

Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot

Mount Gambier

**Report of an evaluation undertaken by
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for the

**Department of Immigration and
Citizenship**

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Overall Outcomes

For a variety of reasons, not least competition for scarce resources (especially affordable housing) in capital cities, over the last few years the federal government has been exploring regional settlement opportunities for a subset of the caseload of unlinked refugees.

Unlinked refugees are refugees who have been identified for resettlement in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program, who have not been proposed by someone already in Australia and who have no pre-existing family or strong social links already residing in Australia. If such refugees originally came from a rural area and/or have skills that are suited to rural areas, they may benefit from being settled somewhere less crowded than major cities and where their skills can be put to good use.

However, it is also recognised that, because of their pre-arrival experiences, refugees need specialist support to assist them to become productive members of the community. Just sending them “to the outback” is clearly not an option.

To increase regional settlement, the Commonwealth Government identified a range of conditions needed for successful regional refugee settlement and then began working together with relevant state governments to identify suitable locations where such settlement could be established.

At first glance, Mount Gambier might not appear to have been a logical choice. It is approximately 450 kilometres from both Adelaide and Melbourne and its past history with migration was largely confined to the post World War II era. It is also significantly smaller than Shepparton, Victoria, the first new regional settlement location established through this process, having less than half Shepparton’s population. Nevertheless, the people of Mount Gambier were highly supportive of the proposal to become a regional settlement location and convinced they had the capacity to support refugees.

Mount Gambier’s selection for the regional settlement pilot was due in part to the strong representation of key people in the town,¹ including those involved in local government, the Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee² and other representative bodies. They were and remain convinced that if Mount Gambier is to have a future, new people need to be attracted into the region, and that humanitarian entrants should be included in the mix. As part of their inward migration strategy, they lobbied state and federal governments and presented their arguments as to why Mount Gambier should be selected as a pilot site.

What Mount Gambier lacks in experience settling refugees, it makes up for in many other ways:

- It is the hub of a region that has considerable economic potential that has yet to be fully exploited.
- Employment opportunities are plentiful for both skilled and unskilled workers because of the diversity of industry.
- The region is essentially drought-proof, with abundant underground water supplies and reliable rainfall.

¹ While Mount Gambier is technically a city, the term “town” will be used in this report to distinguish it from the “city”, i.e. Adelaide.

² Previously known as the South East Area Consultative Committee.

- The region's rich volcanic soils make it ideal for horticulture and other forms of agriculture.
- Accommodation is both obtainable and affordable.
- The town has all major services including a well-equipped hospital, a university campus³ and a TAFE College. Major federal and state government agencies such as Centrelink also have a presence.
- There is a collective awareness in the community about the importance of inward migration.
- There are well established volunteer networks, including in the multicultural sector.
- Key stakeholders had thought very carefully about what would be involved in settling refugees and had concluded that not only did they have the capacity, they really wanted to "give it a go".

Their efforts were successful and the first refugee families referred by DIAC arrived in Mount Gambier in June 2007. These were two families from Burma, both of whom had spent lengthy periods in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. Over the next 12 months, a further eight refugee families from Burma arrived.

It was agreed from the outset that the pilot would be evaluated. This is the report of that evaluation.

In summary, the settlement of the Burmese refugees in Mount Gambier has been a great success.

Nine of the ten families referred for settlement in Mount Gambier were still living there at the end of the pilot period. While one family had left, this was for reasons unrelated to the town or the support provided. The remaining families had formed a tight-knit and mutually supportive group that transcended the differences in their ethnicity, language and religion. The entrants are adjusting well to life in the town and, most importantly, have indicated that they feel safe and see their future in Mount Gambier. Because of their backgrounds and natural diffidence, they are possibly taking longer to reach some settlement milestones than other groups of refugees but there is little doubt that they are well on their way.

Local services have coped remarkably well, in large part because of their shared commitment to providing quality settlement services and because of the high level of inter-sectoral cooperation that has traditionally existed within the town. Throughout the pilot settlement period, when challenges arose, service providers dispensed with egos and procedural constraints and worked together to find solutions.

In a deliberate strategy to give the Burmese refugees the opportunity to settle in away from community scrutiny, their arrival was very low key. Once they began to participate in community activities, stories were judiciously placed in the press to build the community's awareness of who they were and why they had come to Mount Gambier. This strategy has clearly been successful as there has been no negative reaction from the local community to their presence. Nor has there been the over-abundance of enthusiasm seen in Shepparton, where some difficulties were encountered in managing the settlement process due to the enthusiasm of a large number of local people to become involved.

In Mount Gambier one is struck by the "normality" of the pilot project. There has been no hype or fanfare. Most people in the community are not particularly interested, nor bothered. Those who need to know, do so. Those who are involved are doing so because they really want to be and are very excited about having been given the chance to work with the

³ Offering courses run by the University of South Australia, Flinders University and Southern Cross University.

refugees. Significantly, now that they have done been involved, they want to continue with refugee settlement.

That which has been put in place is clearly sustainable and the town and surrounding region show great potential for further humanitarian settlement.

Key stakeholders in Mount Gambier are in agreement that the town has the capacity and desire to support up to 10 unlinked entrant families a year and an equivalent number of linked families. They are also keen to work with service providers in Bordertown and Naracoorte to build their capacity so that humanitarian settlement can be expanded to other parts of the Limestone Coast Region.

1.2. Key Lessons

One of the main reasons to evaluate pilot regional settlement projects is so that lessons can be drawn from the experience to guide future regional settlement initiatives. Following is a list of the key lessons from the Mount Gambier pilot. They can be found again - in context - in Section 4.

Lesson #1:

The strong commitment of key agencies and bodies within Mount Gambier had a profound impact on the implementation of the pilot.

Lesson #2:

Clarity of focus, collegiality and mutual respect are key ingredients for the success of a planning committee.

Lesson #3:

The potential for success of regional humanitarian settlement is enhanced if key local figures have guaranteed their support.

Lesson #4:

The DIAC staff member who will participate in a regional planning committee plays an important role in the planning process. Ideally, the person should be available for the duration of the pilot to ensure continuity. S/he should also:

- *have a sound grasp of the principles and practice of humanitarian settlement,*
- *have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different areas within DIAC,*
- *be a good communicator,*
- *be able to manage expectations,*
- *be prepared to accept with grace that there will be times when the Committee's frustrations are directed at him/her, and*
- *recognise the importance of being an equal member of the Committee.*

Lesson #5:

It is important that DIAC staff ensure that relevant information and other resources are drawn to the attention of the regional settlement planning committees in a timely manner.

Lesson #6:

While it can never be known in advance whether entrants want to join a faith community and how significant religion is in their lives, it is important for a representative of faith leaders to be involved in planning and for faith leaders to be briefed about the entrants in advance, including how they and their parishioners can constructively support any entrants that might wish to worship with them.

Lesson #7:

The ideal lead-time for planning a regional settlement project is about six months, with a notification period of two months before the first arrivals.

Lesson #8:

Where people from a capital city are working with those in a regional centre, it is important that all stakeholders respect the expertise of those at the table and that the focus be on developing partnerships based on mutual respect and collegiality.

Lesson #9:

All Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) Caseworkers⁴ employed for regional settlement projects must receive comprehensive training and be linked into structures that provide supervision and support. This is especially important if they are to be the sole worker in a regional centre.⁵

Lesson #10:

The IHSS provider prepare in advance an information package that can be given to counter-staff and other front-line workers in key service agencies to give them some basic information about the entrants, explain how to use interpreters and ensure they know how to contact the IHSS Caseworker.

Lesson #11:

If a regional settlement project is to be successful, agencies involved in its planning and implementation need to recognise that this will require the allocation of resources and therefore ensure that these are factored into budgeting and, where appropriate, grant applications.

Lesson #12:

Wherever possible, when selecting the first cohort of families to go to a new regional settlement location, consideration should be given to selecting entrants with characteristics (family composition, ethnicity, religion, class, background) that are more likely to bind them together rather than divide the embryonic community.

⁴ Training is equally important for those working in other sectors. This will be covered in later sections of the report.

⁵ Training must also include clear guidance about boundaries. One of the greatest challenges facing anyone working in this sector is balancing the desire to do as much as possible to support vulnerable people with the need to operate according to accepted casework principles. This challenge is exacerbated for sole workers, in particular those in regional areas where the demarcation lines between one's professional and personal lives are often blurred.

Lesson #13:

The importance to the first arrivals of having other entrants follow them so that they can see a community building should not be underestimated.

Lesson #14:

Wherever possible, the IHSS provider should employ a local person as a caseworker. In the absence of anyone with experience working with refugees, they should seek to identify someone with relevant skills and knowledge in other areas who can then be trained about settlement. This is seen as a far preferable option to “importing” a worker, no matter how skilled in refugee settlement, from a capital city.

Lesson #15:

It is important to ensure that entrants are given well-structured and comprehensive support to help them to adjust to living in a western home and that this:

- *focus on safety and building confidence;*
- *respond to articulated needs.*

Lesson #16:

It is important that as much notification as possible is given about arrival dates to enable key services such as health providers to make necessary arrangements.

Lesson #17:

When planning to meet the health needs of new arrivals, it is desirable to set up a subcommittee comprised of front-line health providers who, in addition to developing implementation plans, undertaking risk analyses and establishing referral pathways, can ensure that all relevant health practitioners receive information and training about refugees, refugee health, and working in a cross cultural context.

Lesson #18:

Health practitioners in regional areas should be assisted to establish links with refugee health specialists in capital cities.

Lesson #19:

It remains necessary for Divisions of General Practitioners, medical indemnity insurers, medical faculties and all relevant bodies to impress upon all health workers the reasons why friends and family members should not be used in medical interpreting.

Lesson #20:

IHSS providers should distribute DIAC’s language cards and encourage entrants to present them when they need language support.

Lesson #21:

Medical records, including immunization history, are very important for health providers. It is important that DIAC work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to ensure that wherever possible, these records are available and can be sent with the entrants.

Lesson #22:

Service delivery agencies should be given sufficient time and support to enable them to ensure that key staff are trained and brief all staff about working with the new client group.

Lesson #23:

It is important for Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) teachers in regional areas to establish links to their counterparts elsewhere who are working with the same entrant group(s) so that they can share information about strategies and outcomes.

Lesson #24:

All service providers should be given the opportunity to brief others in the sector about their work to ensure there is clarity around roles, to avoid duplication and to facilitate appropriate referrals.

Lesson #25:

When people are doing things for the first time, they can be very sensitive about any suggestion that they might not be doing as good a job as they had hoped to do so good communication and mutual trust are critical.

Lesson #26:

Recognising the obstacles most refugees face preparing for entry to the workforce, it is extremely valuable to have an employment subcommittee, made up of people with relevant experience, which can focus specifically on organising training, securing support and removing barriers.

Lesson #27:

It is very easy for misunderstandings and misinformation to affect the way entrants view services. It is important that service providers establish good communication with the entrants and their Caseworker so that they can identify any points of confusion and address these as soon as possible.

Lesson #28:

The Caseworker's willingness to take cues from entrants about what activities they wanted to do proved very successful and has enabled entrants to practice English and interact with members of the local community.

Lesson #29:

It is important to provide opportunities for the entrants and the police to learn about each other.

Lesson #30:

Successful management of volunteers relies on ensuring that there is well designed and well managed volunteer support program in place before entrants arrive. Cooperation of key stakeholders, agencies and networks should be sought to ensure any potential volunteers are linked with this program..

Lesson #31:

Effective management of donations includes having a central donation point, consulting with the entrants to establish their needs/wants, and only accepting things the entrants need/want.

Lesson #32:

When establishing a new regional settlement location, careful consideration must be given to the service delivery model to ensure that it is appropriately supported and sustainable.

Lesson #33:

Different groups take different times to achieve settlement milestones. It is important to recognise this and ensure that support programs have sufficient flexibility to accommodate these differences.

Lesson #34:

There is an important role for DIAC in ensuring that those involved in implementing regional settlement projects are made aware of innovative work being undertaken elsewhere so that they can link into this.

1.3. Recommendations

The evaluation of the pilot project also pointed to a number of areas that could possibly be improved. As with the lessons outlined above, the context of each of the following recommendations can be found in the report (in Sections 4-7).

Recommendation #1:

That in the spirit of the Prime Minister's apology to indigenous Australians, those responsible for the planning of any new regional settlement initiative ensure local indigenous elders are informed about the project and that their endorsement is sought. It is also important that indigenous elders be encouraged to help disseminate information about the settlement initiative with the members of their community to minimise the potential for misunderstandings and resentments building up, especially around receipt of benefits.

Recommendation #2:

That the committee responsible for planning a regional settlement initiative form thematic subcommittees in key areas including but not limited to health, education and employment, and that these subcommittees include a mix of people involved in policy and those responsible for service delivery, and that the subcommittees focus on developing implementation plans and referral pathways.

Recommendation #3:

That DIAC National Office staff provide a comprehensive briefing to members of the regional settlement planning committee about the process of identification and selection for resettlement and the processes through which entrants go (including cultural orientation training⁶ and health checks) prior to departure.

Recommendation #4:

Noting the strategic and invaluable role played by Refugee Health Nurses in other states, that DIAC enter into discussions with Country Health SA about funding such a position in Mount Gambier to support current and future entrants, and ensuring that the position is built into the implementation of any future regional settlement projects.

Recommendation #5:

That in the context of the current AMEP Review, consideration be given to ways of ensuring that the first cohort of entrants in a regional settlement pilot are not disadvantaged by AMEP funding formulae.

Recommendation #6:

Noting that planning is underway to support the entrants to make a smooth transition to the workforce, that those involved ensure the planning includes activities that will:

- *ensure the entrants receive specialist advice about possible areas of employment;*
- *facilitate their entry into necessary training courses or apprenticeships;*
- *ensure the entrants also receive training about the Australian workplace environment, including Occupational Health and Safety standards, workplace behaviour and worker's protection;*
- *educate local employers about humanitarian entrants and encouraging them to consider providing work opportunities;*
- *consider the merit of organising mentors or workplace supporters for the entrants so that they can get practical and emotional support while they are seeking work and when they enter the workplace.*

Recommendation #7:

While recognising that identifying suitable entrants for a regional pilot is far from simple, it is important that DIAC take steps to ensure the sustainability of services in a new regional settlement location is not compromised by arrival rates or spacing.

Recommendation #8:

That steps be taken to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in making the decision about the future of Mount Gambier as a regional settlement site.

⁶ The Australian Cultural Orientation program, known as AUSCO.

Recommendation #9:

That the duration of pilots remains at 12 months but that there be provision to bring the evaluation forward if it is clear that the settlement pilot is unfolding smoothly and requisite conditions for sustainable settlement are in place.

Recommendation #10:

That more entrants be identified to come to Mount Gambier to strengthen and ensure sustainability of the embryonic community that has been established there.

Recommendation #11:

That a formal ceremony be held in Mount Gambier to mark the end of the pilot.

Recommendation #12:

As Mount Gambier has more than ably demonstrated its capacity as a regional settlement location, steps should be taken to formalise this status without delay.

Recommendation #13:

That DIAC meets on an annual basis with key state and local government agencies and members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee to discuss progress in relation to humanitarian settlement and consider the number of new entrants everyone feels can be effectively supported in the coming year.

Recommendation #14:

That consideration be given, in discussion with the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee and key representatives of local government and service providers in Naracoorte and Bordertown, to investigation of options for planned humanitarian settlement in those towns.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Background to the Evaluation

In summary, the background to the evaluation is as follows:

- The May 2003 *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* proposed that the Department seek to increase humanitarian settlement in regional areas of Australia where appropriate infrastructure, services and opportunities existed or could be readily established. The aim of the recommendation was to promote regional settlement as a way achieving a more balanced geographic distribution throughout the country and recognise the potential benefits of settling in smaller cities and towns for some humanitarian entrants.
- Since then, considerable attention has been devoted to identifying the factors most likely to make regional settlement a viable option for humanitarian entrants. This has focused on both the entrants (which entrants are most likely to benefit from regional settlement) and the receiving town (what must be done in advance to prepare the locals and the service providers for the refugees' arrival).
- Through consultations with state and territory governments throughout 2004, DIAC gained in-principle support from a number of state governments to establish humanitarian settlement in new regional towns that would be carefully identified and prepared through a consultative and collaborative process.
- Shepparton was the first new regional location selected humanitarian settlement under this process, with 10 families from the Democratic Republic of Congo progressively settled under a pilot project from late October 2005.
- In 2006 agreement was reached between the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the South Australian Government for the establishment of a humanitarian settlement pilot in Mount Gambier. It was agreed that up to 10 families would be settled in the area over a period of around 12 months.
- The Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee, based in Mount Gambier, worked with the DIAC's South Australian Office to prepare for the arrival of refugee families.
- The pilot began in June 2007 and 10 families of refugees from Burma with no substantive links elsewhere in Australia were settled in Mount Gambier.
- When the pilot was commenced, it was agreed that it would be evaluated after the first 12 months to determine the success of the process and identify any areas for improvement. This evaluation is the fulfillment of this commitment.

Further details of the evolution of the pilot are provided in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

2.2. Aim and Objectives

The evaluation aimed to identify key procedural lessons learnt by stakeholders during the Mount Gambier Regional Settlement Pilot. The consultant was asked to:

- identify what processes have worked well and the challenges that have been experienced;

- identify what factors may have had a positive or negative impact (including governance arrangements, interagency relationships and involvement, community involvement/support);
- examine the respective roles of and relationships between the IHSS provider, the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee, DIAC National Office and DIAC South Australia, Multicultural SA and other local stakeholders;
- identify how well the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) arrangements have worked under the pilot;
- acknowledge the particular features of the Mount Gambier settlement pilot, identifying what could be done differently to improve future regional humanitarian settlement initiatives;
- determine the capacity of Mount Gambier and the surrounding Limestone Coast Region for further humanitarian settlement and the number of entrants that could be sustainably settled; and
- ascertain the degree of success or otherwise of the pilot process.

2.3. Research Framework

As agreed with DIAC, the research consisted of:

- reaching agreement on key stakeholder groups;
- developing research instruments (which were approved by DIAC prior to use);
- consulting agreed stakeholders;
- preparing a draft report that documented and analysed the information collected during the consultation process and identified key lessons and recommendations;
- sharing the draft report with DIAC and key stakeholders to allow their input;
- incorporating feedback into the draft report and submitting a final report to DIAC.

2.4. Stakeholders

The key stakeholder groups identified for the purpose of the evaluation were:

- DIAC staff in the National Office,
- DIAC South Australian Staff,
- members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee (which acted as the steering committee for the pilot),
- state and local government representatives,
- the IHSS service provider,
- humanitarian entrants;
- other key stakeholders;
- members of the press;
- members of the local community.

2.5. Research Instruments

A set of questionnaires specifically targeted to each of the stakeholder groups was developed with the objective of capturing information relevant to achieving the evaluation's aim and objectives. The rationale for seeking input from each of these stakeholder groups and the areas explored with them is outlined below.

2.5.1. DIAC Staff – National Office

Staff members within DIAC's National Office have an important overview perspective on regional settlement, as well as having played an important role in initiating new regional settlement initiatives.

DIAC National Office staff members were asked to reflect upon, *inter alia*:

- the background to the establishment of pilot;
- their specific role in the pilot;
- the extent to which other regional settlement initiatives informed their guidance of the pilot;
- the negotiation process with state and local government;
- communication since the commencement of the pilot;
- their perspectives on how the pilot has unfolded;
- what they see as the particular features of the Mount Gambier pilot;
- the lessons they have learnt along the way;
- the lessons they consider should be drawn from the Mount Gambier experience for use elsewhere.

2.5.2. DIAC Staff - Adelaide

A DIAC staff member at the state office played an active role in the development and implementation of the pilot and worked closely with the other members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee.

This staff member was asked to reflect upon a number of key issues including:

- the objectives of the pilot and the extent to which they were realistic;
- the implementation strategies;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation model, including the role of the settlement committee and any subcommittees formed;
- whether contingency planning exercises were undertaken and the value of these;
- the extent to which documented experiences in other settlement locations informed decision making;
- the major challenges confronted;
- the nature and impact of unforeseen circumstances;
- the effectiveness of their communication with and between key stakeholders;
- the successes of the pilot;
- key lessons learnt from the pilot;
- future settlement prospects in the Limestone Coast Region.

2.5.3. Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee

The members of the Migrant Settlement Committee were seen as being central to the evaluation process as they had the closest working knowledge of how things had unfolded on the ground. The opinions of targeted Settlement Committee members were sought about, *inter alia*:

- the development phase of the pilot;
- the process of refocusing the Settlement Committee on the pilot;
- the use of subcommittees and the relationship between these and the main committee;
- the respective roles of and relationship between the Committee and the IHSS provider;

- communication channels between the committee, any of its subcommittees and the IHSS provider;
- the successes and challenges over the last 12 months;
- the factors that contributed to any of the successes over the last 12 months;
- the factors that might have impeded settlement outcomes;
- the level of engagement of members of the interagency;
- whether contingency planning exercises were undertaken and the value of these;
- community involvement and support;
- the capacity of the IHSS provider to meet entrants' needs in the regional setting;
- lessons they have learnt that they believe should inform other regional settlement initiatives;
- future settlement prospects in the region, including the number and type of entrants they believe the region could successfully settle and the supports required for them to be able to do this; and
- suggestions for other key stakeholders who should be consulted.

2.5.4. State and Local Government Representatives

Successful regional settlement requires a commitment from all three levels of government, not just the federal government. Canvassing the views of state and local government representatives was therefore seen as essential in the evaluation of the pilot and for establishing prospects for future regional settlement.

Areas explored with state and local government representatives included:

- their policy with respect to regional settlement of humanitarian entrants;
- the extent to which the pilot is consistent with this policy;
- what they were hoping to achieve with the pilot;
- the extent to which they consider they have achieved, or are on the way to achieving, these objectives;
- the successes and challenges of the last 12 months;
- the factors that contributed to any of the successes of the last 12 months;
- the factors that might have impeded settlement outcomes;
- whether anything could have been done to mitigate the impact of these impediments;
- the communication channels between the various parties involved in the pilot;
- the level of clarity around the roles of the various parties involved in the pilot;
- the extent to which they consider the entrants have benefited from being settled in a regional area;
- the response of the local community;
- the key lessons about regional settlement that can be drawn from the pilot; and
- future settlement prospects in the region, including the number and type of entrants they believe the region could successfully settle and the support required for them to be able to do this.

2.5.5. The IHSS Provider

Because of the level of involvement between the IHSS provider and the entrants and the vital settlement functions it performs, the IHSS provider is a critical stakeholder.

Opinions of staff employed by the IHSS provider in both Adelaide and Mount Gambier were sought about, *inter alia*:

- their involvement in the planning process of the pilot;
- the challenges they confront in terms of service delivery in a regional setting;

- the steps they have taken to overcome these challenges;
- the nature and quality of their relationship with the Settlement Committee;
- the nature and quality of their relationship with other key stakeholders in Mount Gambier;
- the factors that have influenced these relationships;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot;
- the most important lessons they have learnt; and
- their views about future humanitarian settlement in Mount Gambier and the surrounding region.

2.5.6. Humanitarian Entrants

As significant as other stakeholder groups might be, it is really the refugees from Burma who are the most important people in the whole pilot. A project can be well organised and run efficiently but if it does not meet the needs of the entrants, it is of little value.

Focus groups were organised for both the men and the women to explore their opinions and experiences in relation to the following:

- location, including:
 - their settlement in a regional centre (including gains and losses),
 - the accommodation provided;
 - its proximity to services and other things of importance;
- support structures, including:
 - initial support,
 - orientation and information,
 - English,
 - translating,
 - health,
 - income support,
 - volunteers,
 - police, etc;
- economic participation, including:
 - availability of suitable employment,
 - ability to obtain employment;
- social participation, including:
 - community awareness of who they are and why they have come,
 - community acceptance of their presence within the community,
 - level of contact they have had with local community members,
 - participation in recreational pursuits;
 - participation in a faith community;
- family well being, including:
 - impact of the settlement experience on the family as a whole and various members within it,
 - their sense of safety in the new environment,
 - the extent to which they feel in control of their lives,
 - their ability to make choices, including about their interaction with volunteers and members of the local community,
 - the impact, if any, being part of a pilot (and hence being the “first” and highly visible) has had on them;
- future plans:
 - do they plan to remain in the regional centre,
 - what factors might result in a decision to leave;
- lessons learnt:

- what advice would they give to service providers about regional settlement;
- what advice would they give to other entrants who were being offered the chance to settle in a regional area;
- if given the choice now, would they go to a regional area or a capital city.

2.5.7. Other Service Providers and Key Stakeholders

While it was recognised that the members of the Settlement Committee included a broad cross section of service providers and stakeholders in Mount Gambier, it was considered important not to overlook the people who might not have been “part of the loop” but who have been called upon provide services in one capacity or another to the refugees.

In addition to exploring the opinions of these people about the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot and the lessons they consider can be learnt from it, it was seen as being important to canvass the views of these people about:

- the advice they received in advance of the refugees coming to Mount Gambier; and
- the nature and effectiveness of the communication they have had with the Settlement Committee, the IHSS provider, DIAC and any other relevant parties.

2.5.8. Local Media

Having a welcoming host community is essential for the success of regional settlement. Recognising the role the media has in shaping public opinion, the views of representatives of the local press were sought about, *inter alia*:

- the advice they received about the pilot;
- the nature of their initial and ongoing communication with the Settlement Committee;
- the coverage of the refugees during the pilot,
- how they have dealt with issues of privacy and confidentiality; and
- the community’s response to the pilot.

2.5.9. Community Representatives

As one of the stated objectives is to examine the level of community involvement and support, efforts were made to speak to local residents and those with insight into their views. Opinions were sought about a number of issues including:

- the consultation process prior to and since the commencement of the pilot;
- the extent to which the consultation process met their needs and took their opinions into account;
- community support for the pilot;
- the level of community involvement in the pilot;
- the lessons that they feel should be learnt from the pilot;
- their views about future humanitarian settlement in the region.

2.6. Consultation Process

Consultations were held in Canberra, Adelaide and Mount Gambier. Where it was not possible to arrange a face-to-face meeting, phone conversations were held. Two stakeholders elected to send their comments in writing.

In all, 52 people had direct input into the evaluation, 32 of whom represented key organisational stakeholders:

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (National and South Australian Offices),
- Multicultural Affairs SA,
- SA Department of Education and Children's Services,
- South Australian Multicultural Affairs Commission,
- Centrelink,
- Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia,
- City of Mount Gambier,
- District Council of Grant,
- Limestone Coast Regional Development Board,
- Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee,
- Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre,
- Limestone Coast TAFE (AMEP),
- Mount Gambier North Primary School,
- South East Regional Community Health,
- Hawkins Medical Centre,
- SA Police,
- Lifeline,
- Mount Gambier Baptist Church,
- Limestone Coast Multicultural Network,
- The Border Watch.

Many of those interviewed were also (or had been) members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee.

Recognising the importance of the perspective of the entrants themselves, arrangements were made to meet with all 18 adult entrants still resident in Mount Gambier at the time of the evaluation. There was consistent advice that the best way to get feedback from the entrants would be to invite the men and the women to come to two separate sessions at the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC).⁷ This way, one parent could baby-sit children while the other attended. It also allowed the women to express opinions unfettered by the men. In the men's session, one of the male entrants acted as an interpreter and this role was taken by one of the women in the women's session.⁸ In both cases they performed this function with remarkable skill, especially as they were translating between English and both Burmese and Karen. As all but one of the children are aged 12 years and under,⁹ and because no one suggested that there had been any problems relating to the children, it was considered neither appropriate nor necessary to speak with the children.

In addition to the aforementioned stakeholders, discussions were held with an indigenous elder and two local community members.

The evaluation was undertaken between June and September 2008, with the majority of the consultations taking place in July. A full list of people consulted is included as Appendix 1.

⁷ Group sessions were identified as being the most appropriate way to meet with the entrants because they have formed a very close-knit and cohesive group (so there are no problems with isolated entrants) and being shy, it would be far less stressful for them to meet a stranger in a group.

⁸ This was seen as preferable to using a telephone interpreter. For a start, having the interpreter in the room improves the dynamics of the interview. Secondly, there were three languages involved, thereby complicating things for telephone interpretation. Finally, providing interpreting work to two of the entrants enables them to supplement their income and enhance their skills and confidence.

⁹ The exception to this is a 15-year-old girl who had been participating in the New Arrivals Class with the other school-age children.

3. Overview of the Project

The Mount Gambier Regional Settlement Pilot will be examined in considerable detail in Sections 4-7 but before doing this, there is merit in reflecting on some of the overall outcomes.

There is broad consensus that the pilot has gone very well. The entrants appear very happy to be in Mount Gambier and have been well supported. Local service providers have coped admirably and there has been no negativity from the local community.

It might be argued that the success of the pilot comes from a mixture of good management and good luck: The elements of the pilot's success attributable to good management include, *inter alia*:

- good leadership from the successive chairs of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee, the group responsible for planning and overseeing the implementation of the pilot;
- careful planning, including extensive service mapping, by the Committee;
- everyone having realistic expectations;
- good communication between stakeholders;
- trust and respect between stakeholders;
- willingness of all key stakeholders to address any problems that occurred along the way;
- appointment of an excellent IHSS Caseworker;
- selection of a delivery model for DIAC services that was flexible, suitable for the entrants and location and which enabled the Caseworker to be trained and supported;
- appropriate preparation of the local community;
- development of good relationships with the press; and
- careful management of volunteers.

Those responsible for the implementation of the pilot are also very aware they were extremely lucky that:

- there were no medical emergencies or other crises that tested the capacity of the service matrix;
- while the Committee's planning overlooked the significance of evaluation report of the Shepparton Regional Settlement Pilot, most of the recommendations were implemented intuitively and the consequences of any deviations were minor;
- the entrants are very respectful, undemanding and keen to try their best, and all the direct service providers have been very happy to work with them.

If given the chance to do the whole thing over from scratch, Committee members do not feel they would make many changes. Possibly they would have:

- truncated the planning process so that it lasted for six months rather than two years;
- set up subcommittees involving those who would be responsible for delivery of key services, in particular health care and education, so that logistical issues could be ironed out sooner; and
- ensured that planning pathways for employment began much earlier in the process.

Fortunately, none of these issues had a major impact on the overall outcomes.

4. Analysis of the Pilot

4.1. Overview of Mount Gambier and the Limestone Coast Region

Mount Gambier is situated roughly half way between Melbourne and Adelaide, with air links to both cities. It is the commercial centre of the Limestone Coast Region of south-eastern South Australia. The town itself has about 23,000 people and supports a further 10,000 people from the surrounding region. It is built on the slopes of an ancient volcano and is well known for its spectacular crater lakes (especially Blue Lake), volcanic caves and sinkholes, some of which have been turned into parks. As a regional centre, Mount Gambier has a wide range of medical, educational, commercial and recreational facilities and, significantly, an adequate supply of affordable rental accommodation.

To outsiders, the Limestone Coast Region is possibly best known for its coastal holiday towns and for its local wineries, in particular those in the world famous Coonawarra district just north of the town. The region also supports a wide variety of other industries including forestry, dairying and horticulture, as well as mining (limestone and natural gas) and fishing. Flowing from this is a thriving transport industry moving local products to markets.

Unlike most other agricultural areas in south-eastern Australia, there is abundant water in the region (from good natural rainfall and underground aquifers), which when combined with the rich volcanic soils and abundant sunshine, makes it ideal for agriculture. There is widespread recognition that the potential of the region is yet to be tapped and an expectation that as the impact of the drought bites deeper into other areas, more attention will be given to developing the Limestone Coast Region, both as a primary producer and for value-adding (e.g. through establishing factories that can bottle or otherwise transform the primary products).

It is commonly agreed that the one thing the region lacks is people – especially but not exclusively skilled workers. The areas in which workers are in high demand include:

- transportation (especially truck drivers);
- forestry (mechanical harvesting operators, drivers etc);
- dairying;
- construction (plumbers, carpenters etc);
- medicine (doctors, nurses, aged care workers);
- general labourers and agricultural workers.

For several years there has been considerable discussion about this skill shortage within local government,¹⁰ at the Regional Development Board, at the Area Consultative Committee and other relevant fora. The importance of inward migration has also been well publicised in the press and has become part of the area's collective consciousness.

The arrival of skilled migrants from many parts of the world has already begun to change the demographics of Mount Gambier. Prior to this, the town had long been inhabited predominantly by people of British, Irish and western European¹¹ descent who were either born in Australia or had lived there for many years.¹² Because of the accepted connection between inward migration and a prosperous future, local people have largely been very

¹⁰ There are two relevant councils: the Mount Gambier City Council and the District Council of Grant that is responsible for the surrounding region.

¹¹ A number of Greek, Italian and German migrants arrived in the 1950s.

¹² This being said, about 25 Vietnamese families moved into town in the mid 1980s, introducing a small but visible Asian presence.

accepting of and welcoming towards the new arrivals. As one local explained, “if you see a foreign face, you assume they are a doctor or a nurse from the hospital and you are glad they are here because without them, we wouldn’t be able to get medical care”.

The recent inward migration did not, however, include humanitarian entrants. While some other towns in the region had seen refugees move there of their own accord because of seasonal employment opportunities,¹³ very few had settled in Mount Gambier.

Thus while Mount Gambier at first glance might not have seemed as logical a choice for direct humanitarian settlement as somewhere like Shepparton which has a long history of multicultural settlement, there is ample evidence that the town and the surrounding region have the necessary infrastructure and community attitudes to support such an initiative.

4.2. Policies Underpinning Inward Migration to Mount Gambier

When considering the background to the current regional settlement pilot project, it is also relevant to note that it reflects a fortunate confluence of federal, state and local government policies.

At the federal level, a renewed focus on exploring the potential of regional settlement for humanitarian entrants came as a result of recommendations contained within the 2003 *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Refugees* (the Review).¹⁴ This report identified many sound reasons why some humanitarian entrants would be better suited to regional settlement, especially for those from rural backgrounds and/or those whose skills were suited to employment opportunities in regional areas. At the same time as benefiting these entrants, it was argued that regional settlement might take some pressure off services in the larger centres and thus there would be flow on benefits for the entrants who settled there.

While humanitarian entrants had been settling in certain regional areas (such as Toowoomba, Coffs Harbour and Launceston), this had largely evolved organically and not as part of a planned, coordinated approach. The Review stressed the value of a cross-portfolio, whole of government approach to regional settlement and of careful planning when establishing new settlement locations.

The Department of Immigration¹⁵ responded to the 2003 Review’s recommendations by investigating the potential of a number of regional centres to host humanitarian settlement. This included development of key criteria to be considered, such as housing availability and affordability, employment, health care and education, and considered the availability of specialist supports for migrants such as settlement services and language programs.

In July 2004, then Minister for Immigration, Senator Vanstone, wrote to state and territory governments seeking their views on the criteria for considering new regional towns as well as on any suitable locations for regional humanitarian settlement to be established.

¹³ A number of Afghan families have settled in Naracoorte

¹⁴ Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. May 2003.

¹⁵ The Department of Immigration has changed its full title several times during the time span relevant to the evaluation. It will thus be referred to generically as “the Department of Immigration”. Other descriptors, such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (or its acronym, DIAC), will only be used when applicable to the context.

This letter fell on fertile ground in South Australia. The state government had just released its Population Policy¹⁶ in response to the fact that the state's economic performance over the previous decade had fallen behind that of the rest of Australia. It reflected a recognition that low fertility rates, an aging population, significant loss of skilled workers to eastern states and failure to attract migrants was already having a detrimental impact on the economy and that if this was not addressed, the consequences over time would be much more serious.

The Policy identified a number of strategies to turn the tide. Some of these focused on harnessing the full potential of current residents by improving services and providing additional support but others involved attracting new people to South Australia, both from interstate and overseas. In relation to the latter, the Policy articulated a commitment to achieving the following levels of migration by 2008:

- increase five-fold or better (to 600) the number of business migrants;
- double or better (to 2,500) the intake of independent skilled migrants;
- increase to at least 10% (to 1,200) the state's share of humanitarian entrants.¹⁷

This was backed up by a commitment to improve settlement services and support a number of new and existing initiatives aimed at contributing to labour force and skills development. In both instances, the necessity of partnership between all three levels of government and between government, business and the community sector was recognised.

A close working relationship was established between the federal and state governments and consultations were initiated, through the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, in the three regional areas, the Limestone Coast (South East), Riverland (North East) and Murraylands (centred on Murray Bridge), that had been identified as potentially suitable for the settlement of unlinked humanitarian entrants.

These conversations resonated, in turn, with key stakeholders in the Limestone Coast whose discussions about regional development planning had, for over a decade, included the need to plan for inward migration. A multicultural network¹⁸ was established in 2001 and in 2002 a Regional Leaders Forum identified the need for an inward migration strategy. The Area Consultative Committee was tasked with developing this and set up an Inward Migration Committee. The strategy they developed covered a number of areas including promotion of the region to potential migrants, influencing government policy, supporting the development of infrastructure and supporting the establishment of cross-sectoral committees that could plan and resource inward migration initiatives. As previously mentioned, there was widespread recognition that the region's future prosperity is inextricably linked to its potential to attract more people to live and work in the region.

In August 2004 the Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee (LCACC), through the Inward Migration Committee, wrote formally to the Department of Immigration asking that the Limestone Coast be considered as the location for a regional settlement pilot.

In response, the Department of Immigration made a presentation to the LCACC's Annual General Meeting that explained the refugee and humanitarian settlement program. Some 80

¹⁶ Prosperity through People: a Population Policy for South Australia. Government of South Australia. March 2004

¹⁷ Ibid p11.

¹⁸ The Limestone Coast Multicultural Network works to foster and promote cultural diversity. Amongst other things, it has coordinated a number of multicultural festivals and educational projects, the most recent being "Memories in a Suitcase", a collation of stories of post War migrants.

people were present at this meeting, including representatives of government agencies, churches, migrant and refugee support groups, training and educational institutions and the business sector. Those present at the meeting delivered a strong message that they wanted refugees to settle in the region.

4.3. Selection of Mount Gambier as Pilot Site

Recognising the strength and unanimity of support for humanitarian settlement, local service providers, with input from the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia,¹⁹ formed the Coordinating Committee for New Arrivals in December 2004. This was a subcommittee of the Inward Migration Committee that in turn was auspiced by the LCACC. The Coordinating Committee evolved over time, bringing in new members and moulding its function to the unfolding circumstances and eventually became the *Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee*, which was to go on to become the steering committee for the pilot.

From December 2004 onwards, the Department of Immigration's South Australian office identified a staff member to join the Committee. Through this participation, they were able to provide more detailed background information about requisite services for humanitarian settlement (such as torture and trauma counselling) and educate local service providers about federally funded programs including the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) and the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

The selection of a regional settlement location was still, however, some way off at this stage and the Department of Immigration was about to embark on a new tender round for the core IHSS services. All discussions and planning therefore had to be conducted on a purely theoretical basis, with no certainty about whether entrants would actually be sent to the region and if they were, where they would be from and who would be providing key services to them. Nevertheless, the core group of service providers set about learning more about refugee settlement, mapping available services and assessing the capacity of these to respond to the specific needs of humanitarian entrants.

Meanwhile, similar discussions were taking place in the other regions identified as possible locations for a regional settlement pilot and an ongoing assessment of suitability and readiness was being undertaken by the Department of Immigration.

In May 2005, the then Federal Minister for Immigration, in consultation with the South Australian Government, identified Murray Bridge (Murraylands) as the site for the first regional settlement pilot in South Australia. The Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee was, however, reassured by the Department of Immigration that this decision neither precluded humanitarian settlement in their region nor Departmental support for this.

The ongoing desire of the region to host refugees was demonstrated at a forum called "Population through Prosperity" organised by the Inward Migration Committee that was held in Naracoorte on 5th June 2005. The outcomes of this forum included a shared commitment to develop a population policy for the region, an expression of support for state and federal initiatives and strategies aimed at regional migration and a clear statement that the region was willing to embrace diversity.

¹⁹ The Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA) has had a regional development role in South Australia for over 20 years and has established networks that have formed into the Regional Multicultural Communities Council (established in 2000). This body co-hosted the regional conference that was held in Mount Gambier in September 2007 and two previous regional conferences in the Riverland and Eyre Peninsular.

Planning for possible settlement continued and in September 2005, a delegation from Mount Gambier travelled to Warrnambool in Victoria to investigate how this regional centre had supported the Sudanese who had been encouraged to relocate there. The links with Warrnambool were maintained and Warrnambool became far more of a role model than Shepparton, despite the fact that the first regional settlement pilot was underway there at this time. As will be discussed later, despite having been told about Shepparton, for a number of reasons the planning committee did not fully appreciate its relevance to them until much later.

Meanwhile, Murray Bridge was experiencing a significant inflow of migrants on “457 visas”.²⁰ Services that had expected to be gearing up for the pilot, found that their energy and resources had to be diverted to assist the migrants who had already come. Further, the 457 visa holders had created a demand for housing and other services and some in the town feared that this would have an impact upon the capacity of the town to provide adequately for a new group of entrants.

Recognising the potential for services in Murray Bridge to become overstretched, in April 2006 Minister Vanstone wrote to the Premier of South Australia seeking his support to relocate the pilot to Mount Gambier. When this agreement was secured, as well as that of the two relevant local councils (Mount Gambier and Grant), focused planning started in earnest.

Throughout the second half of 2006 and first half of 2007, a variety of community fora and planning sessions were held and the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, which by then had been awarded the IHSS contract, set up a presence in Mount Gambier. As will be explored in Section 4.6, however, the country of origin of the entrants was still unknown at this stage.

It was not until May 2007 that the Department of Immigration was able to advise Mount Gambier that a suitable caseload had been identified. The first families arrived about one month later.

It may be worth noting in this context a significant point of divergence between the selection of Mount Gambier as a site for a regional settlement pilot and that of the other two pilot sites (Shepparton and Ballarat). In the other locations, while local interest and support was evident, the pilot settlement projects were largely initiated by government. In Mount Gambier, the impetus came from the town, with local stakeholders presenting a strong case that they interested in participating and had the capacity to deliver.

Lesson #1:

The strong commitment of key agencies and bodies within Mount Gambier had a profound impact on the implementation of the pilot.

4.4. The Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee

As previously mentioned, the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee (LCMSC) grew organically out a collective desire amongst community leaders and service providers in Mount Gambier and the region to attract and provide appropriate support for migrants and

²⁰

Temporary Business (Long Stay) - Standard Business Sponsorship (Subclass 457)

refugees. It was initially auspiced by the Area Consultative Committee²¹ and its Terms of Reference outlined that it would:

- develop, implement and review the Regional Settlement Plan;
- ensure services are coordinated and sympathetic to the individual needs of refugee families;
- ensure service providers meet the standard operational requirements for provision of customer service;
- foster collaboration across agencies and ensure an integrated, case management approach is adopted to track refugee families; and
- undertake a public education campaign to foster collaboration and promote the benefits of a culturally diverse community.

At the time of its establishment, members of the LCMSC were drawn from:

- Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee (secretary and co-convenor),
- Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA) - (co-convenor),
- South Australian Police,
- Anglican Community Care,
- Centrelink,
- Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS),
- SE Regional Health Service,
- Limestone Coast Multicultural Network,
- SE Regional Domestic Violence Services,
- District Council of Grant,
- City of Mount Gambier,
- Community Settlement Services Scheme,
- Children, Youth and Family Services (CY&FS),
- TAFE SA,
- SE Community Legal Service,
- Employment Service Provider,
- Department of Immigration.

The members of the Committee elected a Chair from amongst their number and it was agreed that this person would hold the position for a term of 12 months. The Committee met monthly and the secretariat functions were provided by the Area Consultative Committee. Most were locals but some, including representatives from the Department of Immigration and MRCSA, traveled from Adelaide to attend meetings.

In the intervening years, the Committee's composition has altered somewhat to reflect changes in personnel within agencies and the move from theoretical planning to developing and implementing a pilot project. It has become smaller and more focused but all agree it has managed to retain the collective commitment and enthusiasm that led to its initial establishment.

Many people interviewed during the evaluation spoke about Mount Gambier having a strong tradition of collegiality and cross-sectoral initiatives and it was stressed that the LCMSC operates in the spirit of this tradition. The Committee has brought together many people who wield considerable influence in their own organisations and clearly have strong views about

²¹ The national network of ACCs provides an important link between the Australian government, business and community. As volunteer community based organisations, ACCs are uniquely placed to respond to issues and opportunities in their regions and provide a vital conduit to government on local social, economic and environmental conditions

how things should be done. It was clear, however, that in the most part, everyone has been prepared to put aside any differences in the interests of achieving the collective goal and ensuring the best possible outcomes for the entrants. It also became apparent during the interviews that the key players within Mount Gambier have a great deal of respect for each other and for the contribution they have collectively made to the pilot. There can be no doubt that it is seen as a team effort in which each person has played a valued part.

Lesson #2:

Clarity of focus, collegiality and mutual respect are key ingredients for the success of a planning committee.

Relevant too is the Committee's awareness that they have the unconditional support of the mayors and CEOs of both local Councils. They know that if anything happens, they can simply pick up a phone and ask for help. This reinforces the fact that their work is not peripheral to the interests of the town but is seen as an integral part of shaping its future.

Lesson #3:

The potential for success of regional humanitarian settlement is enhanced if key local figures have guaranteed their support.

Another key player in the Committee is the Department of Immigration. There was general agreement that its representative played a very constructive role in the pilot despite the difficult position in which she was sometimes placed. As will be discussed later, the delays in confirming whether entrants would actually come to Mount Gambier caused more than a little frustration. She was able to act as a liaison person with the Department's National Office and at the same time, build the Committee's awareness of the Department's settlement planning model. For this she gained much respect.

Lesson #4:

The DIAC staff member who will participate in a regional planning committee plays an important role in the planning process. Ideally, the person should be available for the duration of the pilot to ensure continuity. S/he should also:

- *have a sound grasp of the principles and practice of humanitarian settlement,*
- *have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different areas within DIAC,*
- *be a good communicator,*
- *be able to manage expectations,*
- *be prepared to accept with grace that there will be times when the Committee's frustrations are directed at him/her, and*
- *recognise the importance of being an equal member of the Committee.*

At the time of the evaluation the Committee was on the verge of another transformation. They recognise that the specific function they played during the pilot is coming to a close and that the time has come to rethink their role. It is very clear they see an ongoing role supporting humanitarian settlement in Mount Gambier but a number of Committee members believe they should also broaden their focus to include other entrant groups (in particular the 457 visa holders) and other towns in the region (in particular Naracoorte and Bordertown). The decision to do this was, however, still pending at the time of this evaluation.

4.5. Planning

As can be deduced from the previous sections, the planning process actually began long before there was even a suggestion that Mount Gambier might be selected to trial regional settlement and for the most part was conducted as a theoretical exercise with no clarity about for whom they were planning or whether their plans would ever be used.

It says a great deal for the commitment of those involved that they managed to maintain their commitment during this time. They did this by undertaking specific planning activities including but not limited to:

- finding out from various sources (including the Department of Immigration and MRCSA) about refugees and humanitarian settlement;
- visiting Warrnambool and speaking with service providers and local planners about how they had prepared for the arrival of the Sudanese entrants that had been invited into the city;
- undertaking a mapping exercise in which each agency was asked to articulate what they would be able to contribute to humanitarian entrants and what they would need to do internally in order to respond to their specific needs;
- inviting a cultural awareness trainer from Adelaide to work with staff of key service providers;
- giving very careful consideration to the profile of entrants they considered best suited for settlement in Mount Gambier;
- working with the Multicultural Network to cultivate a welcoming community. A series of multicultural festivals and events were organised, strategically timed articles were placed in the press and dialogue was entered into with existing migrant groups.

Some key people interviewed indicated that it would have been useful during this stage to have a “template” for the process as they felt they were having to “reinvent the wheel”. It should be noted that there was actually a key document available several months before the arrival of the refugees, this being the report of the evaluation of the regional settlement pilot in Shepparton. The Department of Immigration forwarded the report in April 2007 but it appears to have arrived at a time when the Committee had moved from theoretical planning to focusing on the arrival of the refugees and they acknowledge they did not recognise its significance at the time. In fact, a number of Committee members are certain they did not see the Shepparton Report before March 2008, almost a year after it was initially provided.

Lesson #5:

It is important that DIAC staff ensure that relevant information and other resources are drawn to the attention of the regional settlement planning committees in a timely manner.

Fortunately, the absence of the Shepparton Report did not have serious consequences. The competence of the members of the Committee led them in directions consistent with the lessons learnt in Shepparton. It is possibly only in two areas that the lack of attention to the Shepparton recommendations had any real significance:

Just as the planning committee did in Shepparton, the LCSPC failed to take steps to provide a formal briefing for local indigenous elders about the pilot. While at the practical level, this

had no impact on the implementation of the pilot, it is symbolically important. As the pilot is all about inviting new people into the community, it is respectful for those issuing the invitation to advise the local indigenous elders, as custodians of the land, about the background to the pilot and who would be coming.

Recommendation #1:

That in the spirit of the Prime Minister's apology to indigenous Australians, those responsible for the planning of any new regional settlement initiative ensure local indigenous elders are informed about the project and that their endorsement is sought. It is also important that indigenous elders be encouraged to help disseminating information about the settlement initiative with the members of their community to minimise the potential for misunderstandings and resentments building up, especially around receipt of benefits.

Whereas extensive use was made of subcommittees in Shepparton, in Mount Gambier all of the planning was done by the main committee. Several members admit that had they been aware of the Shepparton model they might have done things differently. Most Committee members were people at senior level within their agencies. Had subcommittees been formed, especially in key areas such as health, education and employment, more of the "coal face" workers could have been involved at an earlier stage and some of the (albeit minor) logistical issues addressed sooner. In addition, responsibility for managing these issues would not have fallen as heavily on the IHSS worker. It was also felt that establishment of an employment subcommittee would have enabled earlier consideration of employment pathways and preparation for the entrants. (see Section 4.9.8).

Recommendation #2:

That the committee responsible for planning a regional settlement initiative form thematic subcommittees in key areas including but not limited to health, education and employment, and that these subcommittees include a mix of people involved in policy and those responsible for service delivery, and that the subcommittees focus on developing implementation plans and referral pathways.

Further, while the need to prepare faith communities was identified as important by the Committee, it was not embraced by the representative body so very little was done within the sector. Fortunately this did not appear to have had any impact on the pilot. As will be explored Section 4.9.12, religion is a very important part of the entrants' lives and they have been very fortunate to have made links with an extremely supportive and respectful church.

Lesson #6:

While it can never be known in advance whether entrants want to join a faith community and how significant religion is in their lives, it is important for a representative of faith leaders to be involved in planning and for faith leaders to be briefed about the entrants in advance, including how they and their parishioners can constructively support any entrants that might wish to worship with them.

Another issue of relevance in relation to planning is its duration. As outlined in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, discussions about inward migration had been going on for the best part of a decade and it was almost three years from the Committee's first approach to the Department of Immigration to the arrival of the first entrants. While the length of the planning process period does not appear to have had a significant impact on outcomes, the uncertainty of this period was not easy for those involved. Many said variations of "had we known how long it would take, we would have put things on hold for a time". Others spoke about it being a little like the

story of the boy who cries wolf – they had spoken about humanitarian settlement for so long that it came as something of a shock when they were told it would actually happen.

When asked about what would have been an ideal lead-time, most agreed that this would be about six months, with two months notice of the approximate date of the first arrivals. This would give enough time to make necessary plans without risking dissipation of energy or commitment. This recommended schedule is very different to how things panned out in Mount Gambier where the lead time was much longer (well over two years) and the notification of the date of arrival was much shorter (one month).²²

Lesson #7:

The ideal lead-time for planning a regional settlement project is about six months, with a notification period of two months before the first arrivals.

The lengthy planning process and the strong sense of ownership by Committee members of the project also created a dynamic that needed careful management. On the one hand there were the local service providers who quite legitimately felt they know their town and had expertise in their area of work. On the other, there were the Adelaide-based service providers and administrators who were keen to share their experience in working with refugees and to set up structures for local services. Skillful chairing of the Settlement Planning Committee and the collective commitment to outcomes meant that the potential for this to become a serious issue was avoided but it points to an important lesson for other new regional settlement initiatives.

Lesson #8:

Where people from a capital city are working with those in a regional centre, it is important that all stakeholders respect the expertise of those at the table and that the focus be on developing partnerships based on mutual respect and collegiality.

After a long – and for the Committee frustrating – wait, the announcement was finally made about which group of entrants would come to Mount Gambier. Knowing that they were to be from Burma and of Karen ethnicity²³ meant that the Committee could focus its planning and service providers could begin the gear up for the arrivals.

The Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA), the agency that has the contract to provide Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services throughout South Australia, employed a caseworker who, in turn, played a crucial role in gathering and disseminating information about the background and potential needs of the new arrivals. The Department of Immigration's *Burmese Community Profile* was a valuable initial resource and this was supplemented by internet-based research about the camps in which the refugees had been living, the food rations they had been receiving, their possible health status and the likely incidence of torture and trauma. Meanwhile other service providers were also gathering as much information as possible. There was general agreement that they collectively had sufficient relevant information to meet their needs.

The IHSS caseworker was also provided with comprehensive training by MRCSA and its partner agencies. This included their service delivery framework, her role as a case manager and the requisite data recording and reporting requirements. In addition, she was linked into their staff supervision and support framework.

²² The fact that the Committee was only given one month's notice presented some challenges, in particular in relation to health care and education. This will be the subject of later discussion.

²³ As indicated in Section 4.8, information about the entrants' ethnicity was not entirely accurate.

Lesson #9:

All IHSS Caseworkers²⁴ employed for regional settlement projects must receive comprehensive training and be linked into structures that provide supervision and support. This is especially important if they are to be the sole worker in a regional centre.²⁵

The final stage of planning involved briefing front-line staff of the agencies that would be providing direct services to the entrants. The IHSS caseworker did the rounds of banks, health centres, schools, the Centrelink office etc, introducing herself and seeking their assistance. While many organisations were aware of the imminent arrival, this exercise highlighted the fact that many front-line staff had, at best, only hazy notions about what was about to happen. She identified that her role would have been made easier had a simple information package been prepared in advance.

Lesson #10:

The IHSS provider prepare in advance an information package that can be given to counter-staff and other front-line workers in key service agencies to give them some basic information about the entrants, explain how to use interpreters and ensure they know how to contact the IHSS Caseworker.

Before leaving the subject of planning, reference must be made to the fact that planning is not cost neutral. All of the agencies involved in the pilot, in particular MRCSA and TAFE, made a considerable investment of staff time and expertise to ensure things progressed as successfully as they did. There is no allowance for this in current funding structures.

Lesson #11:

If a regional settlement project is to be successful, agencies involved in its planning and implementation need to recognise that this will require allocation of resources and ensure that these are factored into budgeting and, where appropriate, grant applications.

4.6. Selection of the Entrants

The entrants are of course central to the whole regional settlement exercise and there were various lessons learnt from the Mount Gambier pilot about the process of their selection.

Firstly there is the question of who would be suitable for regional settlement. As previously mentioned, the Committee gave careful consideration to this question and determined that the first entrants should:

- be intact families;

²⁴ Training is equally important for those working in other sectors. This will be covered in later sections of the report.

²⁵ Training must also include clear guidance about boundaries. One of the greatest challenges facing anyone working in this sector is balancing the desire to do as much as possible to support vulnerable people with the need to operate according to accepted casework principles. This challenge is exacerbated for sole workers, in particular those in regional areas where the demarcation lines between professional and personal life are often blurred.

- have primary school age children;²⁶
- have someone who could take on the role of leader within the group;
- include some adults with English.

They did not know this at the time but these criteria were consistent with the Department of Immigration's own checklist for those who would be first to go into a new regional location. This lack of awareness led to some Committee members erroneously concluding that the rigidity of their criteria was a contributing factor in why the decision about which group would come to Mount Gambier took so long to make.

Then there is the issue of how a suitable caseload is identified. People unfamiliar with refugee resettlement often think that with more than 10 million refugees in the world, it must be a simple exercise to find 10 families who want to go to a country town. Several Committee members spoke of their frustration about how long it took for the Department of Immigration to tell them which group would be coming. Committee members (like many others working in the sector) had no real appreciation of the extraordinary complexities behind identifying a suitable group of refugees who:

- have no strong desire to be settled in a specific location,
- do not have complex needs that would unfairly challenge a new settlement location;
- fit the profile outlined above; and
- are ready to be resettled at the same time the town is ready to receive them.

Recommendation #3:

That DIAC National Office staff provide a comprehensive briefing to members of the regional settlement planning committee about the process of identification and selection for resettlement and the processes through which entrants go (including cultural orientation training²⁷ and health checks) prior to departure.

Given the difficulties in finding entrants who fit the selection criteria, one could ask the question: is there merit in relaxing these criteria? It would seem from the experience in Mount Gambier that the presence amongst the first arrivals of adults who spoke good English and the fact that the initial families did not present with complex needs was of great benefit to service providers. It also enabled these first families to build a secure base for later arrivals. Whether all families arriving in the first 12 months need to be equally resilient is another issue and there is possibly no clear-cut answer. Much depends on the characteristics of the entrant group and the capacity of the service providers to meet their needs. One thing that should probably be considered in this context is English ability. If there only one or two adults speak good English within an emerging group, there is a tendency for all service providers to rely on them for advice, support and interpreting. There is a very real danger that these refugees will be overburdened by this role and not have enough time and energy to focus on their own settlement.

Then comes the challenge of building a community from scratch. Something to bear in mind for the initial period at least is that the entrants will have to rely heavily on each other. One of the most remarkable things about the Mount Gambier pilot is the extent to which the refugees from Burma formed a cohesive and mutually supportive group that transcended

²⁶ This was seen as desirable for a number of reasons, not least to avoid the kind of problems they had read about in the press with "youth gangs". They also recognised that primary school age children adapt more quickly to life in Australia, are unlikely to confront the educational challenges faced by teenagers and can be easily linked into community activities through the primary school.

²⁷ The Australian Cultural Orientation program, known as AUSCO.

differences in ethnicity, language and religion. The fact that they did this was possibly more due to good luck than anything else. It should also be noted that one entrant family was not able to fit in and elected to relocate elsewhere. In this case, the key determinant was family composition - it was hard for a single mother to fit into a group in which all other family units had two parents. While no one would suggest that entrants be “matched” for compatibility as one sees in dating games, it is relevant to consider characteristics that might assist or impede mutual support and acceptance.

Lesson #12:

Wherever possible, when selecting the first cohort of families to go to a new regional settlement location, consideration should be given to selecting entrants with characteristics (family composition, ethnicity, religion, class, background) that are more likely to bind them together rather than divide the embryonic community.

4.7. The First Arrivals

The first Burmese refugees arrived in Mount Gambier on 6th June 2007. There were two families, each of which included an adult with good English (in one case the husband, in the other, the wife). As previously mentioned, these two entrants played an invaluable role in educating the service providers and explaining how they could best assist their own families and those still to come.

About two months after the first families arrived, another family came and then five families arrived at the same time, then the final two. The large group arrival presented some logistical problems but these were resolved.

When there were only two families, the entrants felt very lonely and isolated. Reflecting on this time, one of the woman said “I used to cry all the time, and then another family came and I was happier and then more families came and I was very happy”.

Lesson #13:

The importance to the first arrivals of having other entrants follow so that they can see a community building should not be underestimated.

4.8. Profile of the Entrants

During the course of the pilot, ten refugee families (50 people) from Burma came to Mount Gambier. Nine had two parents and between two and five children. As previously mentioned, the tenth family was made up of a single mother and child. This family was no longer living in Mount Gambier at the time of the evaluation.

Most of the children were very young - 8 were under 5 years of age and 23 were of school age, the eldest being 15. One child has been born since the families arrived in Australia. All of the families were able to travel with all of their biological children, though one couple has two adopted children they are hoping to be able to bring to Australia.

The adults had spent most of their adult years and, in some cases their formative years, in refugee camps. Most had had limited education (the highest level being year 10) and little work experience. They were not used to cities or even large towns.

In briefings about the pilot, everyone had spoken about the entrants as “the Karen”, implying Karen ethnicity, though reference was also made to one of the later families not being Karen.

Curiously, when the researcher met the entrants and asked them about their ethnicity, she discovered that six of the remaining nine families are Karenni, only two are Karen and both of the adults in the remaining family independently identified themselves as “Burmese”.²⁸ It is uncertain how these differing ethnicities have remained undetected, although it could be explained by the entrants being too polite to correct anyone who refers to them as “Karen” or that they do not see the issue as being sufficiently important to warrant correction.

The fact that the entrants come from different ethnic groups created a dilemma for the researcher as to they should be referred to. Clearly, calling them “the Karen” is inappropriate, as most are not. Calling people from ethnic minorities in Burma “Burmese” may be insensitive as many feel this term associates them with their persecutors. For this reason, the term “the entrants” was chosen, with occasional usage of “refugees from Burma”.

The revelation about ethnicity also prompted a follow-up question about language. It was established that:

- five of the Karenni families speak Karen as well as Karenni as they had lived in Karen State and in camps with Karen refugees;
- one of the Karenni families does not speak Karen, only Karenni and Burmese;
- the two Karen families speak both Karen and Burmese;
- the “Burmese” family speaks Burmese.

When asked how they communicate amongst themselves, they answered something akin to “in Karen and Burmese of course”, as if it was perfectly normal to have two languages being used side by side.

Not only are there variations in ethnicity and language, the entrants also practice different faiths. Six families are Baptist, two are Buddhist and one is Seventh Day Adventist.

With three ethnicities, two languages and three religions it would be understandable if the entrants fragmented into subgroups. Interestingly, the opposite has been the case. As previously mentioned, the nine families have formed into a tight-knit and mutually supportive group. Any concerns the Caseworker had when it was discovered that one of the last two families to arrive was not “Karen” were soon allayed. The other entrants did not seem in the least bit troubled by their different background and the family in question had no desire to be relocated. They see the fact that they are all refugees as being far more important than anything else.

4.9. Implementation

4.9.1. Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)

As outlined in Section 4.3, the confirmation of a start date allowed the agency responsible for provision of IHSS services in South Australia to recruit a Caseworker. The Committee was insistent that a local worker be employed as providing outreach from Adelaide would have placed considerable pressure on the town’s agencies.

Finding a suitable local person could have presented a significant challenge as the likelihood of finding someone with expertise in refugee settlement in the town was remote. What they did find was a person with 15 years professional experience in Mount Gambier who had worked as a social worker and counselor in the youth and aged care sectors and who had

²⁸

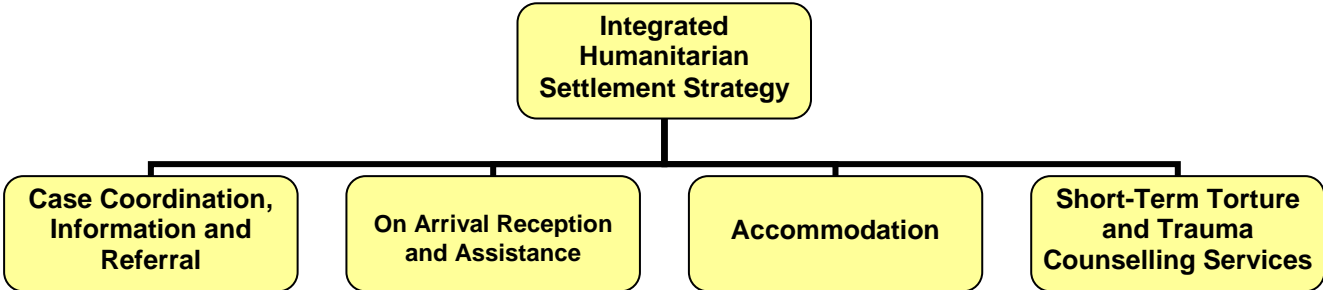
When asked whether they were Burman, they said “no” and said there was no other way they would like to define themselves.

worked in the area of domestic violence. While she had not worked with refugees, she had worked with migrants and was a migrant herself, coming from a country that has had more than its share of troubles. She also had excellent contacts within Mount Gambier in all the right places. Everyone was in agreement that MRCSA made an excellent choice and the fact that the Caseworker was a local was seen as a huge bonus.

Lesson #14:

Wherever possible, the IHSS provider should employ a local person as a caseworker. In the absence of anyone experienced in working with refugees, they should seek to identify someone with relevant skills and knowledge in other areas who can then be trained about settlement. This is seen as a far preferable option to “importing” a worker, no matter how skilled in refugee settlement, from a capital city.

To a large extent, delivery of IHSS services is prescribed by the Department of Immigration. Under the contract, certain services are required to be provided:



During the course of the evaluation, no concerns were raised about service delivery within this framework or standards of service delivery. In fact, there seemed to be general consensus that, because of the hard work and professionalism of the IHSS Caseworker, the provision of IHSS services had gone very smoothly.

The Caseworker has adopted a highly consultative model of service delivery and has involved the clients as much as possible. She has worked with each family to develop a settlement plan and regularly meets with them to check on progress. She also meets with groups of entrants to enable them to talk about how things are going and to suggest things they might need or want. The group meetings have resulted in a number of information sessions being organised in areas such as:

- how to use appliances,
- budgeting,
- rights and responsibilities of tenants,
- health (including sexual health),
- bike and road safety,
- purchasing a car,
- insurance, and
- consumer rights.

As will be discussed in Section 4.9.11, these meetings have also led to a number of activities and recreational programs being established. In addition, there have been numerous outings and practical demonstrations.

Of the nine families still in Mount Gambier, only one is still receiving IHSS services. The others have exited IHSS but are still being assisted by the same Caseworker as she is also the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) worker. From the entrants' perspective, this is an ideal outcome as they have developed a very close bond with her and trust her implicitly.

4.9.2. Accommodation

Unlike all capital cities and many regional centres, securing affordable accommodation is not a problem in Mount Gambier. The starting price to rent a three-bedroom house is \$150 per week and there is sufficient stock to provide choice.

Anglicare is the agency responsible for sourcing accommodation under the IHSS contract. It is their usual practice to take out the initial lease on a property and then sublease it to the entrants. This is seen as a practical way of getting around the entrants' lack of rental history and the entrants can either take over the lease after 6 months or choose their own accommodation.

This model was only used for the first few families in Mount Gambier. As would be expected in "a small town", real estate agents soon realised that the entrants were diligent tenants who looked after the properties well. The IHSS Caseworker also did some important groundwork with the agents to let them know about the pilot and the entrants. She is now able to deal directly with local agents.

A conscious decision was made to try to locate all the entrants in the northern part of town for a number of reasons:

- it is close to the school attended by the children;
- it is close to the TAFE college where the adults attend English classes;
- it has affordable accommodation;
- it does not have the same social problems as other parts of town where there is a high concentration of public housing.

Coincidentally, the church the entrants have elected to attend is also in this part of town.

While it was seen as important that they lived in one area, it was also decided to try as much as possible to space the entrants out rather than having two or more families living in one street or in close proximity. It was felt that this would be much less threatening for local residents and would also help promote relationships between the entrants and their neighbours. On the other hand, they did not want the entrants to be too far away from each other. The rule of thumb thus became "within walking distance of each other".

None of the entrants have gone into Housing Trust properties but several families are keen to put their names on the list. It appears that the principal motivation for this is the fact that some entrants have had to move because the property in which they were living was either sold or reclaimed for use by the owner. They see public housing as an affordable way of avoiding the insecurities of the private rental market. The IHSS Caseworker will assist them to make the applications for Housing Trust properties and provide guidance about areas with a high incidence of social problems that should best be avoided.

Only one entrant family has moved because they wanted different accommodation. This was one of the first families to arrive and they were initially located in an apartment. They indicated that they would prefer a house with a garden (for their children to play in and so they could grow vegetables) and were supported to find a suitable property. Those who were obliged by circumstances to move were also assisted to do so and all indicated that they were grateful for this support as they would have found it very daunting on their own.

By and large the entrants have been well accepted by their neighbours and in some cases they have been warmly welcomed. A couple of entrants reported minor tensions with neighbours but they themselves acknowledged this was probably underpinned by their lack of English and their lack of understanding about how things are done in Australia. No serious problems were reported.

4.9.3. Adapting to their New Homes

The female entrants in particular recalled with great mirth the challenges they faced when they first arrived. Not only had many of the entrants never used most of the appliances they found waiting for them in their new homes, they had never envisaged that such things existed. Ovens and washing machines were identified as real mysteries and some of the women giggled that they are still a bit afraid of them.

They also found their new beds a bit daunting. They were used to sleeping on mats on the floors and the western beds were “far too soft”. Many elected to sleep on the floor when they first arrived. Little by little they adapted to the soft mattresses and have now, according to them, “become as soft as the mattresses”, enjoying the comfort they afford. They are not yet as convinced about superiority of western toilets.

The entrants were very keen to learn about their new homes and were determined to look after them properly. Much to the surprise of their caseworker, one of the best received information sessions she has organised was one that focused on how to clean windows. The entrants were also very conscious that there are many potential dangers for their children in their homes and were grateful for the support and advice they received from their Caseworker and the volunteers who helped them settle in.

Lesson #15:

It is important to ensure that entrants are given well-structured and comprehensive support to help them to adjust to living in a western home. This support should focus on safety and building confidence and respond to articulated needs.

4.9.4. Health Care

There is a general awareness in Mount Gambier that health services in the town are stretched. Many General Practitioners (GPs) have “closed their books”²⁹ and the hospital has had to engage in an active recruitment exercise and source staff from overseas.

Recognising this, the Committee decided that the best approach would be to work with a local health centre. This way, entrants have a choice of doctors who operate within a single system that had been primed for their arrival.

The health centre selected is a large multidisciplinary centre in the middle of town that was very happy to support the pilot and, significantly, was prepared to bulk-bill. This being said, they found the pilot challenging. Despite it being a large practice, there is currently a 7-10 day wait for an appointment and the lead-time for longer appointments (required by families) is 4-6 weeks. As there is an expectation that entrants be seen within the first week of arrival, the lead-time for notification of arrivals is critical. As it was, when the first families came to Mount Gambier, doctors from the practice came in when off duty to ensure that they were seen in a timely fashion. While they were very happy to do this “in the spirit of being a part of the pilot”, it is clearly neither an ideal nor sustainable arrangement.

²⁹

In other words, they are not accepting new patients.

Lesson #16:

It is important that as much notification as possible is given about arrival dates to enable key services such as health providers to make necessary arrangements.

While there had been discussion of health issues by the Settlement Planning Committee, the actual means of delivery was not decided until they were notified of the arrivals. This meant that neither the Centre Manager nor the medical staff were involved in early discussions about the rationale behind the pilot or the medical needs of humanitarian entrants. Once they had confirmed their involvement, they did as much as they could to prepare for the arrivals, working as a team to develop a standardised approach to initial health assessment based on guidelines provided, supplemented with numerous phone calls to services in Adelaide. They also received information from the IHSS Caseworker that contained specific information about the experiences of the Burmese refugees, including some basic details of their possible health and counselling needs. With the benefit of hindsight, the Centre Manager would have liked longer to prepare and more support in doing this, noting that everyone at the clinic was being taken into unfamiliar territory.

As previously mentioned, health was one of the areas where Committee members acknowledge that a subcommittee would have been useful to bring together people from within health authorities and front line workers. This would have enabled them to take planning from the theoretical to the practical level and enabled workers at all levels to be briefed in a timely fashion about their respective roles.

Lesson #17:

When planning to meet the health needs of new arrivals, it is desirable to set up a subcommittee comprised of front-line health providers who, in addition to developing implementation plans, undertaking risk analyses and establishing referral pathways, can ensure that all relevant health practitioners receive information and training about:

- refugees,
- refugee health, and
- working in a cross cultural context.

Lesson #18:

Health practitioners in regional areas should be assisted to establish links with refugee health specialists in capital cities.

The use (or not) of interpreters by GPs remains a thorny issue around the country. Many GPs still consider interpreters an unnecessary intrusion and a waste of valuable time. Fortunately, the health centre in Mount Gambier has taken on the notion that interpreters should be used but the Centre Manager commented that there have been several occasions when they have booked interpreters that were ultimately not needed because the patient came with a friend or family member, adding "he felt guilty because it was a waste of resources". It would thus seem that while the first part of the message has been absorbed, the second part – why trained interpreters should be used - has not.

Lesson #19:

It remains necessary for Divisions of GPs, medical indemnity insurers, medical faculties and all relevant bodies to impress upon all health workers the reasons why friends and family members should not be used in medical interpreting.

Discussion about the interpreter issue also revealed that there was some initial confusion at the medical centre about which families spoke which languages, resulting in some inappropriate interpreter bookings being made.

This problem is far from being unique to Mount Gambier. To try to address this, in May 2008 the Department of Immigration made available cards for clients to show to service providers to assist in accessing interpreting services. On the front, the cards say "I need an interpreter. I speak _____" and on the back there is an explanation about the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)³⁰ and the number to phone.

Lesson #20:

IHSS providers should distribute DIAC's language cards and encourage entrants to present them when they need language support.

Immunization is another area that comes up regularly in discussions about refugee health. The Immunization Nurse at the clinic reported that while some of the entrants came with health records, several did not. This meant that to follow protocol, some of the children had to be given the full set of vaccinations in a relatively short space of time which troubled her as she suspected that they had probably already been immunized.

Lesson #21:

Medical records, including immunization history, are very important for health providers. It is important that DIAC work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to ensure that wherever possible, these records are available and can be sent with the entrants.

Thus far, there has been a heavy reliance on the IHSS Caseworker to act as a point of liaison and facilitate medical appointments. In regional and urban areas in some other states, much of this work is done by a Refugee Health Nurse³¹ who also performs an important health education and brokerage role that involves, *inter alia*:

- identifying suitable GP practices and convincing them to take on refugee patients;
- convincing practice managers to allocate sufficient time for appointments and referring them to the special Medicare billing code;
- briefing GPs and practice nurses about the entrants, refugee health screening protocols, how to work with interpreters etc;
- ensuring that surgeries are registered with the interpreter service;
- alerting and informing health professionals about conditions for which they should be vigilant;
- sensitising health professionals about working with victims of sexual violence;
- gaining the trust of entrants to learn about their background and health status;
- ensuring all entrants receive comprehensive health assessments;
- ensuring children are fully immunized;
- ensuring any medical problems are dealt within a timely manner;

³⁰ A priority translation service is also available to General Practitioners.

³¹ A recently released research report (*'I don't think general practice should be the front line': experiences of general practitioners working with refugees in South Australia*. Australia and New Zealand Health Policy August 2008) highlights the need for specialist assistance and makes favourable reference to the Refugee Health Nurse program in Victoria.

- supporting health professionals so they do not feel they need to cope alone;
- ensuring entrants understand and follow the instructions given to them by GPs;
- ensuring medicines are obtained and properly stored;
- providing advice to entrants about diet, exercise and other strategies to promote good health.

Recommendation #4:

Noting the strategic and invaluable role played by Refugee Health Nurses in other states, that DIAC enter into discussions with Country Health SA about funding such a position in Mount Gambier to support current and future entrants and about ensuring that the position is built into the implementation of any future regional settlement projects.

Some of the entrants have required treatment at the local hospital. The hospital employs significant numbers of overseas-trained doctors and other medical staff so cross-cultural awareness has not been seen as an issue.

The entrants were specifically asked about the health care they received. Both the men and the women were clear that they were happy with this and said they did not want to qualify this in any way. Their Caseworker confirms that there have been no significant health issues.

It was also reported that the entrants are seen as “very gracious patients” who do not push, demand or complain. It was also noted that they do not show pain – even the children are very stoic when they are receiving injections. This has led to them being regarded as “very brave” and the health professionals have been happy to work with them.

Fortunately for all concerned, there have been no medical emergencies to date. The one “challenge” – the arrival of an entrant with a health undertaking – was dealt with by collaboration and cooperation, with arrangements being made for this entrant to be screened in Adelaide. At the same time, steps were taken to have local radiographers registered to undertake the screening so that there is now the capacity to do this locally.

4.9.5. Torture and Trauma Counselling

Psychologists are even scarcer in Mount Gambier than other health professionals; in fact until recently there wasn't one, so external support had to be sourced.

The clinical psychologist on the staff of MRCSA came to Mount Gambier to undertake the initial assessments and develop a support plan. The level of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) amongst the entrants was assessed as being low and so local support options have been pursued. The IHSS Caseworker has provided some counselling, under the supervision of the clinical psychologist, and links to local mental health providers have been established. If it was ever determined that the entrants had needs for greater assistance, they would be referred to STARRS.³²

Mindful of the importance of building local capacity, MRCSA and STARRS, in conjunction with the Migrant Settlement Committee, were in the process of organising a full-day training seminar at the time the evaluation took place. The title of this seminar, “Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of New Settlers in the Limestone Coast”, points to its dual focus on physical and mental health.

³² STARRS (Supporting Survivors of Torture and Trauma) is the Adelaide-based specialist torture and trauma counselling service.

It is hoped that, in addition to building local capacity, this seminar will strengthen the already good relationships that have been established between MRCSA, the rural mental health system, the Mount Gambier Hospital and the specialist torture and trauma and mental health providers in Adelaide.

4.9.6. Income Support

Like all newly arrived refugees, the entrants were entitled to Centrelink benefits from the date of arrival.

The local Centrelink office had been aware of the possibility that refugees would come to Mount Gambier for quite some time before it happened because of discussion in the local networks. They were formally advised of the impending arrival by Centrelink's Multicultural Services Unit in Adelaide, which also sent staff to Mount Gambier to:

- provide background information about working with refugees;
- explain their entitlements;
- conduct the interviews of the first entrant families (observed by local staff).

Centrelink staff members have developed a close working relationship with the IHSS Caseworker and contact her if any issues arise. Fortunately, Centrelink staff report there have been very few issues but that they have learnt a number of lessons along the way. With the benefit of hindsight, they identified they would have liked:

- more information about the entrants, specifically about their level of schooling, previous professions and language ability etc, so that they could better understand these clients' needs;
- the opportunity to conduct their first client interviews under supervision. As helpful as it was seeing someone else do this, they would have also liked feedback on their own performance;
- more guidance about booking and working with interpreters, something that was new to most staff members;
- all staff, not just those working with the entrants, participating in cultural briefing sessions;
- a central point of contact. The Centrelink manager had not been a member of the Settlement Planning Committee³³ and was thus not as familiar with the overall settlement model as Committee members were. This meant some confusion about "who was in charge" – whether it was the Chair of the Committee or the IHSS Caseworker. It would appear, however, that no problems flowed from this confusion.

Another thing they have learnt along the way is that entrants do not always recognise the significance of correspondence sent to them. When meeting with the researcher they pondered whether it would be useful to have a client's nominee to whom copies of correspondence could also be sent. The issue of understanding what was in letters was raised with the entrants who conceded that they find official letters rather daunting. Centrelink's suggestion was canvassed and they indicated they would have no qualms about their Caseworker receiving letters too so she could make sure they responded appropriately.

³³ Centrelink's Manager was, however, invited to a few of the Committee meetings to discuss the logistics of Centrelink support for the entrants.

Lesson #22:

Service delivery agencies should be given sufficient time and support to enable them to ensure that key staff are trained and brief all staff about working with the new client group.

4.9.7. English

It is possibly in the area of language acquisition that the entrants were most disadvantaged by their regional settlement. This is by no means a criticism of those supporting them but rather a consequence of the way the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is structured, in particular the number of students required to form a class.

The pilot brought 19 adults into Mount Gambier of whom 18 remained at the time of the evaluation. They varied in educational attainment (from minimal formal schooling to year 10) and English level (most with little or none, some with very basic English and a couple with good English).

Unlike other regional settlement pilot locations, Mount Gambier does not have a significant number of other migrants or humanitarian entrants enrolled in AMEP classes. TAFE, the AMEP provider, had to set up classes specifically for the Burmese. Staffing to student ratios meant that they could only offer English instruction at two levels, and these were the lower levels that suited the majority of the entrants. They also did not have the capacity to offer bi-lingual support (as is done by a number of the larger providers) for students with minimal English.

The student numbers issue was also complicated by the fact that the entrants did not come as a single group but, to quote one of their teachers, “trickled in during the year” with the timing of their arrival and the lack of notice often presenting a problem for the institution.

Recommendation #5:

That in the context of the current AMEP Review, consideration be given to ways of ensuring that the first cohort of entrants in a regional settlement pilot are not disadvantaged by AMEP funding formulae.

While the TAFE teacher who participated in the evaluation was clearly happy to have had the chance to work with the entrants, she acknowledged that she was learning as she went. She did receive professional development support but with the benefit of hindsight, would liked to have also been linked to AMEP teachers working with Burmese refugees elsewhere. She indicated her concern that she had no way of knowing how effective their teaching was and whether they were “reinventing the wheel” because they had nothing to which they could compare their program.

Lesson #23:

It is important for AMEP teachers in regional areas to establish links to their counterparts elsewhere who are working with the same entrant group(s) so that they can share information about strategies and outcomes.

The entrants with better English feel they have not been extended as much as they would have liked and make the comparison between their progress and that of friends who have

been settled in Melbourne. The benchmark they use for this is the level of their CSWE³⁴ attainment, with one of the entrants saying he had been awarded Certificate 1 and his friend in Melbourne had a Certificate 3. The man saying this not only did so in fluent English but he also proved to be a very efficient interpreter during the researcher's meeting with the male entrants, something one would expect from someone with Certificate 3 or above. It is therefore hard to know whether this man's English has been held back by the lack of opportunities for extension classes or possibly his English has progressed well but TAFE is not able to assess at higher levels because of their limited resources.

This being said, many of the entrants are clearly still struggling with English and there are a number of possible reasons for this, including:

- the close-knit nature of the entrant group. They socialise together and operate very much as a unit. When together they will speak Karen, Karenni and Burmese, with little scope for the insertion of a fourth language;
- the presence within the group of one man and one woman (from different families) who have far superior English to the others and who are relied upon for most interactions with the English speaking world. For example, when one of the women needed medical attention, her family called the woman who spoke English who then called the ambulance;
- the low educational levels of many of the entrants and to some extent, their very limited experiential background. Both have an impact on their ability to learn a new language;
- the entrants' diffident natures. They are shy and reluctant to take risks and this extends to a reticence about speaking English if it can be avoided. When the women were asked about how they manage when shopping they said "we just look, look, look, then see price, then go to counter" rather than asking for help.

However, it is important to note that this is not a scenario where the entrants think it is acceptable not to learn English and simply to interact within their own community. They clearly understand the importance of learning English and very much want to do so. Driven by this desire, they approached their caseworker and asked whether it would be possible to get some additional help, especially with conversation.³⁵

Classes were set up by the MRC using volunteer teachers. They focus on spoken English and include a strong focus on Australian cultural norms and role-plays. It would seem these classes are very popular. The caseworker reports "lots of laughter coming from the room" and entrants speak about the classes "not being like school – it doesn't matter if you get it wrong".

While the conversation classes were only ever intended to supplement the AMEP, it would appear there was some tension between the MRC and TAFE at the time they were introduced. Some suggest that this might have resulted from lack of clarity about exactly

³⁴ CSWE is the widely used acronym for the competency based national curriculum and assessment framework used by, *inter alia*, AMEP providers and in its expanded form is "Certificate of Spoken and Written English".

³⁵ It is relevant to note that this request points to an acknowledged problem with the current AMEP syllabus, particularly that for lower levels. The focus is on both spoken AND written English. For people with minimal education, even more so when that education was in another script (as it was for the Burmese), written English can be a significant challenge. Many people have argued in the context of the current AMEP review that there should be a far greater focus on practical spoken English for students with minimal education and limited English.

what the AMEP provides. As tends to happen in Mount Gambier, cool heads and a commitment to cooperation seemed to have smoothed this out but it possibly points to a more generic lesson:

Lesson #24:

All service providers should be given the opportunity to brief others in the sector about their work to ensure there is clarity around roles, to avoid duplication and to facilitate appropriate referrals.

Lesson #25:

When people are doing things for the first time, they can be very sensitive about any suggestion that they might not be doing as good a job as they had hoped to do so good communication and mutual trust are critical.

4.9.8. Employment

Curiously, given the focus within the region on inward migration for employment, the one area many on the Committee feel did not receive as much attention as it should have is employment. Possibly this was because they were not fully appreciative of the fact that refugees, especially those who have spent long periods in camps, need targeted support to educate them about and prepare them for the Australian workplace environment and it is not simply a case of being able to slot them straight into available jobs.

At the time of the evaluation, none of the entrants was working. All of the men and some of the women³⁶ expressed a strong desire to work but articulated clearly their view that they were not yet ready to do this. They recognise that they must concentrate on improving their English and accept that this takes time. This being said, the entrants are looking forward to the time when they can work but say they are not entirely clear about how to progress towards employment.

This is consistent with the Committee's realisation that they had not given as much attention as they should to thinking about pathways to employment and ensuring that trained workers were available to work with each of the entrants to explore suitable options for them and develop an employment plan. With the benefit of hindsight it was felt that had there been an employment subcommittee, some of this thinking would have occurred earlier.

Lesson #26:

Recognising the obstacles most refugees face preparing for entry to the workforce, it is extremely valuable to have an employment subcommittee, made up of people with relevant experience, which can focus specifically on organising training, securing support and removing barriers.

The IHSS worker recently began exploring "Work for the Dole" options to try to find opportunities for the men to get work experience while still studying English.³⁷ Initially she encountered obstacles in relation to this, with Centrelink policy stipulating that it was not permissible to do Work for the Dole while attending AMEP classes.³⁸ Centrelink staff members were supportive in this regard, establishing that there was a process for seeking

³⁶ Some of the women had infants and/or very young children.

³⁷ This was seen as preferable to seeking seasonal work in agriculture which has far fewer opportunities for training and support and which, because of its itinerant nature, does not have the same potential to lead to full-time employment.

³⁸ It is hoped that this structural obstacle will be addressed by the current AMEP review.

exemptions and ensuring these were obtained. This is yet another example of the cooperative approach adopted by service providers in Mount Gambier.

With the obstacles overcome, plans had been put in place to give all of the men and two of the women work experience. The men were to be placed in supervised positions with the local Council (in horticulture, gardening and construction) and it had been arranged that the women would train as bilingual support workers at the primary school.

Because of their natural diffidence and their strong desire to “do the right thing”, it will be very important for the entrants to be actively supported and encouraged during their placements. They need to be given careful instruction and achievable activities to build their confidence.

The male entrant with the best English and highest level of education (year 10) appears to stand out from the rest in that he has a clear picture of what he wants to do. He had been a medic in Thailand and his goal is to work in a similar area in Australia. Commendably, he recognises that there is a huge difference between the type of work he was trained to do the camps and the duties of nurses in Australia. “They use so many machines” he observed. While not ruling out training to be a nurse someday, he has identified a much more achievable objective for the short term – that of training to be an aged care worker, an area where there staff are much in demand - once he completes his AMEP course.

This conversation, and the discussions with the men about the importance of improving their English before they embark on full time employment, point to some unusual characteristics amongst this group of refugees. Because of the massive disruption to their lives prior to arrival, often including many years in limbo, many refugees want to reclaim their lives as quickly as possible when they arrive. For most, this means entering the workforce. This ambition is often thwarted, however, by a lack of language skills and workplace experience and by employers’ reluctance to recognise their qualifications or previous employment skills. Realising that they will not be able to get back to where they were as easily as they hoped can become a heavy burden for many entrants, especially heads of household who are driven by the obligation to provide not only for their family here but also support family members overseas.

If the Burmese entrants share these compelling drives, it was not obvious to the researcher. From all accounts it would seem they have taken a more pragmatic view of their settlement process, recognising that it will take time and that there are steps that should be followed along the way. Whether this can be attributed to their lower educational attainment (and hence lower expectations), or cultural reasons or merely a function of group dynamics can only be surmised. The possible outcome for the entrants, however, is that while it might take them a little longer to become independently functioning members of the community, the journey will probably be a lot less traumatic.

They are also very fortunate to have been settled in a growth region where work is readily attainable. There is common agreement that there are good opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. This does not mean to say that the entrants, even after work experience, will necessarily be able to secure employment without assistance.

The grant funding the MRC has recently received from the Department of Immigration under the Sustainable Regional Settlement Program (see Section 4.10.2) specifically targets this issue and comes at an excellent time to support the entrants make the transition to the workplace.

Recommendation #6:

Noting that planning is underway to support the entrants to make a smooth transition to the workforce, that those involved ensure the planning includes activities that will:

- *ensure the entrants receive specialist advice about possible areas of employment;*
- *facilitate their entry into necessary training courses or apprenticeships;*
- *ensure the entrants also receive training about the Australian workplace environment, including Occupational Health and Safety standards, workplace behaviour and worker's protection;*
- *educate local employers about humanitarian entrants and encouraging them to consider providing work opportunities;*
- *consider the merit of organising mentors or workplace supporters for the entrants so that they can get practical and emotional support while they are seeking work and when they enter the workplace.*

4.9.9. Education

While the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) had been involved in the Settlement Planning Committee, it was only when it was confirmed that the refugees would be coming and some indication about family composition provided that steps were taken to identify a suitable school for the children. As none of the local schools had existing expertise in teaching new arrivals, they sought to identify a single school (rather than sending the children to different schools) as it would be easier to build expertise in one school rather than many.

Mount Gambier North Primary School was the preferred site because they had:

- undertaken structured work around literacy;
- a history of welcoming disadvantaged children (those affected by poverty or disability);
- the capacity to accommodate new students.

When the school was first approached by the DECS, the Principal declined. She felt her school was "already complicated enough" and recognised that they had no experience working with children from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds. DECS asked again a week, at which stage she accepted the invitation, and reflects now that she is very glad she changed her mind.³⁹

The Principal recognises that the start-up phase was far from ideal. They had no trained English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, no resources and very little time to plan. What they did have was a "can-do ethos" and staff who were keen to learn and willing to be flexible. They also had an ancillary staff member who developed a real rapport with the Burmese children and who was able to help out in a multitude of ways.

In addition, while not designating the school a New Arrivals School, DECS did provide resources that enabled two teachers to be allocated to work with the new arrivals in a team teaching capacity. These teachers are also supported by the school's music, physical education, art and library teachers who provide specialist instruction in these areas.

³⁹

The Principal was asked about how the other schools in Mount Gambier had responded to her school being approached - and possibly to the fact that her enrollment numbers (so crucial when it comes to funding) have been boosted. She indicated that she had not had any negative comments from her colleagues who if anything, have shown little interest.

The classroom teachers chosen to work with the new entrants were those with specific expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy. They have been provided with specialist ESL training and support and new resources were obtained.

On the subject of resources, the teachers discovered early on that many of the books and aids they use for Australian born children were not suitable for the Burmese children because these children do not interpret visual images in the same way. They had not had the same range of experiences and thus found cartoons and drawings quite confusing. The Burmese children needed to see photographs and even then, it was best when these could be linked to an actual object in the environment. In many instances, the teachers actually made their own resources, including a dictionary, by taking photos of familiar places and things and then adding text.

Early on those at the school received great assistance from the female entrant who speaks very good English. She spent time at the school learning about the system in Australia and then provided advice about the best way to explain this to the other entrants. These insights were seen as invaluable by the school and they also greatly appreciated the sense of being able to learn from each other.

When they first arrived, the children received intensive instruction in the new arrivals class. Once they acquired some confidence in English, they were linked to a class of their age peers where they would spend some time each week. This was part of a gradual transitioning process that aimed to have them “mainstreamed” 12-18 months after arrival (as is consistent with South Australian state government policy). The 15 year old and the five others due to start high school with their age peers in 2009 have also been progressively linked into the high school through participation in sport and through being linked to older “mentors” who will support them when they actually move up to the new school. They have also received specific language instruction aimed at giving them the vocabulary they will need for the subjects they will take in high school.⁴⁰

The length of time spent in the new arrivals class was raised as a matter of concern by some of the parents. In doing so they made comparisons with what they saw happening to the children of their friends in Melbourne. Their perception was that these children learnt English faster because they were in regular classes after 6 months. Ironically, the difference has nothing to do with skill levels but reflects differences in state policy. In South Australia, federal funding is matched by state funding thereby doubling the amount of specialist support provided. This is part of the state government’s aforementioned commitment to assisting migrants and refugees to settle in South Australia.

Lesson #27:

It is very easy for misunderstandings and misinformation to affect the way entrants view services. It is important that service providers establish good communication with the entrants and their Caseworker so that they can identify any points of confusion and address these as soon as possible.

The Principal believes that the children have progressed very well, while acknowledging that it is difficult to judge this, having no previous experience with refugee students,. The children are making huge leaps in literacy and numeracy and are mixing well with the other children in the school. The Burmese children have also been very supportive of an Indian girl who has joined their new arrivals class.

⁴⁰

It is relevant to note that the Principal of the High School to which the Burmese students will go has been very supportive and has greatly assisted the primary school design and implement their transitioning program.

The fact that the parents were a little confused about one aspect of their children's education should not be interpreted as meaning that they have been sidelined by the school. In fact it would appear that quite the opposite situation has been the case. From the outset, parents were encouraged to come to the school. In addition to the usual orientation program, they have been invited to use the school as a meeting place (out of recognition that they do not have a hall or other communal facility) and the computer laboratory has been opened on Wednesday evenings for their use. Apparently about 8-10 entrants come along each week to use the computers. A volunteer is on hand to answer any questions and provide assistance but the entrants are free to use the computers as they choose.

In addition, the school has plans to engage and train two of the mothers as Community Liaison Officers once the Work for the Dole arrangements are sorted out. It is felt this will be of great benefit to the women, the children and the school.

As previously mentioned, the Principal is very glad she changed her mind so that her school was able to host the students and feels it has benefited the school in many ways including:

- the other children are able to understand and appreciate diversity;
- it has helped the teachers to promote a "giving culture" within the school as there are now "people who need help";
- the entrants are so "joyous" to have around. They laugh a lot and their enthusiasm is infectious;
- the staff take great pride in the way that they were able to rise to the challenge.

She attributes this success to:

- the willingness of staff to be flexible and to take on new challenges;
- the support the school and the families have received from the IHSS caseworker;
- the fact that sufficient children arrived in the first instance to enable the school to attract the funding necessary to set up a new arrivals class.

This last point is very significant. Funding in education is provided on a per capita basis. In South Australia, the policy is that each new arrival child attracts funding for 0.1 of a full-time-equivalent position for 12 months. In other words, a school needs 10 new arrival children each year to keep a teacher. If there is an expectation that there will be at least 25-30 new arrivals each year, a school can establish a New Arrivals Program (NAP) for which additional funding is available.

During the 12 months of the pilot, 23 new arrival children enrolled at Mount Gambier North Primary. This is how they were able to employ the two teachers who worked with the entrants. The school was not, however, considered suitable for a New Arrivals Program because there is as yet no guarantee of continuity of arrivals. Further, the school's current funding only lasts until the end of the 2008 school year. Unless there is a clear indication that more entrants will be arriving, the two teachers they have now will have to be reassigned.

Understandably the Principal is very concerned about what will happen next. She very much wants to see new entrants coming into the town, not only for the sake of the existing entrants but also so that her school does not lose the skills and knowledge it has acquired in the last year. There are two things she would like to see happen:

- an expeditious and favourable decision about the future of Mount Gambier as a regional settlement location so that there is not an undue delay between the end of the pilot and the arrival of more entrants;

- DECS to adopt more flexible policies for funding support to new arrivals in regional schools. Particular reference was made to the fact that it is almost impossible for an emerging settlement location to be able to do forward projections about enrolment numbers.

4.9.10. Transport

Like many country towns, Mount Gambier is not well served by public transport. There are a few bus routes that converge on the town centre but buses run at most once per hour and with very limited services at night and during weekends. Despite actively looking out for one, the researcher did not see a single bus in the week she spent in Mount Gambier and would not have known they existed had it not been for posts bearing a “bus stop” sign.

It was thus not surprising that entrants reported that if they wanted to go anywhere they walked, rode their bikes or asked someone to drive them. Fortunately Mount Gambier is of a size that if the weather is clement and you have time, you can get around on foot or on a bike. Interestingly, when the issue of public transport was canvassed more, it seemed that the reason why they were not using it had less to do with its infrequency and more to do with saving the 90 cents it would cost them for a ticket.

This being said, the entrants are now at the point when they want to get a car. As with everything they do, they are doing this cautiously and collectively. Some of the men are preparing to get drivers’ licenses and the group is organising a traditional revolving loans scheme to enable one of the entrants to purchase a car.

It was also reported that the school has recently received funding to purchase a bus and that the MRC would be able to use this. This was seen as a very exciting and welcome development.

4.9.11. Recreation and Other Activities

The IHSS caseworker has worked closely with the entrants to identify activities of interest to them and which would bring them in contact with members of the local community. There have been quite a number of these in the last 12 months. Examples include:

- i. **The Community Garden:** the entrants indicated a desire to grow vegetables familiar to them and which were not readily available in the local stores. In addition to being helped to obtain seeds that they could plant in their own backyards, they were encouraged to become involved in the town’s community garden. Here they have more space and can work side by side with local residents. This has become a very popular activity.
- ii. **Men’s Shed:** Mount Gambier has a Men’s Shed where local men come together to “make things”. Despite being willing participants, they are a bit bemused by the fact that they are being shown how to carve limestone.⁴¹ They cannot see any practical application for this and indicated they would really like to learn some basic carpentry skills which they perceive to be much more useful for being able to make things for their home.
- iii. **Clothing Distribution:** the MRC received many donations of clothing for the entrants. After discussion with them about how these should be managed, the entrants set up a clothing committee and the women are now in charge of sorting through and allocating the clothing. They are very excited about doing this as it gives

⁴¹ One of the people supporting this project is a well-known sculptor.

them control and choice. It also reduces the paternalism often associated with donations.

- iv. **Soccer:** the men are keen soccer players and thus were linked into a local club where they not only play but interact socially with locals (albeit still at a limited level because of their shyness speaking English).
- v. **Homework Support:** the parents were concerned that they were not able to help their children with their homework as much as they would have liked so the MRC identified volunteers willing to help.
- vi. **School Holiday Programs:** recognising that school holidays, especially the long summer vacation, can be a strain on families who are not familiar with the range of affordable activities available for children, the MRC and the school worked together to organise a range of activities. These included excursions to the beach (linked with water safety instruction), computer classes, movies and ten-pin bowling. In addition to being fun, the activities aimed to extend the children's experiences and give them practice in English so their language skills did not regress during the holidays.
- vii. **Excursions:** in response to expressions of interest by the entrants at their regular meetings, the MRC organises excursions for the adults so they can learn more about shops and other local facilities.

Lesson #28:

The Caseworker's willingness to take cues from entrants about what activities they wanted to do proved very successful and has enabled entrants to practice English and interact with members of the local community.

All of these programs are run by volunteers and their success is underpinned by the establishment of a structured volunteer program (see Section 4.9.14).

4.9.12. Links to Faith Communities

It was very clear from discussions that religion is very important to the entrants and that worship forms an integral part of their lives.

As previously mentioned, six families are Baptist, two are Buddhist and the other is Seventh Day Adventist. The Christians had all joined the congregations of local churches but noted that their lack of English meant that they were not able to understand the service as much as they would like. They were still very keen to attend, however, and said that being able to go to church is very important.

In addition to attending formal worship, all the families gather together each Sunday afternoon to worship in their own language(s) and then share a meal. Despite the Baptist Church having offered their hall for this, the entrants have indicated that while their numbers are at the level they are now, they prefer to rotate amongst the homes.

The families who identified as being Buddhist participate in this worship. They said that they felt it would be nice if there was a Buddhist Temple in Mount Gambier but they did not feel they were really missing out on being able to worship because of the Sunday afternoon sessions. They added that the fact that the worship is based on Christian teachings is of no real consequence to them; it is the fellowship that they consider most important.

As previously indicated, it would seem that many of the entrants are very fortunate to have elected to join the congregation of the Mount Gambier Baptist Church – and it would appear that they did this off their own initiative, the contact between the IHSS Caseworker and the Minister coming only once the first families had been there.

While the congregation might be predominantly Anglo-Saxon, the Minister is experienced in cross-cultural ministry and has a respectful and responsible approach to supporting his new parishioners. Not only has he welcomed them but is gradually encouraging them to take an active part in the activities. Recognising their diffidence, he has offered a variety of things that they might wish to do (singing during the service, collecting the offering, serving tea and coffee etc) so that they can choose the activities with which they feel most comfortable. They have also included the entrants in church social activities, such as a barbecue, and recognised how much easier it was for the entrants to mix when there are activities such as cooking and soccer where language is not such a barrier. The children, of course, are much less reserved than their parents and are more confident in English so they have joined into the children's program at the church with enthusiasm.

It is apparent that the Minister has developed a respectful relationship with one of the leaders of the entrant community. They talk through issues together and learn from each other.

The Minister has also taken the lead in providing clear guidance to his congregation about their interactions with the entrants. Mindful of how counterproductive and potentially patronising individual initiatives can be, he has encouraged anyone who wants to "help out" to join the MRC's volunteer program where they can be trained, supported and directed towards constructive activities. He has also explained the importance of giving the entrants choice and not putting them in a position where, out of their intrinsic politeness, they will not say no. He believes he has managed to get the message across without "ruffling too many feathers". By and large, he feels his congregation is very supportive of the refugees and happy to worship alongside them.

It also appears that the Minister and IHSS Caseworker have entered into constructive collaboration, with the Minister mindful of the Caseworker's expertise and willing to take guidance from her. On occasions they have worked together to address problems the entrants were encountering, such as unsolicited visits by members of a charismatic church who were door-knocking around the town in search of converts.

This being said, one cannot help but feel it is sheer good luck that things have worked out as well as they have with the Baptist Church. As previously mentioned, the Settlement Committee's efforts to involve the religious leaders (through the Ministers Fraternal) in the planning of the pilot were not successful. This meant that individual churches were not aware of the possibility that refugees might join their congregation; nor were they briefed about the background of the entrants, the settlement process and who they could approach for information and support.

4.9.13. Law and Order

It was apparent from comments made by the entrants that they had had some very traumatic experiences with the police in Thailand and with the military in Burma. They therefore came with understandable reservations about people in uniform.

Steps were taken to let the entrants know about the police in Australia – both about the fact that they had nothing to fear from the police if they obey the law and also that the police are there to help them if they have problems. The entrants have clearly taken the first part of this message to heart. When asked about the police, the men said they were "nice" to which, after reflection, they added "if we do the right thing". In this context they also spoke with

obvious appreciation of the fact that in Australia “you are allowed to go anywhere”, a clear reference to the oppression under which they had lived for so long. The women are still not entirely sure which uniform belongs to the police but say that they no longer have the same fear as they once had of anyone in uniform.

The entrants’ obvious desire to “do the right thing” has meant that they are not on the police’s radar at all. The police officer interviewed in the context of the research indicated that, to his knowledge, there had been no incidents involving the Burmese refugees and no incidents reported to the police of racism or other negative responses directed towards them. Further, a direct inquiry to the community safety unit confirmed that there was no suspicion of any family violence within the homes.

The police’s Blue Light Committee is consciously including the Burmese children in the events they organise each term. The police also provided training in bike safety and have plans to move into driver safety classes for the adults now they have expressed an interest in getting licenses.

Lesson #29:

It is important to provide opportunities for the entrants and the police to learn about each other.

4.9.14. Volunteers

As previously mentioned, managing volunteers became a major challenge for those involved in the Shepparton pilot because they had not foreseen the huge number of people who wanted to become involved and thus did not have the relevant structures in place early enough.

The low-key approach taken to media coverage in Mount Gambier (see Section 6) meant that the local MRC was not flooded by offers of help but rather that offers came at a more manageable pace. The Caseworker also sent the word out through relevant networks such as the churches and the Multicultural Network when volunteers with particular skills were required.

MRCSA has an existing structured volunteer program and this model was adopted in Mount Gambier. It involves:

- interviewing potential volunteers to assess their suitability⁴² and to get a sense of their skills and interests;
- ensuring all necessary checks are undertaken;
- providing induction and training, covering things such as cultural awareness, confidentiality, boundaries, privacy etc;
- providing clearly identified roles for volunteers. In some cases these involve supporting the Caseworker to deliver IHSS services and in others, they are linked to activities the entrants have identified as something they would like to be involved in (see Section 4.9.11);

⁴²

If it is felt that the person might be volunteering for the wrong reasons (e.g. they are lonely or they are looking for someone to rescue), their offer of help is politely declined.

- matching volunteers' skills and interests with the activities;
- identifying coordinators who take responsibility for running the various projects;
- holding monthly meetings at which relevant information is provided and important issues, such as maintaining boundaries, can be reinforced; and
- ensuring that all volunteers are supervised.

Hitherto, everything has worked very smoothly and no problems in relation to volunteers were reported.

Lesson #30:

Successful management of volunteers relies on ensuring that there is well designed and well managed volunteer support program in place before entrants arrive. Cooperation of key stakeholders, agencies and networks should be sought to ensure any potential volunteers are linked with this program..

Before moving from the subject of volunteers, it is important to mention the appreciation many people expressed for the contribution made by the Caseworker's husband and daughter who are active volunteers within the program.

4.9.15. Donations

As with volunteers, there was a realisation that if donations of goods and clothing were not carefully managed, things could quite easily get out of hand. Nobody wanted to see a situation where people went to the entrants' homes and left unsolicited donations.

As with volunteers, it was decided that having a central point for donations – the MRC – was the only way to manage things and that they would be selective about what they accepted.

In the early days, there was a sense that some people were likely to bypass the MRC but the churches and school were very cooperative in stressing the importance of going through a central point so things have largely been contained.

The entrants have been consulted about what sort of things they would like. Bikes were high on the list and an appeal for donations of bikes resulted in all of the entrants who wanted them being given bikes in good working order, together with the requisite safety equipment.

Clothing has also been requested and, as previously mentioned, some of the female entrants have formed a committee to sift through and distribute donated clothes.

Lesson #31:

Effective management of donations includes:

- *having central donation point;*
- *consulting with the entrants to establish their needs/wants.*
- *only accepting things the entrants need/want.*

4.10. Procedural Issues

4.10.1. Cooperation Between Stakeholders

Mount Gambier is by far the smallest of the three regional settlement pilot locations - its population is only 23,000 compared to Shepparton's 60,000 and Ballarat's 88,000 residents. While technically a city, it has many of the features of a country town, not least the fact that not only do the people in key positions all know each other, they also interact with each other regularly in many capacities. This has been of great benefit to the pilot, both in terms of enabling those with carriage for it being in regular contact with each other and also enabling them to brief others who are not involved but who need to know how things are progressing.

As previously mentioned, Mount Gambier's tradition of inter-sectoral cooperation flowed into the planning and implementation of the pilot. The collective desire for humanitarian settlement and the commitment to ensure favourable outcomes meant that egos were put to one side and the focus could remain on achieving the common goal. This was enhanced by skilful and sensitive leadership of the Migrant Settlement Committee by the people who assumed this role.

As mentioned, the Migrant Settlement Committee in Mount Gambier undertook all its planning at the full committee level and did not break this down into subcommittees. The main drawback of this was that the planning was largely undertaken by people in senior policy positions. When the Committee was notified that entrants were actually coming, there was very little time for those who would be responsible for implementation to make the necessary preparations. The areas in which this had the greatest impact were education and health. Had there been subcommittees involving those working at the coal-face, staff could have been trained and systems developed earlier and in less haste.⁴³

It is possibly also relevant to note that there is a parallel set of services in Mount Gambier for migrants, with agencies funded by state and federal government departments. There has been some involvement of these agencies in the planning of the pilot, in particular by Lifeline, but the pilot has largely operated outside this framework as it is seen that there is very little overlap in the needs of the target groups.

4.10.2. The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) Model

Possibly the key challenge facing service providers in regional areas is that the IHSS is funded on a unit cost basis and in most instances, the number of arrivals is not sufficient to fund a full-time worker. Meanwhile, newly arrived refugees require a level of assistance during the first few weeks that can only really be delivered by a full-time worker.

Different service providers have tackled this in different ways and with varying degrees of success. In some locations, the IHSS worker is employed part time (and does lots of, usually unpaid, overtime), in others, the worker is an employee of a larger local agency (e.g. a local TAFE) and dovetails their IHSS work with other duties not funded by the Department of Immigration. The third model is where a combination of grants from the Department of Immigration is combined to fund a local worker in a full-time or near full-time capacity. The model used in Mount Gambier has evolved, through a fortunate turn of fate, into the third model.

Prior to the commencement of the pilot, the Multicultural Network in Mount Gambier had successfully applied for Settlement Grants Program (SGP) funding. After the first couple of months, however, changes at staff and Board level led the Multicultural Network to

⁴³ This issue has already been taken up in Recommendation #2.

reconsider their capacity to deliver the contracted services. They approached MRCSA who, for the remainder of the funding period (until 30 June 2008), delivered the services on a subcontractural basis and then were awarded the contract in their own right from 1 July 2008.

This enabled MRCSA to combine the IHSS and SGP funding to employ a full-time caseworker. When entrants first arrived, the Caseworker's duties were heavily focused on delivery of IHSS services and when the pressure of these reduced, she was able to concentrate more on community development and other SGP related tasks.

Now that the IHSS-related work with the existing client group is nearing its end, MRCSA's capacity to ensure continuity of service delivery has been bolstered by the receipt of a Sustainable Regional Settlement (SRS) grant that provides \$48,000 over 14 months to ensure the entrants are efficiently linked into employment in Mount Gambier.

This combination of IHSS, SGP and SRS funding appears to have worked extremely well on a variety of levels. It has:

- enabled the Caseworker to be available when the entrants needed her;
- removed an "exiting stress" as there is a seamless transition from IHSS to SGP;
- meant that MRCSA can continue to employ the Caseworker beyond the end of the pilot so that her expertise will still be available for any future arrivals.

It is important to note that the success of this model also depends upon:

- the employment of a skilled worker who can operate with a high level of independence and flexibility and who can empathise with and provide appropriate support to the entrants; and
- appropriate guidance and support from the employing agency.

As previously mentioned, both of these are in place in Mount Gambier.

Lesson #32:

When establishing a new regional settlement location, careful consideration must be given to the service delivery model to ensure that it is appropriately supported and sustainable.

Possibly one final thing that was identified as being significant to the local community is that MRCSA purchased premises in Mount Gambier. The building is a house that had been converted for use as a paramedics' clinic and is right in the centre of town. It gives the sense of being both welcoming and business-like. The fact that MRCSA made this investment sent a strong message to other stakeholders that they intended to be there for the long haul and were not simply going to "cut and run" once the pilot was over.

4.10.3. Rate and Spacing of Arrivals

City-based IHSS providers have learnt to adjust to fluctuating arrival numbers and large groups arriving at once and have structured their staffing levels accordingly. In regional areas, especially during the pilot stage when all of the service providers are getting up to speed, fluctuations are much harder to accommodate.

In the best possible of all worlds, having two to three families arriving every two to three months would be ideal for a single caseworker. This would enable intensive support to be provided to newly arrived families and to get them to a point where they are able to do more

for themselves by the time the next group of entrants come. Too many families arriving at once can seriously stretch resources and compromise the level of support provided. On the other, if there is too long a delay between arrivals, the funding dries up and unless the provider has the capacity to cross-subsidise, there might not be a caseworker employed to support the next group of entrants.

Recommendation #7:

While recognising that identifying suitable entrants for a regional pilot is far from simple, it is important that DIAC take steps to ensure that the sustainability of services in a new regional settlement location is not compromised by arrival rates or spacing.

Of equal relevance is the time taken to make a decision about what happens after the pilot phase. Not only is the capacity of MRCSA to maintain its presence in Mount Gambier dependent on an expeditious decision, so too is the ongoing viability of other programs including the new arrivals class at school and the AMEP classes. Unlike other regional centres such as Shepparton, the levels of spontaneous secondary migration to Mount Gambier are far too low to sustain programs.

Recommendation #8:

That steps be taken to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in making the decision about the future of Mount Gambier as a regional settlement site.

4.10.4. Duration of Pilot

The question has been posed as to whether the duration of the regional settlement pilots is too long and that maybe it would be better if the pilot phase was six months, after which progress could be evaluated and a decision made as to whether or not the region was suitable for ongoing humanitarian settlement.

There is probably not a simple answer to this question as there are many variables involved, not least:

- the number and frequency of arrivals in the initial period;
- the ability of each of the various service providers to “hit the ground running”;
- the ability of the service providers to function as an integrated team;
- continuity of staffing in key agencies;
- the complexity of the entrants’ settlement needs; and
- whether or not there are any crises.

Mount Gambier has been blessed in that everything has gone very smoothly from the start and the pilot was clearly running on very sound foundations. Based on this, it could well have been possible to assess the outcomes of this particular pilot after six months. It is, however, unlikely that every regional settlement pilot will be as fortunate to have all necessary conditions for success fall into place as neatly and quickly.

Recommendation #9:

That the duration of pilots remains at 12 months but that there be provision to bring the evaluation forward if it is clear that the settlement pilot is unfolding smoothly and requisite conditions for sustainable settlement are in place.

5. The Entrants' Perspective

While many of the views of the entrants have been reported above, it is relevant to record what they said about living in Mount Gambier.

Both the men and the women say they are very happy to have settled in the town. They freely acknowledge that they would find it hard being in a big city as they have only ever known village life. Cities are seen as noisy, confusing and expensive whereas Mount Gambier is a place where you can "get anywhere you want to go on a bicycle".

They acknowledged that it was "a bit scary at first" but that everything has worked out very well and there were people to help them at every step of the way. It has clearly been an important boost to the confidence to the entrants to realise that they have the skills and knowledge to guide later arrivals.

As previously mentioned, the level of mutual support and assistance amongst the group has been quite remarkable. Equally remarkable is the fact that they are not exclusionary. Not long before the researcher's arrival, two young refugees from Burundi had moved to the town from Adelaide. The entrants saw them as fellow refugees and quickly welcomed them into their group in much the same way as they had a Kurdish family who had also relocated to Mount Gambier.

While one family moved away from Mount Gambier, the decision to do so had nothing to do with the town.⁴⁴ The others clearly see their future in Mount Gambier and while they would like to visit the city, they do not appear to be attracted to the notion of moving there.

They indicated that they are grateful to Mount Gambier for giving them a place to make a home and where their children will have a future free from fear. They also noted the importance of being able to define their identity, "not like in Burma or Thailand where you have to hide your ethnicity".

Recognising how good life can be for them in Australia, they want their families to join them. "A lady from Immigration" has explained the Special Humanitarian Program proposal process to them and they hope to be able to do this when their "English is better".

This is yet another example of the aforementioned pragmatism the entrants display. They recognise that settling into their life in Australia will take time and they are prepared to wait and work to get what they want.

⁴⁴ As previously mentioned, the family who moved away was a single parent family. MRCSA supported the family during the decision-making process and assisted with the relocation.

6. Reaction of the Local Community

It was very interesting to compare the response of the Mount Gambier community to that of Shepparton. Whereas one might have expected the people of Shepparton to be quite blasé about “yet another group of foreigners”, the advance publicity about the arrival of the Congolese led to a sense of huge excitement in the town and large number of people wanting to become involved. This then created a challenge for the IHSS provider to manage expectations and channel people’s enthusiasm in constructive directions, especially in those cases where the locals resented “being told what to do”.

While not aware of what had happened in Shepparton, the Committee intuitively felt that drawing too much attention to the pilot would be counterproductive and putting entrants in the media spotlight would be too intrusive. Instead their community awareness strategy focused on working with the local media to run a series of generic articles about the importance of new people coming into the region and about how humanitarian entrants would make a valuable contribution to the mix. Having key local leaders (for example, from the two Councils, the Area Consultative Committee and the Regional Development Board etc) speaking with one voice and prepared to both draw on their media contacts and be spokespeople was very beneficial for this.

As previously mentioned, judicious use of the press was supplemented by events (festivals etc) run by the Multicultural Network that celebrated diversity and focused on the benefits of inward migration to the town.

When the IHSS Caseworker came on board, she introduced herself to the media, gave them information about the pilot and sought their help to keep the arrival of the entrants low key. They reached an agreement that when the entrants had had time to settle in, and when there was something newsworthy to report, she would make sure they got their stories. They were happy to agree and over the year, there has been a steady trickle of stories in the local press about the entrants, for example about the children singing in the choir and the adults participating in the Community Garden. During Refugee Week 2008, a special exhibition of photos and stories was held in the Town Hall and this received very good coverage.

It would probably be safe to say that the majority of people in Mount Gambier are not really aware of the presence of the Burmese refugees in their town and if they are, it would be because they have seen a group of “Asian-looking people” in the street or they recall “reading something about them somewhere”. Others know a little more because they have paid attention to stories in the media or have come across the entrants at church, while playing soccer or in other places they are interacting with members of the local community. Then of course there is the small group of people who know a great deal about the entrants because it is their professional duty to know and/or because they have become friends.

One of the really impressive elements of the Mount Gambier pilot is its “normality”. There was no hype or fuss but neither has there been any negative reaction. No instances of racism have been reported and none of the people interviewed for this evaluation were aware of anyone within the town being critical of the entrants’ presence. It is simply a case of them “being accepted” which, when it all boils down, is exactly what one would hope for.

Most importantly, the entrants report that they “feel safe”. They have been given space to get on with the complex task of settling without feeling that they are in the spotlight.

7. The Future

7.1. *The Refugees from Burma*

It is reasonable to say that the entrants have not progressed as far as many other refugees have in their initial settlement period. At the time of the evaluation, none were in paid employment and many were still struggling with English. It would not be fair, however, to attribute this to a failure of the support services. Rather, it has to do with the fact that, as previously mentioned, the entrants:

- are very cautious and diffident;
- want very much to do the right thing and not cause offence;
- are reluctant to take risks;
- have spent most if not all of their adult lives in refugee camps;
- have had limited education;
- have had limited or no experience working.

This being said, the entrants are also:

- keen to learn English;
- determined to work when they have enough English to enable them to do so;
- very happy to be in Mount Gambier;
- feel safe and well supported.

It is clear they will need support for a while yet, in particular in relation to transitioning to the workplace. Fortunately this need is clearly within the sights of the Committee and plans are in place to:

- arrange supported work placements that can be undertaken while the entrants are still studying English;
- help them identify employment goals and the steps necessary to attain these;
- educate local employers.

In this context, DIAC's Sustainable Regional Settlement grant is very important as it will enable the Caseworker to play an important part in assisting the entrants work towards employment.

Lesson #33:

Different groups take different times to achieve settlement milestones. It is important to recognise this and ensure that support programs have sufficient flexibility to accommodate these differences.

Given the level of support the entrants are likely to need, there would also be great value in the Committee looking at some of the existing workplace mentoring programs in place elsewhere so that they do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Lesson #34:

There is an important role for DIAC in ensuring that those involved in implementing regional settlement projects are made aware of innovative work being undertaken elsewhere so that they can link into this.

It is also probable that the entrants will need ongoing encouragement to mix with the local community. When you are shy, it is clearly very attractive to stay within your comfort zone. The entrants have formed such a close-knit group that there is a danger they will turn inwards over time if not presented with safe and enticing opportunities to participate in activities that bring them in contact with the wider community. This being said, it is very positive that the entrants have already reached out of their own accord to the Burundian and Kurdish people who have recently arrived in Mount Gambier and have indicated they are very excited about the prospect of other refugees, not necessarily from Burma, coming to town.

As generous as this mindset is, it is clear the entrants very much want other Burmese refugees to come to Mount Gambier, in particular those with whom they have links. Their group is still very small and the arrival of more entrants would be beneficial for them in many ways; not least it would:

- broaden the opportunities for friendships and links;
- enable the existing entrants to recognise how far they have come since arriving;
- bolster the confidence of the existing entrants as they support others.

Recommendation #10:

That more entrants be identified to come to Mount Gambier to strengthen and the sustainability the embryonic community that has been established there.

7.2. The Migrant Settlement Committee

On the one hand one could say that the work of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee is nearing an end as the pilot phase is all but over, however, on the other, its work has possibly only just begun. As will be discussed in the following sections, Mount Gambier and its surrounding region have great potential for future settlement and a group of skilled professionals will be needed to guide this.

As mentioned in Section 4.4, the Committee has recognised that their role as the steering committee for the pilot is about to come to an end. One gets the sense, however, that the prevailing sentiment is not “thank goodness that’s over” but rather “what can we do next?” They are about to embark upon redrafting their Terms of Reference to look at how the skills and knowledge they have acquired during the pilot can be put to best use in the future.

Whereas in Shepparton there was a clear need to differentiate between the frenetic activity of the pilot and the more measured pace required for long term settlement, it would seem this adjustment is not really necessary in Mount Gambier. It was as if they set off knowing it would be a marathon rather than a sprint and they have paced themselves accordingly. This being said, it would be wise to formally mark the end of the pilot and celebrate the considerable achievement of all involved in it.

Recommendation #11:

That a formal ceremony be held in Mount Gambier to mark the end of the pilot.

7.3. Prospects for Future Humanitarian Settlement in Mount Gambier

Not a single person expressed any doubt about the suitability of Mount Gambier for future humanitarian settlement. The town offers, *inter alia*:

- affordable accommodation;
- a full range of core services;
- excellent coordination between service providers;
- plentiful water;
- a range of employment opportunities; and
- a welcoming community.

There are also service providers in key areas who have, during the course of the pilot, learnt a lot about working with refugees and are very keen to put this knowledge to further use.

There was remarkable consistency in the answer to the question “how many new entrants can the town support?” The consensus appears to be ten unlinked families per year and a similar number of linked cases. As to the issue of where new entrants should be from, no strong views were expressed, save for the obvious desire of the entrants that some of the new arrivals should be from Burma and the view of the community members that the current cohort had been a “good fit” for the town. It was felt, however, that if the caseload is diversified, care should be taken in the early stages to ensure that there are enough entrants from any one group to form the nucleus of a community.

There are possibly only two things that might influence this:

- If for any reason the IHSS/SGP Caseworker resigns, it would leave a big hole. This being said, the template has been developed and the standard set so the (not insignificant) challenge for MRCSA would be to find an equally suitable replacement.
- If there is a significant delay between the end of the pilot and the arrival of new entrants, as previously mentioned, the viability of some services is likely to be compromised.

Recommendation #12:

As Mount Gambier has more than ably demonstrated its capacity as a regional settlement location, steps should be taken to formalise this status without delay.

Clearly, future humanitarian settlement in Mount Gambier will require ongoing monitoring. Consideration will need to be given to how service providers are coping with increased numbers and the impact this is having on the town. There may be a time when it is wise to scale back for a while rather than pressing on and getting to a point where saturation is reached.

Recommendation #13:

That DIAC meet on an annual basis with key state and local government agencies and members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee to discuss progress in relation to humanitarian settlement and consider the number of new entrants everyone feels can be effectively supported in the coming year.

7.4. Prospects for Settlement in the Limestone Coast Region

As mentioned in Section 4.1, the two other major towns in the region, Naracoorte (about 100km north of Mount Gambier) and Bordertown (another 75km further north), have both had some – albeit limited - experience with refugees (in particular those on Temporary Protection Visas) and temporary migrants (those on “457 Visas”). It is reported that these people have had no appreciable difficulties in the towns and that services have managed to meet their needs.

Should targeted humanitarian settlement be considered, the capacity of service providers would need to be significantly bolstered but the presence within the region of a core group of people that have had the experience of the pilot and are willing to support and guide their regional colleagues, means that this could be done at a local level.

Recommendation #14:

That consideration be given, in discussion with the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee and key representatives of local government and service providers in Naracoorte and Bordertown, to investigation of options for planned humanitarian settlement in those towns.

8. Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to have undertaken this research without the support of many people. Particular thanks must go to:

- Constanze Voelkel-Hutchison from DIAC Adelaide,
- Heather Muirhead from the Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre, and
- David Mezinec, Chair of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee.

Each in their own way provided invaluable guidance and support.

I am also indebted to the many service providers and bureaucrats who gave so generously of their time to speak about the pilot and to share their insights and learnings. Their enthusiasm for the pilot was infectious and left the researcher feeling very excited about the future prospects of Mount Gambier as a regional settlement location.

My thanks go too to DIAC Central Office for giving me the chance to look in depth at another regional settlement initiative. It was exciting to have studied Shepparton but as it was the first pilot, there was nothing with which it could be compared. Mount Gambier has shown that the success of Shepparton was not a one off and that regional settlement can be just as successful elsewhere.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the refugees from Burma for assisting with this research. I would also like to acknowledge the courage that enabled them to come so far from home to an entirely strange environment and to deal with everything they have confronted with such grace and dignity. Mount Gambier is lucky indeed to have them as the pathfinders in what everyone hopes will be a new and exciting future for the town.

Margaret Piper

5th September 2008

APPENDIX 1: Stakeholders Consulted

1. DIAC Central Office

NAME(S)	POSITION
Sophie Montgomery	Director Settlement Planning and Information
Michael Kreskas	Assistant Director Settlement Planning and Information

2. DIAC South Australian Office

NAME	POSITION
Constanze Voelkel-Hutchison	Settlement Manager Settlement & Multicultural Affairs Section

3. South Australian State Government Representatives

NAME	POSITION/AGENCY
Italia Mignone Toni Jupe	Community and Government Relations Officer Multicultural SA
Don Boerema	Manager ESL Programs Department of Education and Children's Services
David Kelly	Health Promotion & Development Officer South East Regional Community Health Country Health SA

4. Local Government Representatives

NAME	POSITION/AGENCY
Russell Peate	CEO District Council of Grant
Greg Muller	CEO City of Mount Gambier

5. IHSS Provider

NAME(S)	POSITION/AGENCY
Eugenia Tsoulis	Executive Director Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia
Davorka Krecinec	Manager IHSS Program
Joseph Masika	Manager Multicultural Health, Training and Advocacy
Heather Muirhead	IHSS and SGP Worker Limestone Coast MRC

6. Members of the Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee

NAME	POSITION/AGENCY
David Mezinec	Chair Limestone Coast Migrant Settlement Committee Regional Education Manager TAFE SA Limestone Coast
Elaine Pollock	Executive Officer Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee
Barbara Linden	Project Manager Limestone Coast Area Consultative Committee
Linda Polomka	Regional Migration Officer

	Limestone Coast Regional Development Board
Gala Mustafa	Member South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission
Louise Waters	Migrant Support Worker Lifeline

7. Entrants

By the time the evaluation was undertaken, nine of the ten families remained in Mount Gambier. The researcher met with all of the remaining adults in two focus groups, one for the men, one for the women.

At the suggestion of the MRC, entrants with good English skills were engaged to also perform the role of interpreters.

8. Other Key Stakeholders

NAME	AGENCY/AFFILIATION
Angela Shaw	Manager Centrelink Mount Gambier
Linda Stark	Team Leader
Lisa McKenzie	Service Practitioner
Barry Kuhl	Senior Customer Service Provider
Sgt Rick Grimes	Crime Prevention Manager SA Police
Jane Turner	Principal Mount Gambier North Primary School
Rev Garth Wooten	Minister Mount Gambier Baptist Church
Dale Beaty	Practice Manager Hawkins Medical Centre
Diane Saunders	Health Nurse (Immunization)
Commander Sandy Coulson	Board Member

	Multicultural Network
Malcolm Anderson	Indigenous Elder Board Member of Multicultural Network
Kathleen Nugent	AMEP Teacher TAFE SA Limestone Coast

9. Local Media

NAME	AGENCY
Analia Blackie (with additional comments fed in from Tim Lewis – TBW's Editor)	Reporter The Border Watch

10. Local People

Two local taxi drivers were asked for their own opinions about the entrants and about any views expressed to them by members of the local community.