



Building community connections through schools



School principals are among the strongest advocates for community hubs. We asked three of them to share with us the difference that hubs have made in their communities, in terms of outcomes for children and families, and the broader impact on their school.

Community Hubs Australia's national community hubs program works with migrant women and pre-school children, providing: engagement activities; playgroups or pre-school (often with an intensive language component); English classes (both formal learning and conversational practice); vocational training; and a host of other services depending on need (such as referrals to health services, domestic violence support, counselling and more).

The hub leader is essential to each hub. Their role is to: engage families and build trust; develop partnerships with local services, businesses and community groups; and identify needs and be responsive.

The community hub philosophy empowers parents to help their children be the best they can be – socially, emotionally and academically. For many preschool children, their hub will be their first interaction with the school system. Being a part of a hub can help them to feel at home in their school environment and more prepared to start school.



Community hubs help migrant and refugee families create friendships and support networks, and give them a sense of belonging. Mothers, fathers and carers can undertake volunteer work, education and training that can lead to employment.

Although the hubs share a common goal of connecting people in the community, every hub is different, with support and services tailored to the specific needs of the communities they operate in.



Regardless of location, each and every community hub believes in the power of the community coming together to improve the lives of children and families.

Holy Child Primary School



Holy Child Primary School in the northern suburbs of Melbourne typifies diversity. With 345 students, many of its families are first-generation Australians, recent arrivals or refugees – from backgrounds including Iraq, Vietnam, East Timor and Sri Lanka. Many speak English as a second-language.

“Our families coming from other cultural backgrounds don’t necessarily have the same educational experiences that we have in Australia, or the same educational expectations,” says Principal, Alan Smith.

Shortly after beginning his tenure at Holy Child, Alan had several families ask him if they could go into the Prep room to learn English with their children.

“This was the catalyst for setting up our community hub,” Alan says.

The national community hubs program model provided a framework for the school to further develop the role of their hub.

“We wanted to establish a community centre that would help to develop educational opportunities for our parents.”

Holy Child’s community hub offers an adult education program that gives parents a real sense of what the school is like. Classes help to establish parents’ expectations about how the school operates, and how their children will learn.

During hub sessions, parents learn how to find and access services they need, and how to read basic English to their children.

“Our classes enable parents to develop practical language skills in a safe and familiar environment,” said Alan.

“These language skills can then be taken home and transferred to the children, so that our students are also much better prepared when they start school.”

The Holy Child community hub also runs certificate courses for parents in areas such as hairdressing and cooking, and these courses can provide an avenue for employment.

Many of the parents who have undertaken a certificate course have gone on to open micro businesses.

“To say that the courses have changed the lives of our parents is not an overstatement,” said Alan.

“Two of our parents who previously undertook courses have moved on to become hubs’ aids, and they are now undertaking further studies at university.”

Above all, the hub provides a foundation for strengthening relationships between parents and the school, and providing families with a sense of safety.

“Families who come from war-torn countries can often be anxious about being separated from their children,” says Alan.

“Through the hub, we’ve been able to connect parents with organisations that work through issues of trauma and violence, and at the same time, build parents’ trust in the school.”

It’s had a profound effect on his school, but Alan says the community hub has also had a positive impact within the broader community.

“Our community hub is about building the capacity of our school community. It’s about enhancing the potential of our parents and, in turn, improving the educational outcomes for our students.”

Alan Smith
Principal, Holy Child Primary School

“Our hub has really brought the community together – our staff, parents and families are there for each other, both in times of need, and times of celebration.

“If we can start to really change the way that our community thinks about itself, then we’ll start to change the way other people think about us as well,” Alan says.

Roxburgh Rise Primary School



With almost 40 languages and cultures represented among families at Roxburgh Rise Primary School in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne, the school has always celebrated its multicultural heritage. But in the last five years, as the school welcomed an increasing number of migrant and refugee families who spoke little or no English, Principal Chris Bozikas began to notice the language barrier was leaving some students and families behind.

“We felt we weren’t making contact with a lot of parents – we’d send the newsletter out with key information, but it wasn’t necessarily being read or understood,” Chris says.

“We had to come up with a way to connect with those parents, and for them to feel more connected with us.”

In 2012, Chris announced they would join the National Community Hubs Program and launched the Roxburgh Rise community hub, providing a place where staff could meet face-to-face with parents to talk through any concerns.

To encourage parents to stop by at the hub, Chris and her Vice-Principal hosted a series of cooking classes.

“At first, it was myself and the Vice-Principal taking charge, but our parents loved

the classes so much they developed their own roster and soon enough we were creating a different international dish every week.”

Next came the development of an edible community garden, where children and their parents began to plant, grow and pick vegetables together.

“Food connects us all, and our cooking program has blossomed into something that our school is really proud of,” says Chris.

For Chris, one of the most heart-warming things to come about because of the hub is an ongoing tradition of staff breaking fast with parents during Ramadan.

“Each year, we’re invited to an Iftar dinner. A group of our mums cook and they put on the most magnificent spread.

“It’s a privilege to be exposed to part of something that’s so important in their culture,” Chris says.

In addition to its expanding cooking program, the Roxburgh Rise community hub offers playgroup sessions, and runs coffee and chat sessions. A multicultural aid is on hand to assist parents in finding and accessing services within the community that they may require.

“The hub is about helping parents help their children. By giving them the resources and assistance they need, they can help their children better prepare for school,” Chris says.

In its four years of operation, the hub has made a real difference to how staff interact with families, and the hub is having a positive flow on effect in terms of early education outcomes.

“Our children are more ready for school by the time they get to Prep - they have an existing understanding of what school is like, because they’ve been read to by their parents in playgroup sessions,” Chris says.

While improving education outcomes was the initial goal in setting up the Roxburgh Rise community hub, Chris believes it’s become much more than that.

“Many of our parents have made great friendships through the hub, and that’s been so lovely to see. It’s become a real place of togetherness.”

“What makes the hub really rewarding for me is seeing our children from refugee and migrant backgrounds be happy and succeed.”

Chris Bozikas
Principal, Roxburgh Rise Primary School

Springvale Rise Primary School



Springvale Rise Primary School joined the National Community Hubs Program in 2014. Since then, the hub has grown to provide a broad range of educational, practical and social support and services for its culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Located in Melbourne's south-east, the school is made up of many families that have recently arrived in Australia, with more than 35 nationalities represented, including Burmese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Indian, Sri Lankan and Afghan.

Principal Debbie Cottier, says the hub has changed the way they look at preparing new students for school.

"Initially, we all thought about school readiness in the context of children developing good oral language skills and appropriate social skills," Debbie says.

"Since having the hub, our sense of what that means has actually changed.

"We have a much stronger belief about the whole child. We understand that students need a strong sense of health and wellbeing, first and foremost – particularly when you're dealing with children that have come from refugee backgrounds and have experienced trauma," Debbie says.

A significant role of the hub at Springvale Rise is to build the capacity of mothers and fathers to support children in the home environment.

The hub runs English classes for parents and kindergarten children, and teaches newly arrived parents practical skills.

“Some of our parents never attended school, and aren’t familiar with the processes that many of us have learnt growing up in Australia.

“Through the hub, we teach our parents skills like opening up a bank account, using a computer, preparing nutritious meals, and parenting.”

There are also classes to encourage mental wellbeing, including yoga.

Additionally, the school works closely with NFP organisations and service providers in the area to offer support in a range of areas, from employment to family violence.

“Our partners understand that many families feel safe and secure in a school environment and that, for some families, school might be the only place that families can come to access some of those services.

“The role of a community hub is... about minimising social isolation, it’s about connectedness, it’s about relationships, and it’s about building the capacity of families to participate in the wider community”

Debbie Cottier
Principal, Springvale Rise Primary School

“Having strong links with a wide variety of partners is crucial to a community hub program in a school,” Debbie says.

At Springvale Rise, the impact of the community hub is seen by staff on a regular basis.

“We have one family whose eldest child came through the school before the hub established, while the youngest was involved with a number of our playgroups and other sessions once the hub was set up.

“The different ways those siblings dealt with angst, making friends, and learning as they went through school indicated to us that our hub program was making a genuine difference,” said Debbie.

Having been involved with two different community hubs in the greater Dandenong area, Debbie says that, while both hubs shared a common goal, each was based around its unique community.

“A community hub’s role is to understand what its particular community requires, and to tailor its support services to meet those needs.”

She says the most rewarding part of the hub is being able to support families in their time of need.

“Our community hub is not a physical space within the school, it’s not just one particular room. It’s a sense of place, where our community feels connected and supported,” says Debbie.

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Want to know more? Get in touch.

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