



Case Study 2: Castlemaine African Community Project 2008-2010

Dr Meg Montague, December 2010

Introduction

This Case Study is an evaluation of the Castlemaine African Settlement Project (CACP) which operated over a period of two years between 2008-2010 to provide settlement support to the refugee community in Castlemaine, Victoria. The CACP had been set up in response to the needs of over 50 African Australians from refugee backgrounds who had arrived to take up jobs in the Castlemaine meat works.

By mid-2010, there were about 110 African community members in Castlemaine, and of these 50-60 were working at the meatworks. Six families lived in the town, while others had families who remained in Melbourne and the workers commuted between the two locations on a regular basis.

The Project focussed on combining the development of the capacity of the Castlemaine African Australian residents and community development work with local agencies and the general community. As such, it focussed on five main areas:

- strengthening African community capacity and leadership
- increasing access to a range of education and employment opportunities
- improving access to and the capacity of local services
- supporting the capacity of local volunteer networks, and
- building cross-cultural understanding and relationships.

Relevance of this Case Study

While the focus of this Case Study was on the effectiveness of the CACP itself, the nature of the employment, the distance between the meatworks and the State's Capital City, and some of the re-entitlement experiences have the potential to align with the current Murray Bridge project. In addition, many of the services of the CACP are those provided by similar agencies in re-settlement locations.

Some of the key messages/learnings from this Case Study

The writers observed that the intensive support offered to refugees on arrival to Australia appeared to have created some dependency, and that there had been an expectation that that level of support would continue to be provided on an ongoing basis.

The expectation that the Project would support the development of leadership and independence within the African Community was only partly successful, and was impacted by internal conflict and the demands on a small number of involved individuals.

The effectiveness of English classes were reduced because they were in Bendigo (not Castlemaine), were not often enough, were not available to fit in with different shifts and were not available in different levels.

Concentration of employment in the meatworks was interpreted by the author as limiting diversification of employment among the African Australian community.

A key role of the CACP was the identification of interpreters/translation support and the raising of cross-cultural awareness, particularly with schools, health services, police and the justice system. It also helped to strengthen the volunteer services. The report stated that this is a vital area of resettlement work and needs to be flexible, accessible and ongoing.

An important aspect of relationship-building was being able to understand their concerns and challenges, their networks and conversations i.e. communication.

The outcomes of the project demonstrated the importance of maintaining a balance between settlement type services and encouraging the community to develop the capacity to resolve and address issues themselves.

The involvement and support of the local community is a vital component of successful settlement. Cross-cultural information sharing was critical.

Montague, Dr Meg (December 2010) *An evaluation of the Castlemaine African Community Project 2008-2010 – Activities, achievements, lessons learnt and potential future directions.* A report to the Mount Alexander Shire.

www.refugeecouncil.org.au/doc/1012_CACP_Eval.pdf