



Illawarra Refugee Challenge August 2016

Project Snapshot

Aim

To work with young people to raise awareness of refugee issues and experiences.

To build intercultural understanding through a respectful process based on lived experience.

Background

The Illawarra Refugee Challenge was successfully piloted in 2015 with Keira High and Wollongong High School of Performing Arts. Using a creative, peer-led approach to cultural awareness, the Challenge drew on similar projects led by GyMEA Community Centre and Auburn Council.

For its second year, the Illawarra Refugee Challenge partnered with Woonona High School. In contrast to the pilot project, this school community had a very small number of CALD students.

Project Overview

The project provided students with the opportunity to learn about refugee journeys and experiences, culminating in a tour of a simulated refugee camp setting. A class of 30 student facilitators led the tours through an interactive display where their peers experienced aspects of refugee journeys and the reality of accessing water, sanitation, education and food in a refugee camp.

As an extension of the school tours, an open Community Night was held at the school hall. The event was an open invitation to experience the interactive display and to speak with people from a refugee background.

1. **Project Development & Design** - Consultation with Multicultural Communities Council Illawarra, Wollongong Youth Services and Woonona High School.
2. **Development of Illawarra Refugee Challenge Resource Kit** – Classroom worksheets and activities, student scripts and interactive activities and images, infographics and props were developed and produced.

3. **Peer Facilitator Training** – Thirty students participated in three workshops on issues, exhibition content and project logistics.
4. **Classroom Activities** – A teacher resource kit was developed to assist with classroom teaching on key refugee issues.
5. **Refugee Conversations** – Seven community members shared their journey and experiences as a refugee in small conversation groups. 97 students from Year 9 attended.
6. **Refugee Challenge Event** – One hundred and ninety one year 9 and 10 students participated over two days in the peer-led tours. The ninety minute tour began with a short introduction and semi simulation of leaving home without notice and going through a checkpoint with a guard. The students rotated around six different stations which covered daily life in a refugee camp, an asylum seekers journey by boat and an interactive game exploring refugee journeys.
7. **Refugee Challenge Community Night** - Sixty adults and fifteen children and young people experienced the display, and engaged in conversations with refugees and former refugees from our local community. Food was provided by SCARF Catering.

Project Delivery Schedule

| Component | Date | Time required |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Facilitator Training Session 1 | 23 May 2016 | 2 hrs |
| Facilitator Training Session 2 | 9 June 2016 | 2 hrs |
| Facilitator Training Session 3 | 21 July 2016 | 2 hrs |
| Teacher Delivery of In-class Information | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| Year 9 Refugee Conversations | 28 July 2016 | 2hrs 30 mins |
| Facilitator Practice and Set Up | 5 August 2016 | 2 hrs |
| Refugee Challenge Event | 8 – 9 August 2016 | 4 tours @ 90 mins each |
| Community Night | 8 August 2016 | 2 hrs |
| Facilitator Evaluation and Pack Down | 10 August 2016 | 1 hr |

Partners

Wollongong City Council, MCCI, Wollongong Youth Services and Woonona High School.

Navitas, IMS, SCARF, MCCI, Green Connect and STARTTS contributed to the community event.

The Community Night was part funded by a Multicultural NSW Celebration Grant received by MCCI



Students passing the border checkpoint guard at start of tour



Students participating in 'Education' and 'Shelter' stations



Learning about refugee journeys



Community Night

Feedback Process

- Written evaluation form by each student who participated in Year 9 Refugee Conversations.
- Facilitated discussion with former refugee community members.
- Written evaluation form by each student who participated in the tour.
- A facilitated evaluation discussion and feedback activities with peer facilitators. Meetings held with lead teachers after the Challenge.
- Written survey at the Community Night.
- Video footage and short interviews with participants from the student tours and Community Night.
- Project staff observations; conversations with supervising teachers, students, partners and community members.

Feedback Peer Facilitators

- Increased awareness of refugee issues, particularly through listening to personal accounts from refugees.
- Peer facilitators expressed interest in pursuing refugee issues further, either through school setting or with a community group.
- Learnt new skills and gained confidence in group presentation, facilitation, team collaboration.

Comments from Peer Facilitators

"It was fun, I learnt a lot and it was a great experience."

"Talking to refugees and learning their stories in person and then showing students through the tours that we are lucky for what we have."

"More educated and involved in making the community aware."

Feedback – Students Participating in the Refugee Challenge Tours

Of the 191 students who participated in the Refugee Challenge, 94% of students rated their overall experience as excellent or good.

Key themes emerged from student feedback:

- Students spoke of strong feelings after experiencing the tour:
 - Feeling upset, shocked and disturbed by refugee experiences and daily life in a refugee camp.
 - Appreciation of their life and gratitude for this country.
- Felt more aware of experiences that refugees may go through and have a new found appreciation and acceptance for refugees.

Comments - Student Participants

"Refugees go through a lot to get to another country."

"I think refugees should be treated differently."

"How there are many more people in need than the media might portray."

"I learnt that refugees can spend more time in a camp than I do in school."

"I have more respect for them."

Feedback - Community Night

All participants rated their experience as either excellent or good.

"I feel even more empathy and respect for these people – I already felt that way but listening to them is incredibly moving."

"It puts the human face on an important issue."

"I felt greater understanding of what it is like and a stronger personal connection. It's one thing to read about it but very powerful to meet someone and hear their story."

"...I have a deeper knowledge of immigrants in different countries being persecuted then coming to Australia. So it is so complex."

Highlights – Woonona High School

- Peer teaching a key highlight, being a peer facilitator provided students with the opportunity to take ownership of the information and activities that they were presenting.
- Students have an increased understanding of refugee issues including definitions of a refugee and asylum seeker and a greater ability to challenge media myths.
- A valuable opportunity for authentic learning, i.e. conversations with a person with a refugee background and a simulated refugee camp experience with interactive activities.
- Young people who are now interested in community activism and social justice.

Highlights - Wollongong City Council

- Increased understanding of refugee experiences within the general community, addressing Community Strategic Plan.
- Stronger relationships and networks with Woonona High.
- The community valuing members of the refugee community through hearing their stories
- Paid work for guest speakers from a refugee background.
- The development of a pool of guest speakers from a refugee background. These speakers have since been offered paid work in a similar role.
- New support networks created amongst refugees and former refugees of diverse cultural backgrounds, who met each other through the Challenge.
- Creation of a promotional DVD for future use.

Key Learnings

- This is a logistically complex project. Once expectations and roles of partners have been negotiated, it would be helpful to have a written version to refer to.
- Preparation before the tour is important:
 - Year 9 students received more information regarding refugee journeys and experiences in class in the lead-up to the Challenge; this is understood as the reason why year 9 students expressed better outcomes compared to the year 10 students.
- A direct link to the HSIE or English curriculum is helpful to ensure best success for classroom preparation before the tours. This could also provide better support for the facilitators.
- The attendance of the school community was not as high as expected (approximately 20% of attendees).

Recommendations

- Continue to run refugee cultural awareness programs; this could include running a similar version of the Refugee Challenge in 2017.
- Explore a variety of applications for the Challenge, ie a condensed version utilising components of the existing project.
- Continue existing partnerships, seek other partners.
- Investigate the inclusion of the urban refugee experience as part of the tour.
- Promote the resource kit to community groups and services.
- Continue to update the kit as information is released.