

FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP FOR RECENTLY ARRIVED MIGRANTS

overview of the project

Recently arrived migrants receive little or no environmental education as part of settlement programs. The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW developed an innovative education program named Operation Blue Tongue to provide information on biodiversity and sustainability to new migrants. The training was designed to assist migrants to develop a sense of belonging in Australia and to protect the environment.

Operation Bluetongue provided recently arrived migrants and refugees with an opportunity to become familiar with Australia's unique biodiversity through a workshop and field trip, as well as suggesting actions individuals could take to protect the environment. 2,440 participants attended 27 workshops and 28 field trips held across the Sydney region in just 12 months.



Operation Bluetongue tree planting

how the project was carried out

A reference group made up of key stakeholders including settlement services, local government, the Ethnic Communities Council and TAFE was established to provide advice and guidance on the development and implementation of the education program.

Resource materials were collected and refined to form the basis of the teaching

materials. These materials were incorporated and developed into a comprehensive teaching manual to aid workshop delivery. At the completion of the program a detailed facilitator's kit was developed that outlined the steps involved in running Operation Bluetongue for new migrants. It was launched at a training workshop for organisations involved with new migrants.

The one hour workshop covered information on biodiversity, environmental problems and why we need to be concerned. This was followed by a field trip that involved visiting a local bushland reserve to undertake activities including bush walks, tree planting and to interact with native Australian animals through a wildlife handler. A survey was undertaken at the end of the day to collect feedback from participants and evaluate the value of the program for the migrants.

A brochure outlining the project's aims, objectives and activities was developed and distributed to migrant service providers. This was followed up by a direct phone call to the migrant centres and English schools in those local government areas known to have larger populations of new migrants to encourage them to become involved in the program.



Operation Bluetongue native animal display

outcomes now and in the future

The facilitator's kit provides a step-by-step framework for organisations who work with migrants to be able to plan, promote, deliver and evaluate the program on their own and to continue the valuable work carried out by this project.

Feedback from program participants and migrant organisations has acknowledged that the project was a unique and valuable learning opportunity for the migrants. Migrant facilitators found that the workshops and field trips offered a very different experience for new migrants and recognised the ongoing benefits of the program to language development, overcoming fears about the Australian bush, and assisting with settlement and assimilation into the local community.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Partnerships have formed within councils between teams that had not been traditionally involved with each other, namely community development and environmental services. Through future cooperation between these groups, migrant communities as well as the community in general will have greater access and opportunity to be involved in biodiversity and sustainability issues.

During the delivery of workshops the facilitators recognised and acknowledged that complex relationships may exist between and within cultures and that it was important not to force participants to split away from the groups that they naturally form, that way the participants felt more at ease and could focus on the program and its educational content.

The field trip has the potential to be logistically difficult, it is important to be well prepared, including ensuring culturally suitable and age appropriate activities are undertaken. It is also important to limit the number of participants as large groups can be difficult to manage.