levels of anxiety and sadness amongst parents, even depression, and are doing what they can to address this, through running playgroups, parenting courses, and providing opportunities for people to volunteer within the school and to connect with each other, but they also report that parents have expressed wariness about institutions such as schools and as a consequence can be difficult to engage.

However at local Community Consultation exercises such as in Cranbourne 2006-7, residents suggested six priorities to address this and other issues:

- An active and healthy community
- Improving accessibility to employment & learning
- Access to Personal Development programs
- A culturally rich community
- A well-designed, well-built community
- Strengthening prosperity within the community.

The Personal Development programs envisaged by Cranbourne residents included affordable courses that covered career training, after hours hobby courses, parenting programs and workforce re-entry programs, interests that could be of relevance to Wellsprings.

The household data from Doveton Eumemmerring, an area on the north-west boundary of Casey, indicates significant levels of disadvantage and the need for similar programs to those requested at Cranbourne. It was found in both the 2004 and 2007 surveys conducted for the City of Casey that:

- almost half of the residents had lived in the DE area for 10 or more years;
- about 15% had completed Year 12;
- as in 2004, almost half of the respondents in 2007 lived in households where no-one is employed;
- as in 2004, in 2007 almost half were married or lived in a de facto relationship;
- As in 2004 almost 75% received government income support;

²⁸ Education provider, in interview December 13. 2008,

- Residents lived in a similar housing tenure type (about 20% live in public housing);
- In 2007 there was a 14% increase in those who felt they had some link to an ethnic or indigenous community
- In 2007 there was an increase in the number aged 60.

The data for Hampton Park, the home of many Wellsprings participants, also suggests significant levels of disadvantage. In 2006 7.4% of its residents were unemployed in comparison with 5.4% in the Casey municipality, this in spite of the fact that 60.3% of Hampton Park's population are aged 18-59 (i.e. working age) in comparison to 59.4% for Casey as a whole. There is suggestive evidence that this impacts on the financial and emotional pressures on women, on their sense of identity, self esteem and confidence, and their ability to engage in pathways that may seem to them to involve insurmountable challenges.

With respect to income, a higher proportion of Hampton Park residents access lower incomes, than is the case for the Casey municipality as a whole. Overall, 13.6% of the households earned a high income, and 14.8% were low income households (less than \$500 per week), compared with 20.8% and 13.8% respectively for the City of Casey²⁹. Material aid and counseling services in Cranbourne report high levels of demand from Hampton Park.

Also raised in the community engagement and consultation process in 2007³⁰ was the need for more services, especially mental health services.

Casey residents have requested that Personal Development and other programs be conducted at sites close to public transport links as local transport, educational and social service infrastructure has not been provided in pace with community growth. It can be seen from this description that in the City of Casey as in Greater Dandenong, that the ACFE priorities of

²⁹ www.casey.vic.gov.au/communityprofile accessed 26/2/2008

³⁰ Red Road Consulting, (2007), Hampton Park Preliminary Consultation Report, October 2007 for the City of Casey and Department of Planning and Community Development, (unpublished)

- Vocational education and training that assists people to start working, go back to work or change jobs;
- Adult literacy and numeracy training, including teaching English to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Basic skills training to support work or further earning, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving;
- VCE and VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) for adults³¹

are highly relevant, but that there are significant cohorts of vulnerability in Casey needing a range of 'pre-ACFE-funded courses to first provide the space for personal nurture and skills development to overcome the exigencies of the past.

A Possible Point of Discussion

To what extent might it be possible for Wellsprings to post one of its staff members to provide outreach programs from a hub such as schools or neighbourhood centres in Cranbourne in Hampton Park, to help parents to develop links with one another and to support services, or from such a site, such as the Home Visiting Program?

3.3. THE NEEDS OF NEW AND EMERGING COMMUNITIES

It will never be within the ambit of organizations such as Wellsprings to meet the range of needs identified below³², but these details are provided in order to inform and/or support Wellsprings as it selects programs and partnerships for the future.

³¹ Kosky, Lynne, MP, Victorian Minister for Education and Training, (004), **Future Directions for Adult and Community Education in Victoria**, Communication Division for the Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Melbourne, p6

³² This table has been developed from data presented about the Sudanese peoples in the publication by the South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, (2007), **Sudanese in South East Melbourne: Perspectives of a new and emerging community**, Migrant Resource Centre, Dandenong, Melbourne. Service providers and Wellsprings staff believe these issues feature to varying degrees in the lives of migrants and refugees from other communities also.

Figure 11: The Needs of New And Emerging Communities

TOPIC	ISSUE	WELLSPRING'S REPOSE
PREFLIGHT CONTEXT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Level of trauma, torture, age, connection to family, time in refugee camp, competence in English impact on needs at point of settlement ○ Women's preflight and in-flight experiences, including sexual and other forms of violence in the camps can be quite different to those of men, impacting on their needs and their levels of resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides a Home Visiting Program, where women volunteers, after receiving training, meet 1:1 with isolated women, develop friendships and with the backing of the Wellsprings Co-ordinators. provide help or guidance as needed. ○ Provides with ESL classes; ○ Provides 1:1 mentoring ○ Provides grief counseling workshops ○ Refers to services such as Foundation House.
TORTURE AND TRAUMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Migrants and refugees have often been through traumatic circumstances in war e.g. Iraq, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cambodia, Burma, brutal conditions in refugee camps, and sometimes in circumstances of torture, even in countries of asylum such as Australia.³³ ○ Some refugees suffer a sense of 'survivor guilt' in that they have escaped where others have not. ○ Some refugees live with on-going anxiety about the plight of loved ones still trapped in insecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have in 2007 provided Foundation Hose with a venue for its programs ○ Provides survivors with non-threatening personal development and skills development programs to reconnect the threads of their lives, and to move towards self-actualisation.
ACCESS TO SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The need for on-going mentoring to guide through the maze of different or places for basic services such as real estate agents, Centrelink, community health centres, adult education services and managing utilities such as phone companies. These services are unfamiliar to many, let alone their nature of operation and expectations. ○ Counselling can be an unfamiliar service to many members of new communities that might need such support. Sometimes women need the approval and support of their men in order to access services. ○ The need to understand when people from new communities need interpreters or translators of the <i>spoken</i> word as distinct from a translator or someone providing <i>written</i> translation e.g. for government or court documents ○ The need for better understanding of the range of first languages that people from new communities speak, including different forms of Arabic, and greater access to interpreters whom the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wellsprings staff provide assistance here but are not in a position to provide on-going mentoring. ○ Wellsprings nurtures understanding of counseling, provides therapeutic listening, a community development environment where people can draw on advice from others and a range of speakers who nurture care for themselves.

³³ Australia has incarcerated in detention centres far from legal advice, educational services, and cultural supports asylum seekers arriving by boat, and kept them in overcrowded and degrading environments for indefinite periods of time, up to 8 years. A significant proportion of these refugees have suffered mental health problems as a consequence of this treatment, prompting some psychiatric/medical and legal authorities to charge that the Coalition government is responsible for torture.

“Trauma is a process by which a person’s capacity to manage life’s events is completely overwhelmed by traumatic experiences, and as a result, psychological and physical health is compromised. (Harms, 2005)

	client can understand.	
ACCESS TO LANG-UAGE CLASSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some members of new communities speak languages that have no written form, and therefore need more than 510 hours access to English language classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ESL classes are offered at Wellsprings with no limit of hours and minimal fee.
EMPLOYMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication systems from government and welfare services that use the familiar word-of-mouth method. ○ Lack of recognition of qualifications to un/ or under-employment of skills leading to loss of esteem, depression, the need to redefine identity in work and family tension, especially where the male head of household is unemployed. 	W is investigating the establishment of an advocacy service, staffed by a volunteer, to support students with visa issues, so that they can proceed to TAFE and employment.
FINANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of appropriate job opportunities ○ Discrimination in the workplace ○ Refugees on 202 Visas feel obliged to repay their fairs in 6-18 months ○ The obligation to send money to family in the refugee camps in Sudan ○ Conflict between adults here over which families to send money to and how often ○ CL payments, mostly to the women, can undermine the male roles as provider and alter power dynamics between the genders. ○ Lack of familiarity with needing to pay for everything. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ W includes information on budgeting in its classes
CHILD CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many members of new communities arrive without the traditional relatives that provide this and the cost of available childcare is beyond their means ○ Different understandings of the inter-generational discipline that is appropriate. 	
DISLOCATED IDENTITY	<p>This can affect three quite distinct groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where members of new communities have spent childhoods in camps, separated from their culture they can lose a defined sense of cultural identity, and develop feelings of disconnection. ○ Where young people are seeking belonging within the Australian context they can be faced with the stresses of demands from two competing cultures. This can add stress to family relationships and to mothering. ○ Where males heads of household, culturally charged with the responsibility as the provider, are unemployed. ○ Family separation, where males return to their country of origin due to difficulties with integration into Australian life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A safe and secure environment is provided at W, to assist the women to discuss, explore and work through their identity issues. ○ An ‘Unwrapping Grief’ Program ○ The women are provided with opportunities to share challenging stories in a trusting environment enriched by ‘therapeutic listening’ where the issues behind the sentences are discerned and support is provided.
SITUATION OF WOMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary role is often bearing children, maintaining the home, caring fro the children and other family members ○ Whilst ambitions for the children might be high, including professional status, attitudes to women pursuing language or further studies is not uniformly positive, especially where there are perceptions that the male status might be diminished. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ W provides English as a Second Language courses, conversation classes, Friendship Groups and courses on work-related skills, including literacy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In Australia, on the assumption that the women are the primary carers for children, social security payments are made into the accounts of women, who must have their own bank account, rather than to that of the men, or into joint accounts, a situation which can impact on gender status within the family. ○ Single or unattached women can be vulnerable to the attentions of men interested in accessing the welfare payments received for children. 	and computer skills
ELDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These can often be important sources of guidance and sustainable protocols in the source countries but are not always present in Australia's migrant and refugee intake, and those that step up for the role here may seek to re-invent community hierarchies but can be viewed differently. ○ Heads of families are where possible the men, who are responsible for the households wellbeing, but where the men are unemployed and/or the Centrelink payments are paid to the wife, this can be undermined. ○ Elders and Heads of Households are sites of respect and obedience, but lack of competence in English and lack of familiarity with Australian mores can undermine this in the eyes of women and the youth and lead to intergenerational conflict. 	The Women Friendship Groups provide a venue for sharing on these issues, gaining new insights and evolving new strategies. It is also helps them to connect with other community services.
HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Absence of stable access to suitable, quality housing ○ Bewildering bureaucratic systems ○ Discrimination of landlords, against migrants and refugees of different colour and also against large families. ○ Lack of references ○ Inadequate size ○ Lack of affordability can fuel problems of over-crowding ○ Shortage of public housing stock 	
HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The settlement process can induce high levels of anxiety and stress that can result in physical pain that can be very debilitating, and mothers can develop anxiety over their ability in these situations to care for their children. ○ Poor mental health – where the significance of headaches and stress can sometimes be poorly understood by migrants and refugees, and the associated stigma, a further deterrent to seeking help. ○ Poor dental health. Many W participants have lost most of their teeth. ○ Poor nutritional deficiencies – especially the transition from the low carbohydrate diet in country of origin to the carbohydrate diet most affordable in Australia ○ Infectious diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women's health workshops, Healthy Eating Programs and referrals where appropriate to the Community Health Centres.
LAW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A lack of familiarity with the law e.g. with regard to parking, traffic fines, child protection, noise and perceptions of loitering, and the seriousness of legal processes in Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information workshops are included in Wellsprings program
RELIGION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The time and space to celebrate important dates ○ The need sometimes to discern the distinction between religion and culture especially with regard to the status and role of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wellsprings celebrates different festivals and runs Friendship Groups.
ADDICTIVE BEHAV-IOURS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Substance abuse, particularly alcohol ○ Self-medication ○ Sharing medication with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information sessions that nurture links with community services.

3.4 ACFE AND THE LEARNER GROUPS AT WELLSPRINGS

Of the ACFE Priority Groups, Wellsprings works with isolated women, women aged 55+, Indigenous people, CALD, people with a highest school level of Year 9 or below, most of whom are of migrant background, and people without qualifications, again most of whom are also of migrant background.

In 2007, members of this group included people particularly of Sudanese and Afghan background as these groups have settled in the City of Greater Dandenong (CoGD) in significant numbers. Some have never been to school and are totally illiterate. Whilst much of the work at Wellsprings conforms to the national definition of an ACE provider, increasingly Wellsprings is finding that the educational opportunities its participants want and need, relate to the ACFE priority for adult health (see p8) which is education in its broadest definition, developing the basic skills to survive the challenges of life in Australia and/or in poverty and violence, and in the case of the majority of Wellsprings participants, lives lived in particularly challenging contexts.

Increasingly Wellsprings participants are demonstrating a need for holistic personal support, and staff are working to provide this with a program oriented to 'Learning to Learn' presented in a community development setting.

Thus, in addition to the ACFE Priority Learner Groups, Wellsprings also works with other women in the community, whose ages range from 30-55 and whom services generally find hard to reach:-

- Women isolated by disadvantages in socio/economic status, health and education
- Women migrants and refugees from new and emerging communities
- Women isolated by family violence
- Women isolated by poor public infrastructure, including childcare support, social security support, respite support and transport.

Datasets from the National Census 2006 indicate that these groups continue to live in the City of Greater Dandenong in significant numbers and

should therefore continue to be a focus of the Wellsprings program.

A Possible Point of Discussion

To what extent could Wellsprings couch many of its pre-accredited programs in terms of the ACFE priority role:

Facilitators of adult health- improving mental, physical and emotional wellbeing; and approach ACFE for funding?

It has been recorded that nationally the drivers for lifelong learning

*'include globalization, the knowledge economy, an ageing population, skills shortages, technological change, labour market changes and social cohesion.'*³⁴

Whilst the lives of participants at Wellsprings are affected by these drivers, the most significant driver in their lives has been globalization and the preceding phenomenon of colonisation that disturbed patterns of economic, social and political subsistence and determined on geographic boundaries of independence that cut across traditional Asian and African ties and led to instability.

The consequent wars and disrupted personal security, economic, educational and health services has directly influenced the decisions of Wellsprings participants. These decisions have been made in a context of pre-flight trauma, seen in most dramatic profile where single women, who are widows, come to Australia not only with their own children but also those of deceased or insecure relatives.

Scarcely less dramatic is the profile of couples who do the same, and where there is damage to marriage and community relationships when post-settlement in Australia, the 'families', due to the stringencies of federal government policy, are placed in a situations of precarious access to housing, employment, income and educational services – both for school-aged children and adults, including significant difficulties with language

³⁴ Volkoff, Veronica and Walstab, Anne (2007), **Setting the Scene: Investigating learning outcomes with a view to the future**, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, p18

acquisition, which, in addition to the culture shock they experience, constitute significant barriers in their lives.

Thus in 2007-8 it is less the formal education programs that draw people to gather around the well at Wellsprings, than the warm, nurturing environment that acknowledges dignity and capacity in the face of social isolation and low self-esteem, and provides opportunity for friendship and the building of courage to tackle new skills.

State-wide in Victoria, ACFE participants currently participate in 5 broad program types:

- Adult literacy and Numeracy
- Employment skills
- VCE or equivalent
- Vocational programs
- Enrichment Programs

The Wellsprings program does include provision for all but the VCE and Vocational programs, and gives high priority to enrichment type programs as these meet local need.

The second national driver to lifelong learning of significance to participants at Wellsprings is the struggle with lack of social cohesion. The social isolation that is a consequence of this, is experienced by many members of the groups in the CoGD in general and among the Wellsprings participants in particular. In the 2006 Census, only 36.4% of CoGD residents participated in citizen engagement activities in the last 12 months in comparison to 49.4% for the MSD, and a further concerning indicator of lack of confidence in engagement is that only 10% of CoGD residents were members of a decision-making board or committee in comparison to 15% for the MSD. Those not engaging are drawn from Australian-born cohorts, migrants and particularly refugee communities, and those from the new and emerging communities.

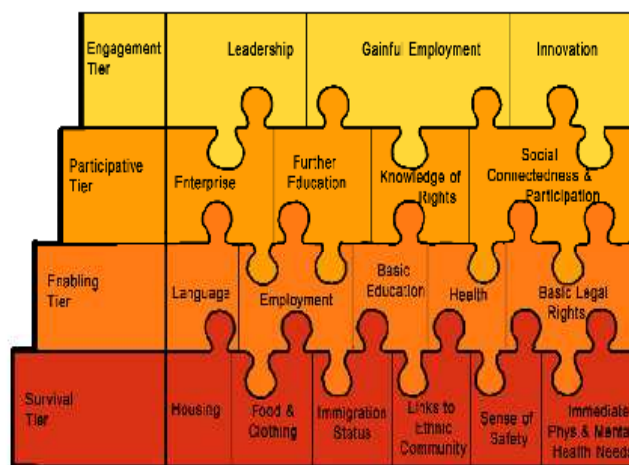
Wellsprings programs, such as the Home Visiting Program, give special attention to social isolation, often connecting with people whilst still in the Survival Tier, as indicated in the Figure 12 from

SuccessWorks³⁵ below, and then mentoring them as they engage in the Enabling, Participative and Engagement Tiers in journeys that follow myriads of steps rather than neat, forward trajectories.

This “Readiness Model” was developed as a planning tool for meeting the needs of CALD women, but Wellsprings staff have observed that in regard to the Survival Tier, with the exception of Immigration Status and Links to the Ethnic Community, many of these jigsaw pieces figure in the lives of other disadvantaged groups in the CoGD.

In its **CALD Women’s Project** SuccessWorks found across all age groups and nationalities, that physical and mental health, the joint responsibilities of Federal and State Governments, were priority issues of concern to CALD women, followed closely by access to language classes, a responsibility of the Federal Government. Other

Figure 12: Success Work’s ‘Readiness Model’ to assess readiness to access supports



issues that rated highly were education, employment, housing, isolation and parenting, issues that to varying degrees are also the shared responsibility of State and Federal Governments. These issues also are causes of concern for the CALD women who participate in programs at Wellsprings.

³⁵ Department for Victorian Communities,(2005) **CALD Women’s Project Final Report**, SuccessWorks, Melbourne, p.67

Whilst tasked with heavy responsibilities, the State and the Local Governments, (in this case CoGD and Casey), lack access to the funds, needed for more adequate provisioning. It is relevant to note here that:

“...[of every] \$100 paid by Australians in taxes [to the Howard Government]....” \$82 goes to the Federal Government, just \$15 to the states and \$3 to local councils. Yet of every \$100 that governments spend, (excluding money given to others to spend), the Federal Government spends just \$36, while the states and councils spend \$64.”³⁶

Current levels of provisioning for the new and emerging communities in south-east Melbourne cause hardship and distress.

Figure 2 above indicates that, in the CoGD, two of the three top birthplaces of recent CALD migrants and refugees are Afghanistan and the Sudan. It is estimated³⁷ that approximately 2,500 had arrived by April 2007, and that almost 50% of these were under 19 years of age. Whilst a significant number of these younger people are members of the ‘Lost Boys of Sudan’ cohort, many are girls whom social workers at the Dandenong Hospital have observed, are living with community expectations of early marriage and child bearing, who are vulnerable to the social isolation that can attend this, but do not know where to turn to for advice. This is just one example of the hardship and distress than can occur where funding for the provision of social services is inadequate. Dandenong Hospital staff would like to work with Wellsprings to further explore community expectations and ways of reducing the vulnerabilities associated with these (refer p.26 below)

Indigenous groups constitute about 2.4% of the populations in the CoGD and Casey, and Wellsprings has provided a venue for a ‘yarn-up’ women’s group. However, at this point in time, it appears that indigenous peoples prefer not to use more mainstream venues, such as Wellsprings.

³⁶ Tim Colebatch, ‘It’s a federal election, on state issues’ **The Age**, Tuesday November 20, 2007, Fairfax Publishing, Melbourne, p13

³⁷ Nuer Community in Victoria Inc, (2007), **Only Mountains Don’t Meet**, Forum Proceedings, p4

Wellsprings is a place focused on supporting the socially isolated, many (perhaps even most), of whom are living with disabilities acquired in the course of challenging lives, rather than lived with since birth. For this reason, this research has not explored the experiences of those living with sensory or physical disabilities in the CoGD or Casey.

4: SUGGESTIONS FOR WELLSPRING’S PROGRAM

Aware, that the Mission and Vision of Wellsprings is focused on strengthening the confidence, self esteem and empowerment of the individual isolated women who participate in its programs and on assisting them and others to strengthen community, the following contextual comments and suggestions have, in the main, been made by informants external to the staff at Wellsprings.

The datasets from the ABS, the Doveton Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Renewal Surveys of 2004 and 2007, and the Hampton Park preliminary Consultation Report do not provide gender disaggregated data, but assuming that the education levels of men are higher than for women in the new and emerging communities as in those that are Australian-born, it can be assumed that the education levels are in fact lower than the levels indicated in the graphs above (see Figures 5 & 6) indicating a significant need not only for ACFE courses, but more particularly, for pre-ACFE courses. The educational opportunities that these groups prioritise, are outlined below.

At the July 2007 session of **In the Community – Casey**³⁸, Terry Healy, DVC, noted a number of high level themes regarding community strengthening:

- *The importance of strong leadership;*
- *The need for building and maintaining partnerships with stakeholders;*
- *Ways to access information;*
- *The importance of adequate government support but also space for communities to operate with independence, to meet their needs;*
- *The value of diversity in the community.*

³⁸ City of Casey (2007), **In the Community – Casey: Reportback to Participants**, Narre Warren, p 3

In responding to these themes, and the areas of disadvantage and levels of need outlined above, there have been the following suggestions for Wellsprings future programs and perhaps, partnerships.

4.1. ACFE Programs

- Maintain the Adult Community Education programs, which provide women who might otherwise be unable to engage in formal education, with an opportunity to develop their readiness for formal study, with access to vocational training and employment, in with opportunities for social connection.

The ten most popular training packages in Victoria are:

- Business Services
- Hospitality
- Community Services
- Information Technology
- Metal and Engineering Industry
- Retail, Automotive Industry Retail
- Service and Repair
- General Construction
- Transport and Distribution
- Financial Services

Some of these are relevant to those Wellsprings participants, keen to enter or re-enter the workforce in Australia.³⁹ With the election of a Federal Labour Government in November 2007, with a policy to drop the Bridging Visa E that denied refugees the right to work, the numbers of Wellsprings participants interested in work readiness and accessing these training packages may increase, especially for the two most important courses for migrants and refugees accessing Wellsprings, the ESL and the computer classes.

Anglo-Celtic women in the Doveton Eumemmerring NR area who have expressed a need to enter the workforce, require local work opportunities because of transport problems and their roles as primary carers. In order to assist here, the NR team has explored areas of skill shortages for women in CoGD and Casey – aged care, child

³⁹ National Center for Education Research Ltd, (2007), *Did You Know?: a guide to vocational education and training in Australia*, Adelaide, p.5

care, asset maintenance (cleaning) and catering and hospitality, and is preparing women to be ready for Certificate Training in these areas. Some Wellspring participants may also be interested in these areas of work.

4.1.1 Expand the Program of ESL Classes

The women in the Friendship Groups have indicated an interest in attending 2-3 sessions a week, in order to develop skills sufficient to be work-ready. Each have found the government supported program of just 510 hours inadequate as they can spend up to 200 hours just building the courage to pick up a pen. They are acutely aware however of government pressure to obtain employment and the need to acquire skills training in order to achieve this.

4.2 Non-Formal Learning Pathways

The need to balance ACFE (and the funds it attracts) with pre-ACFE programs in order to meet the needs of the local community, has been recognised by Wellsprings staff and also the Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. It has been recognized that the deepest, most extensive disadvantage in the CGD and Casey⁴⁰ is experienced by those women who lack the skills and the confidence to access ACFE programs.

These women, and very often their men, face multiple barriers to formal education, such as lack of access to school, in deed some refugees have never attended school; failure to learn in a traumatic context; serious disruptions to schooling due to war, ill-health, poverty, violence or poor transport; Welfare to Work, aged care or childcare policies which can marginalize significant proportions of the population.⁴¹ Many of the women are primary carers and thus lack the time and headspace to overcome their diminished sense of identity and agency, to ready themselves for study skills.

⁴¹ In Sudan in 19...., the Arabic government in Khartoum in the north, arbitrarily decided that the language of school instruction nationally would be Arabic, even though it had insufficient Arabic teachers in the south to staff the schools. The education system in the south disintegrated.

4.2.1 The Home Visiting Program

Because the Dandenong and Doveton areas are affordable, many CALD communities have settled in them in the last decade and because of this, a range of CALD –focused programs have been implemented. However in addition to these, it needs to be recognized that many of the migrant and refugee women take much longer than the 6 months settlement support provided by AMES to develop confidence in coping with life in a new country, a new culture and with a new language. Without help, they cannot read their way around Dandenong from a map or observance of street signs; they cannot develop an understanding of the services they might access or the skills they need to survive. Many informants, including Centrelink and the Dandenong Hospital have indicated the need for more freely available 1:1 mentoring support for these people. In recognition of these needs, the following suggestions have been made.

There have been suggestions from a number of quarters⁴² to expand the **Home Visiting Program**⁴³, with its focus on isolated CALD and disadvantaged women, by providing more women with 1:1 home visits, awareness-raising about mental health and wellbeing, and providing opportunities for social connection at Wellsprings, opportunities for involvement in groups and/or classes actually on-site at Wellsprings, and importantly, mentoring their linkages to other services, especially health services such as the refugee nurse based at CoGD and the Casey Community Health services.

The need for a mentoring component to the Home Visiting Program was raised by several informants internal and external to Wellsprings. Many people need practical support with daily living skills. In Australia it is important to be able to read but acquiring this skill can seem overwhelming, especially if as an adult one has never attended

⁴² Possible points of referral could perhaps be from Centrelink in Dandenong via Mandy Lake, and Katherine Eyers, Social Worker re pre and Post Natal Care at Dandenong Hospital.

⁴³ Seamer, Sam, (2007), **Friendly Home Visitation Program: Project Evaluation 2007**, Women's Health in the South East (WHISE) for Wellsprings for Women Inc and the St Vincent de Paul, Dandenong

school. Locating banks and working with their systems or finding the Casey Community Health Services and knowing what it is appropriate to expect from them can be problematic for families that have spent years in refugee camps and need to be introduced to everything, especially if they cannot read. Those that cannot, can quickly feel isolated and depressed.

This mentoring is especially necessary, if in addition to the preflight trauma experienced, parents supporting children have endured family breakdown. Some have husbands who have been killed in the war, have been left behind in Sudan or else have returned to the Sudan because it is easier for them to find work there in the areas of their careers. As a consequence the women find themselves isolated and alone with up to 10 children, who because of their own language issues can find school a series of problematic experiences, and can attract unwelcome police attention.

In mentoring in these situations, matching language groups can be important. It has also been suggested that as Foundation House can only offer short-term assistance to people, and are struggling with an 18 month Wait List, these mentors with the Home Visiting Program might be able to reduce the impact of the trauma often experienced by the women in the post survival phase.

In addition to the mentoring, groups have been suggested that focus not on ESL and computer classes but just a 'cuppa' and an opportunity to share about life. Key issues raised by participants in the recently evaluated Wellsprings Friendly Home Visiting Program⁴⁴ included:

- Grief and loss: the traumatic loss of a significant other, dislocation from country and community
- Mental health concerns, both their own and of those close to them
- Care of children/childcare, especially in order to access classes or groups. With regard to this Wellsprings has also been urged to provide access to onsite childcare/playgroup activities to enable mothers to attend classes and social activities at the same times as attending, and being seen to attend, to the needs of their children

⁴⁴ Seamer, Sam, (2007) op cit.

- Physical health of children, including how to relate to Maternal Child Health (MCH) check-ups, diet on a limited budget, communication with doctors, understanding tests such as pap smears or for cancer, and health services
- Limited English proficiency
- Financial difficulties and budgeting. These problems are exacerbated by the problems associated with accessing adequate, safe housing affordable to people dependent on welfare support or low income.

It will be important for the women to access affordable childcare however, if they are to attend these 'cuppa' and chat sessions.

4.2.2 Programs that Nurture Social Connection

Wellsprings has been encouraged by informants to this research to maintain **programs that nurture social connection**, such as perhaps monthly information/social gatherings for the women from language groups such as the Pashto from Afghanistan, where participants could perhaps suggest topics and speakers. These provide opportunities to engage in both cognitive and affective learning that includes the space to share life's experiences, appreciate the social and policy structural issues in their struggles and to engage with others in tackling these, such as the art and craft opportunities and other Wellsprings programs that offer Home Visiting Program (HVP) participants opportunities to connect with each other.

Social isolation is a significant issue in both CoGD and Casey. Casey is an area of rapid growth, newly peopled by cohorts who are working long hours to cope with their mortgage and who are often too exhausted to find the energy to socialize. This, coupled with complex disadvantage (in the DE NR area 10-11% are in public housing and many more are receiving welfare support), low confidence, low income (100% of Yr 7s at Doveton SC in 2008 requested support to meet basic educational needs)⁴⁵ and the practical barriers of poor public transport and a hilly environment that reduces 'walkability', compounds social isolation.

⁴⁵ State government official, in interview, February 15, 2008

In relation to programs nurturing social connection, increased funding support for the **Afghan Women's Friendship Group** and the **Sudanese Women's Friendship Group** has been suggested. These programs are very important to the women who are isolated by lack of English language and cultural understandings about their role in the community and in the home. These groups function also as a preparation for more formal learning.

Currently these receive funding for 9 hours or 0.2 EFT but because the course participants have cultural expectations, are so vulnerable and need such encouragement and support, the workers require 3 full days or 0.6 EFT in order to cover the ground necessary, including networking. Currently they are doing much of the work in their own time at home, such as phoning each of the women to invite them personally when a speaker is coming, or phoning whenever there is sickness.

4.2.3 Enhanced Access to Budgeting Skills

In the view of Centrelink staff, another unmet community need is courses on **budgeting** to assist people to manage their debt loads, such as housing, funds back home, utilities, and life in general. At the time of writing, people who usually do not ask for help until they are in a crisis, have to wait 3-4 weeks for an appointment with a financial counsellor who is so pressed for time that they cannot provide the support needed with budgeting skills. Support with basic budgeting is offered at Wellsprings and there could be value in expanding this program.

4.2.4 Enhanced Access to Health and Wellbeing

Health promotion is a highly appreciated focus at Wellsprings and could be enhanced by including more on the relative nutritional value of affordable foods, relating to health professionals, medical issues for which help is available, women's emotional experiences and how these affect weight management and health generally.

It has been suggested that information could be included in Wellspring's ESL classes or Drop-In activities, about the Myuna (**Fresh Food**) Market being established in the Doveton Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Renewal Area of the City of Casey. Initially, the plan is to run this weekly, to

ask residents what they wish to buy, and to use local suppliers within Casey to obtain this in order to improve people's **access to healthy food**. More medium to long term plans for this fresh food market include encouraging people to tackle the stringencies of limited income through using whatever land they can access, e.g. in their backyards to grow fruit and vegetables, in stead of grass and to barter these with others locally. Apparently a number of fruit trees have been planted in the yards of homes in the Doveton Eumemmerring (DE) NR area but people are not aware of their value as food and their potential as valuable items of exchange. If Wellsprings was interested, there could be some potential for partnerships with the NR Area project and possibly the City of Casey.⁴⁶

Related to the need for fresh food is the need for **nutrition education**⁴⁷, for both refugees such as the Nuer,⁴⁸ and for the wider population of Wellsprings participants and women living in the DE NR area, perhaps provided to mothers in playgroup or childcare settings and involving the women in actually cooking food.

Another area of potential partnership with DE NR could be encouragement of participation in **affordable physical activities** such as exploring the newly connected walking tracks in Dandenong and Casey e.g. along the creek systems, or attending the annual Doveton Show, Australia Day celebrations and other community events.

Yet another area of potential partnership with DE NR could be in the area of **mental health**, assisting people who are experiencing sadness of grief and depression or collaborating on programs that protect/prevent depression.

When working with partners, the DE NR project is planning to develop Neighbourhood Agreements in order to enhance openness and transparency.

⁴⁶ In separate interviews, in the course of this research, this possibility was raised by both Tracey Rodoni (of the City of Casey) and Tammy Osborne, Manager, Doveton-Eumemmerring NR Project.

⁴⁷ Community Service Provider, in interview, December 14, 2007

⁴⁸ Nuer Community in Victoria, op. cit p12

*4.2.5 Advocacy for Services in relation to Public Transport*⁴⁹

Participants reported that in some countries, buses that are empty are thought to be private and therefore not available for public use, or if only occupied by a male driver or men, then not available for use by women, perceptions that can severely undermine timely access to classes or appointments.

More generally, there are other public transport issues that whilst entirely outside the responsibility of Wellsprings affect its participants. Most of the public transport provided is bus and these are the source of many difficulties. They can be difficult for mothers with prams. They are provided for only limited periods each day and connect poorly with other forms of public transport. Furthermore they are focused on access to centralized hubs such as Dandenong Plaza rather than within and across the suburbs in Dandenong and Casey. These issues affect access by the most vulnerable, 'pre-ACFE' cohorts, to classes, especially as there is a lower ratio of car ownership where there is low income in Dandenong and the DE NR area (in Casey). Where income is low, taxis are unaffordable and even Met tickets beyond reach.

Many Wellsprings participants need to be shown how to purchase a Met ticket, where the bus stops are located, and how to locate timetables.

It is thought that the Wellsprings Home Visiting and Learning to Learn Programs can reduce the vulnerability to these stresses through the provision of 1:1 mentoring and access to information about appropriate services.

4.3 Childcare

Lack of affordable childcare is a significant barrier to many women in Dandenong and Casey as it prevents them from learning about mainstream life, managing public transport etc., engaging socially with others and accessing AMES, TAFE or Wellsprings programs.

⁴⁹ *ibid*

4.4 Reduced vulnerability of young Sudanese mothers.

Social workers at the Dandenong Hospital are aware of extensive unprotected sex amongst adolescents, and with multiple partners, especially amongst the boys. The Sudanese youth are no exception to this but the cultural consequences for the young women who fall pregnant are concerning.

Hospital staff are aware that if a young Sudanese woman falls pregnant outside marriage and loses the baby in miscarriage, she is considered “damaged goods” and is pushed to fall pregnant to the same young man again, so as to force a commitment, even if the young man is unready for marriage or is violent.

In Sudanese society, pre-Conflict, men were married young, but maturation of those in Australia has been severely affected by trauma, brutality, dislocation and the impact of difficulties of language and disrupted education on employability. Thus the very young women are pushed into relationships that expose them to violence and poverty and also to HIV/AIDS.

Hospital staff wondered if it would be possible to work with the Sudanese worker at Wellsprings to run a workshop or seminar to stimulate discussion on the issue with a view to devising a strategy that would reduce the vulnerability of all concerned. Alternative suggestions included the following:

- As women are seen as unifiers in at least the Nuer community from Sudan⁵⁰, perhaps one of the women leaders in the Sudanese community identified by the Sudanese worker at Wellsprings, could be approached to run such a seminar/workshop;
- Wellspring’s participants include some Sudanese grandmothers and perhaps it would be possible to conduct a workshop with these women to explore culturally sensitive strategies;
- In a current training program for new volunteers for the Home Visiting Program, two previous participants, one a Sudanese, reported they were now volunteering as supporters of

other newly arrived refugees. Perhaps the Sudanese could be approached, with regard to this issue.

4.5 Family Violence Programs

As at Wellsprings, staff in the DE NR project recognize that whilst they do not necessarily disclose their situation, many of the participants are living with violence and DE staff wondered if working together, and with WHISE to devise appropriate programs might be a possibility. The federally funded Communities for Children Project is also concerned to work in this area and has made overtures to WHISE.

5. PARTNERSHIP IDEAS FOR WELLSPRINGS CONSIDERATION

In addition to its own core program, in recent years Wellsprings has engaged in a number of partnerships, with regard to funding e.g. the Scanlon Foundation, and to some extent, program implementation and the sharing of the Wellsprings site for programs conducted by other agencies such as Foundation House for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma. In the course of this research informants gave some thought to possibilities of program collaboration that might reduce the level of vulnerability of the isolated women. No expectations were attached to the ideas proposed below. In fact a couple of informants stressed the value of Wellsprings maintaining its current very clear focus and being wary of expansion. This was confirmed at a recent meeting of Wellsprings’ stakeholders.

In view of the significant changes in the current cohort of Wellsprings participants, as discussed at the February Wellsprings Board meeting however, an awareness of the possibilities raised could be useful to future program planning. The ideas here are not exhaustive but were raised by informants to this research.

⁵⁰ Nuer Community in Victoria, (2007), **Only Mountains don’t Meet**, City of Greater Dandenong, p 6

Figure 13: Partnership Ideas for Wellspring's Consideration

POSSIBLE PARTNER	POSSIBLE PROGRAM
Doveton-Eumemmerring Neighbourhood Renewal Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fresh Food Market ○ Nutrition education ○ Literacy skills and Learning to Learn programs for women ○ Family Violence Support Programs ○ Walking groups
Centrelink Dandenong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home visiting and mentoring in 'surviving life in Australia', such as through assisting with access to services such as the MRC, CAB, Centrelink ○ Group therapy type situations in a safe, secure and welcoming place like Wellsprings, for people facing similar types of challenges ○ Co-location of some services or some services perhaps out posting to Wellsprings so that there is something of a one-stop-shop for services as so many families have to negotiate a bewildering round of agencies,- or perhaps providing a volunteer to mentor through this, someone who can advocate on behalf of Wellsprings participants, including perhaps pushing for the recognition of their qualifications and prior experience. ○ Centrelink and Hanover could provide additional assistance with housing through the Family Focus program.
Communities for Children Program, Dandenong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nutrition education for African refugees
Cranbourne West Primary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Happy to advertise Wellsprings Program in Dandenong ○ Outpost Home Visiting Program ○ Drop in type Program for Parents
City of Casey – Cranbourne Community Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning for Life Programs
Casey North Community Information Service	<p>Could provide trainers for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial Literacy program ○ Keeping it Together Group (for women)
Sudanese Community Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facilitated discussion of Sudanese and members of the mainstream Australian community to help the Sudanese understand Australian mores around such things as parenting,
Dandenong Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social and reproductive health for teenage Sudanese women
DPCD/City of Casey Hampton Park Community Renewal Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This began in October, 2007 and is working now towards a Community Action Plan. Once this is developed, the possibilities for collaboration will be clearer, but there is considerable interest in working with Wellsprings on the part of the Project staff. Jacqui de Sylva (Manager) Maja Parks and Bruce Drummond.
Dandenong Neighbourhood House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Very open to exploring possibilities of collaboration
South-Eastern Migrant Resource Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education programs on health and managing medications

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended:

- that Wellsprings for Women Inc. continues to offer the women of the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Casey, access to ACFE-funded programs;
- that Wellsprings for Women Inc. continues and in deed expands on the access to non-formal, pre-accredited ACFE programs it offers the women of the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Casey,
- that Wellsprings for Women Inc. considers the suggestions for future programs and partnerships made by internal informants and also those external to Wellsprings.

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