Improving
Culturally and Linguistically
Diverse Communities Kindergarten
Engagement
(ICALDKE) Project

Summary Report

Findings from Consultations with Community Members and Early Childhood Stakeholders

BSL Diversity Unit - July 2020

Acknowledgments

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL)'s Cross-Cultural Consultancy Unit would like to acknowledge the foresight of the Victorian Government's **Department of Education and Training**, who commissioned and helped steer research on this very important topic to ensure greater access and equity for children of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Many DET staff were involved and we note our appreciation for the guidance, in particular, of **Jo Gately and Lucy Richards.** We look forward to future kindergarten attendees having even greater participation and inclusion because of the implementation of this report's recommendations.

This Project was supervised by BSL's Diversity Unit Senior Manager, **Hutch Hussein**, and led by **Stephanie Shavin** as the Early Childhood Cross-Cultural Consultancy Co-ordinator. Collectively, they brought 30 years of experience in working with newly arrived communities to the design of this project and the writing of this report. Stephanie took the lead on its research, including literature review, consultations with the Early Childhood sector stakeholders, authoring this report, and supervising and supporting the Bilingual Kindergarten Community Educator roles who formed the ICALDKE team. This Project would not have been possible without such professional facilitators and leaders dedicated to empowering their communities – they were **Riham El Hadari** (Arabic community); **Laura Ibrahim** (Assyrian Chaldean community), **Sadia Ali** and **Hangama Hamid** (Afghan community) and **MiZa Mawi** (Burmese community). The project benefitted greatly from hearing directly from the CALD communities these staff had networks and connections into, allowing participants to share insights into their culture and family decisions in their own languages. This Project report also benefitted from the expert contributions of **Dr Tim Gilley JP, Senior Research Fellow** from BSL's Research and Policy Centre.

The Project thanks all **stakeholders** who gave so generously of their time, knowledge and expertise to give voice to those tasked with providing support for CALD families to know about and have access to kindergarten.

Most critically, the Project wishes to express its humble gratitude to all **community participants** who provided their time and generously shared their knowledge so that this report may authentically reflect their experiences and elevate their voices regarding kindergarten in Victoria. The project also wishes to acknowledge and thank the families and support networks of those who participated, and whose encouragement has enabled the participation of others.

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The Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges and recognises the
Traditional Owners of the land upon which we live and work, and we pay
our respects to their Elders both past and present.

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Glossary and Acronym List

Term	Acronym	Definition
Brotherhood of St Laurence	BSL	The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a community organisation that works to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia
Department of Education and Training	DET	The Department of Education and Training offers learning and development support and services for all Victorians
Improving Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Kindergarten Engagement Project	ICALDKE	The name of this research project
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people includes people who were either themselves born and/or have a parent born overseas in a non-Main English speaking country and/or speak a variety of languages
Support services focused on children and families		Support services or programs operating in the child, youth and family space – such as Integrated Family Services (IFS), Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI), Families First, Child Protection, Orange Door, and others
Bicultural Kindergarten Community Educators	BKCEs	Bicultural workers recruited as part of this project to identify, engage and facilitate community consultations to better understand the experiences of the four target communities in kindergarten
Support Services		A broad term encompassing any government or non-government funded service that is concerned with the wellbeing of children and or families, newly arrived or other – including settlement services (AMES, Migrant Resource Centres); Asylum Seeker services (including ASRC, Lentara Asylum Seeker Project, Life Without Barriers, Salvation Army, Foundation House etc); social services such as BSL, Anglicare, Berry St etc; council services such as playgroups, libraries, MCH and other services including families first, Child Protection and Orange door.
Educators		Kindergarten teachers and assistance. This is not in reference to early childhood educators located in LDCs
Refugee background		Refers to those who have been found to be refugees under the United Nations Refugee Convention, 28 and who hold a humanitarian visa.
Refugee like backgrounds		Refers to those who had survived refugee like experiences and who have entered Australia under other migration steams. This includes people seeking asylum, children on orphan visa's and families who have come via Women at Risk visa's, amongst others.
Awareness, Access, Engagement, Inclusion and Retention	AAEIR	These lenses unpack the principles of access and equity in acknowledgment that CALD communities are often under-represented in accessing government funded services.
Humanitarian Settlement Program	HSP	The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) provides support to humanitarian entrants to build the skills and knowledge they need to become self-reliant and active members of the Australian community. The program is delivered on behalf of the Australian Government by five service providers across Australia.
Maternal and Child Health Program	MCH	The Maternal and Child Health program is a free universal primary health service available for all Victorian families with children from birth to school age. The MCH service consists of

		three components – the Universal MCH Program which offers face to face support for families with an MCH Nurse according to a schedule of visits (and which is of primary reference within this research report); The enhanced MCH Program and the 24-hour MCH Line.
Settlement Services		Refers to a range of government funded services aimed at assisting humanitarian entrants and eligible migrants within their initial period of settlement in Australia. These services assist clients to become self-reliant and participate equally in Australian society and minimise longer-term reliance on support services.
Health Care Card	HCC	This is a concession card for low income earners or those receiving certain Government allowances. It enables the individual or family to access discounts to a range of necessary services such as public transport, general practitioners, certain medicines, some educational programs such as kindergarten, and others.
Power distance		Power distance refers to the way in which power is distributed and the extent to which the less powerful accept that power is distributed unequally.
Bicultural worker		A person employed to work specifically with people or communities with whom they share similar cultural experiences and understandings, and who is employed to use their cultural skills and knowledge to negotiate and communicate between communities and their employing agency.
Interpreter		A person employed to provide linguistic translation from one language to another in support of communication between two or more people who do not speak a common language.
Multilingual educator		Refers to an educator who has command of three or more languages with equal and / or varying proficiency.
Language Other Than English	LOTE	LOTE is the name given to language subjects besides English taught in Australia and other English-speaking countries.
Local Government Areas	LGAs	LGAs are an area or collection of suburbs governed by a City Council, which is the third tier of Government in Australia.

Summary of reviewed literature

1. Context for review of the literature

An electronic search was carried out to identify peer-reviewed articles and relevant service delivery and government reports. Literature was sourced from America, the UK, New Zealand and Australia. These four countries were chosen because, like Australia, these countries share the characteristics of navigating increasing multiculturalism within a broader dominant Western cultural community; hosting increasing populations of migrant and refugee CALD communities; offering various options for early childhood education engagement; and have capacity to engage with and seek to understand and support increased awareness and participation for CALD communities in their awareness and participation with early childhood education programs.

The review of the literature sought to engage with the following six questions:

1. What are the benefits of kindergarten participation?
2. What are the benefits of kindergarten participation for CALD children, including English acquisition?
3. Is there any difference in the participation rates of CALD children compared with other children?
4. What are their barriers to participation in kindergarten and other early childhood education programs?
5. What are the additional barriers to participation in kindergarten and other early childhood educational programs faced by CALD children?
6. What are the enabling factors to involvement with kindergarten and other early childhood education programs for CALD children

Principle of Progressive Universality

BSL undertook this research within a long-established policy and advocacy position which posits that for all children to flourish, systemic government and community support is required, a principle articulated as **progressive universality** (Harris, 1990). This principle recognises the importance of adequate family income and affordable housing suitable for the needs of the growing child. It identifies the importance of societal provision of a universal framework of services and four broad barriers to its provision: cost, location, social cultural issues and asymmetrical power relationships.

To counter these barriers, BSL has identified the importance of policies on income and housing provision, anti-discrimination and counter discrimination measures to support disadvantaged groups and investment in services developed in direct response of the needs of individual communities.

2. Overview of literature

There is consensus amongst the literature that there are many gains of kindergarten participation for all children. These gains have been found not just in the early years of childhood but continue to hold positive influence over the course of a child and families' life and even across future generations (Mitchel et al, 2017; Hopkins et al. 2017; OECD, 2017; Greenberg, 2016).

The literature further directs attention to the gains experienced by children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, including those from CALD backgrounds, for whom participation in high-quality preschool programs are generally found to contribute more significantly to positive long-term education outcomes and life experiences than for other children (Greenberg et al, 2016).

However, these findings need to be considered alongside those from the E4Kids study, conducted in Victoria in 2016, that identified the quality of learning support needs to be high to have an impact on reversing early family learning disadvantages for young children (Tayler, 2016). In the period 2012-2014, most everyday child care and kindergarten programs included in the E4Kids study were found to not be high enough quality to reverse home learning disadvantages to age 8 (Tayler, 2016).

In contrast to the E4Kids Study findings, other work undertaken by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education demonstrated that intensive support lead to improved quality of programs and improved learning and development outcomes for disadvantaged children (Pilsworth et al., 2017). Amongst other things, the intervention made use of early childhood learning support techniques known as Abecedarian (3a in Australia) which has been shown to lead to major improvements in children educational outcomes in the short and long-term (Campbell et al., 2012).

The literature indicates that the opportunity to engage in Kindergarten for children of CALD Background and for those arriving in Australia in early childhood, offers an opportunity to begin acquisition of English as a second language, which can hold significant influence over later academic performance. However, the literature acknowledges that to achieve a level of English that would support academic success will take a number of years (Niklas, Tayler and Cohrssen, 2017; Morland, 2016).

Exact statistics detailing the participation rates of children from CALD backgrounds compared with other children are scarce amongst both local and international literature. However, there is consensus in the literature that "…suburbs with lower participation rates are those with higher cultural diversity and correspondingly lower socio-economic status" (Harrison et. al., 2017. pp. 19; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; House, 2016). This is supported by data from the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing which "…indicate a different pattern of numbers of children attending preschool for children in refugee-like groups than for Victorian children overall" (Paxton et. al., 2011. pp. 6); and further supported by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in Victoria who show kindergarten attendance for 2016 in the City of Maribyrnong – "…a culturally diverse and vibrant population experiencing significant population growth, residential development and demographic shifts" (Harrison et. al., 2017. pp. 3) – was low at 85% compared to the state average of 96.2 (Harrison et. al., 2017).

These findings are further complemented by House (2016) who found that despite increased support for vulnerable communities (including those from refugee/asylum seeking backgrounds) to access kindergarten, children from Chin backgrounds in Melbourne's inner west were found to predominantly struggle in their first year of school – many having not participated in a kindergarten program. This finding was further supported by Burchell (2011) who identified that "…in 2009 27% of prep students starting at another local school in Melbourne's west had not participated in any early

childhood educational programs – the vast majority being children from refugee and of NESB" (House, 2016. Pp. 3-4). What is clear from review of the literature is that "… among other disadvantaged groups, children from CALD backgrounds are substantially underrepresented among kindergarten users" (House, 2016. pp. 4).

Barriers to participation in kindergarten programs can be divided into two distinct categories – 1. those that understand barriers from the perspective of families and which can be described in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs –

> ***"Without being able to address housing and food security, health care, transportation—the parents simply aren't going to be able to prioritize and engage in early learning experiences for their children if they're dealing with much more fundamental sorts of survival issues…They're not thinking about quality settings for the child, not because they don't want to, but because these other things are the priority."*** (Greenberg et al., 2016. pp. 9).

and 2) those that see barriers in relation to the ways Early Childhood Education (ECE) services are funded, organised and provided rather than factors within the family's themselves" (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017. pp. 957). Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg (2017) highlight cost – including fees, food, transport and additional or optional costs charged by particular ECE services. Greenberg et al (2016) identify an overarching set of barriers that affect low-income families including a "…lack of knowledge about programs; unaffordability; challenging eligibility and enrolment processes; insufficient supply and capacity and inconvenient locations, hours and schedules" (pp. 5).

There is significant overlap in the barriers faced by children from low-income families and those children from CALD backgrounds (Morland, 2016). Morland (2016) states that –

> ***Primary barriers to families' participation include low-socio-economic status; a lack of awareness and knowledge of early childhood systems, basic literacy, and proficiency in English; cultural differences in the care of young children; and not feeling welcomed or comfortable with ECEC providers"*** – (Morland, 2016. pp. 5).

Issues of affordability, transportation, limited knowledge of the benefits of participation for children's educational success, limited awareness regarding access processes "…and [parents] beliefs regarding child rearing and education may differ from those in the U.S mainstream" – (Morland, 2016. pp. 5).

House (2016) states that despite the availability of early childhood services to CALD families, "…there may be cultural and service barriers that discourage use… They may not trust service providers who do not understand or reach out to their community" (pp. 3). House (2016) further found that "newly arrived families were unaware of the value of kindergarten" (pp. 3). They highlight the challenges of navigating formal service systems "…for families from a refugee background for whom the service provider culture is alien and English language is limited" (pp. 4).

Lower participation rates in MCH programs amongst CALD communities is further evidence that families are less likely to access formally provided information about kindergarten to inform enrolment decisions, and ultimately undermine participation (House, 2016). Compounding this are issues of social isolation; a fear of services and perceptions that mainstream services are not for their ethnics group; a preference for children to remain at home surrounded by first language and culture; and a lack of cultural support in Kindergarten services. For instance, kindergarten teachers not using interpreter services and holding limited knowledge of the guidelines for their use; All contributed additional barriers to the participation of CALD families (House, 2016; Greenberg et al., 2016; Mitchell

and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; Morland, 2016; Paxton, 2011; Harrison et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2017).

Language and cultural considerations are highlighted as significant in supporting families to overcome barriers to engage with high quality early childhood education programs, increasing participation (Harrison et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2017. Pp. 12). The literatures draws attention to the significance placed by families of being with people of a similar cultural background to themselves, and of the significant positive impacts of local council engagement of bicultural / bilingual workers in overcoming some of the specific communication and cultural barriers (Harrison et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2017; House, 2016).

Further, collaboration between service systems is highlighted amongst the literature as a key determinant in improving participation rates of CALD families in early childhood education programs (Morland, 2016; House, 2016). This included outreach support during resettlement; priority access to high-quality early childhood education programs for refugee families; community outreach awareness raising initiatives that utilised interpreters; interpreter support to complete enrolment forms; community engagement through recruitment of bicultural workers from target communities; cross-training activities to build the capacity of collaborating service systems; partnering to overcome logistical barriers such as transport (priority access for refugee families in nearest to home services) and co-locating childcare services with early childhood education programs, to enable parents to enrol even when their work schedules prevented them from picking up their children in the middle of the day (Morland, 2016).

Greenberg et al (2016) speak to the importance of building trust in overcoming a number of barriers to access and participation by CALD families in early childhood education programs. They propose that families with access to supports that can guide them through the enrolment process are more likely to overcome any fear and distrust related to government institutions. Extending responsibility for supporting families to build trust, they posit that early childhood education providers can build trust through their initial contact with prospective families and ongoing service delivery. They further speak to the positive impacts for families and services that had attracted bilingual and bicultural teaching staff, utilised interpreters and recruited administrators who could actively reach out to CALD communities.

3   Conclusion

What is clear from this brief review of the research literature is that there are significant reasons for us to be concerned about families whose children are missing out on kindergarten, unable to access programs and not adequately supported to participate. Exploration of the six guiding questions for this review of the literature provides a useful framing of current research findings and offers significant insights to the issues encountered across diverse policy, economic and cultural contexts – revealing similarities amongst the many issues faced by CALD families in other Western countries.

1. Background

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) was commissioned by the Victorian Government's Department of Education and Training (DET) to provide insight into the experiences of four newly arrived communities with sessional kindergarten in Victoria. This report of the **Improving Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Kindergarten Engagement (ICALDKE)** project aims to build an understanding of the barriers and enablers that support awareness, access, engagement, inclusion and retention to inform future micro and macro policy changes to support increased participation of children from newly arrived culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in kindergarten.

The ICALDKE project spanned metropolitan Melbourne and participants were engaged from these four target communities:

- Afghan
- Iraqi/Syrian (Arabic speaking)
- Assyrian-Chaldean
- Burmese

It focused on participants' experiences with sessional kindergarten, which includes kindergartens managed by local councils, community-based services under early years management and community co-operatives. Some participants in the research also spoke of their experiences of kindergarten programs provided as part of long day care. However, engagement with private sector providers of kindergarten programs was beyond the scope and capacity of the project.

This report:

1. Provides a brief overview of existing knowledge of the barriers and enablers to participation in early childhood education for families of CALD background during resettlement.
2. Acknowledges that CALD communities are often under-represented in accessing government funded services; and utilises the principles of **Awareness, Access, Engagement, Inclusion and Retention** to unpack the principles of access and equity – acknowledging **Awareness** as fundamental to enabling **Access**, and **Engagement, Inclusion and Retention** as necessary to ensure proportionate and equitable participation and retention in government funded services.
3. Utilises the above principles to inform three research lenses through which the experiences of each community have been explored. These are:
   a. Awareness
   b. Access
   c. Engagement, Inclusion and Retention.
4. Presents findings in two parts divided into Barriers and Enablers.
5. Utilises project findings to inform a set of broad recommendations to guide further investigation and action by DET and/or internal/external advocacy by DET towards supporting increased participation of families from CALD background in kindergarten – the learnings of which could be extrapolated to support participation in other early childhood services.

2. Methodology

To deepen understandings about why particular cohorts of children in Victoria are over-represented amongst those not attending kindergarten, BSL utilised the below three data sources to identify the four target communities for this project:

a. **DSS data** - 0-5-year-old aged humanitarian refugee arrivals over a recent 10-year period (2008-17) where, a portion would be at kindergarten age in 2019/2020. The data is indicative providing a sense of likely numbers (not actual numbers) in that age group.

b. **DET data -** "Funded Kindergarten Attendees between 2016-2018 by Language Spoken", over 3-year (2016-2018) period overlapping with arrival data – ie. Those aged 0-3 in the above cohort and would have been 4 over the course of 2016-2018.

c. **DET data** - Percentage not attending from analysis of "Educational Attendance of 4-year old's, by Birthplace of Mother 2016"

BSL analysis of the data revealed four newly arrived refugee communities either met the criteria for significantly greater over-representation amongst those not attending kindergarten when compared with other communities; or because (as is the case with the Burmese community in the Melbourne's west) anecdotal evidence suggests this community was previously over-represented amongst those not attending, but intentional local efforts have increased community participation in kindergarten. Thus, there was an opportunity to learn successful practices and strategies utilised by local providers in the west, whilst simultaneously comparing the experiences of this slightly more established community with more recently arrived communities from Burma that have resettled in Melbourne's east.

This project utilised community consultations with members of the four communities and identified relevant stakeholders from across four service sectors (local government, CALD / Refugee specific services, support services focused on children and families and sessional Kindergarten services) to explore the experiences of newly arrived communities through the research lenses of awareness, access and engagement, inclusion and retention.

Four Bicultural Kindergarten Community Educators (BKCEs) were recruited to identify, engage and consult with a total of 236 community participants – approximately 50 participants via focus group and 10 participants via individual interview per community. These community educators shared either the same culture and/or language with the target communities. The project coordinator conducted a mix of individual and small group interviews with a total of 57 stakeholders over 19 interviews and one network focus group.

The intentions of conducting the community and stakeholder consultations were to:

a. Understand potential **cultural** issues, and **levels of awareness about kindergarten** in CALD communities;

b. Ascertain an understanding of **access issues** for those newly arrived families with young children who are either **aware of kindergarten programs but not accessing them** or **overcame barriers to access** a program; and

6. Understand factors of **engagement, inclusion and retention**, that fosters **greater participation** for newly arrived CALD children who are enrolled in a kindergarten program and attending, or for those who are enrolled but either not attending, attending sporadically or stopped attending entirely.

3. Findings

The data is largely presented according to overall trends within and across communities. Where community characteristics varied, this has been acknowledged in the narrative. Case studies and quotes have been included to highlight and bring to life participant experiences throughout the report. Where individual experiences differed from the overall trends, and the basis of these differences added depth to understanding the operations of barriers and enablers, this information has been included and identified as individual experiences. Analysis of each of the four communities was not necessary owing to the high levels of consistency and similarity of data across them.

The findings are presented in two parts:
1. **Part 1** features the Findings and Barriers, which includes a discussion of their interconnected nature across the three research lenses.
2. **Part 2** features the Findings and Enablers, which are organised in relation to four key functional areas as follows:
    1. Navigating the system
    2. Interacting with professionals
    3. Community characteristics
    4. Practical realities

The identification of these enablers provides a nuanced examination of how they function in the lives of participants and how they support better use of kindergarten programs across the three lens areas.

3.1 BARRIERS

3.1.1. Barriers to AWARENESS of kindergarten included:

- **Decentralised and inconsistent information** about kindergarten (and an onus on parents / carers to seek information)
- **Inability to engage with information** in relation to kindergarten – lack of English language; written information not translated (and need for high levels of literacy); many kindergarten services unaware of their ability to freely access telephone interpreters and families are often unaware this is a free service and entitlement; and other places where families might access information such as libraries, local councils etc may either not have free access to interpreters, be unaware of this access, or struggle to overcome other barriers to engaging interpreters for example the ability to commit the time required and the confidence to both engage a telephone interpreter and skills to effectively utilise this support.
- **Lack of depth and content of information** about kindergarten which doesn't adequately convey the purpose, benefits or approach to play-based learning in kindergarten
- **Social isolation from and limited access to support services.** Furthermore, most participants who held awareness that kindergarten existed as an option for their child also held high awareness of the locations of kindergarten services in their area but medium to low understanding of the purpose and nature of kindergarten and play based learning. For example, the data reveals that it was widely understood across communities that kindergarten provided an opportunity for children to "play" and develop "social skills and connection" and was somehow related to preparing children for school, but the mode through which this learning took place was not well understood. Additionally, there was low understanding of what was meant by the term "school preparedness", with varying expectations and ideas of what is expected of children in relation to being prepared for school.

3.1.2. Barriers to ACCESS to kindergarten included:

- **Complex processes & forms**
- **Practical issues** (including lack of provision of interpreters and bicultural staff support)
- **Cost –** (including actual fees or low awareness about available subsidies or access prohibitive without subsidy)
- **Cultural beliefs, values and expectations** that differ to the Western beliefs, values and expectations that underpin the value and benefits of early childhood education in Australia
- **Competing demands** (and impact of economic participation) such as parental work or study commitments, clashing school start and finish times, younger children requiring care or parents are responding to other challenges associated with resettlement such as instability of housing, settling other children into school, addressing health and mental health challenges etc.

In relation to barriers to access to kindergarten Foundation House state -

"…families from a refugee background, for whom the service provider culture is alien and English language is limited… may not trust service providers who do not understand or reach out to their community".

They further found that amongst the Chin community cultural beliefs, values and expectations were significant influence in family's decisions to engage with kindergarten stating

"newly arrived families were unaware of the value of kindergarten and did not have the capacity to support their children's participation".
– House 2016. pp.3-4

The data revealed that most participants who had sought to access kindergarten reported achieving access but only as the result of significant levels of formal and informal support from family, friends and/or bilingual staff who assisted them to navigate the system. Cost, and limited understanding of eligibility to access additional fee subsidies, presented a significant barrier for participants without access to a health care card. Further, the cost of three-year-old-kindergarten was found to be prohibitive for almost all participants and the cost of four-year-old prohibitive for those who had to pay fees without access to a Health Care Card and / or visa complication.

Most participants, for whom cost was not prohibitive, reported requiring high levels of formal or informal support to navigate complex registration and enrolment processes in English. Cultural beliefs, values and expectations were raised as concerns but ultimately presented as only a minimal barrier for a small number of participants from each of the four communities, and as a moderate barrier for a greater proportion of participants from the Afghan community.
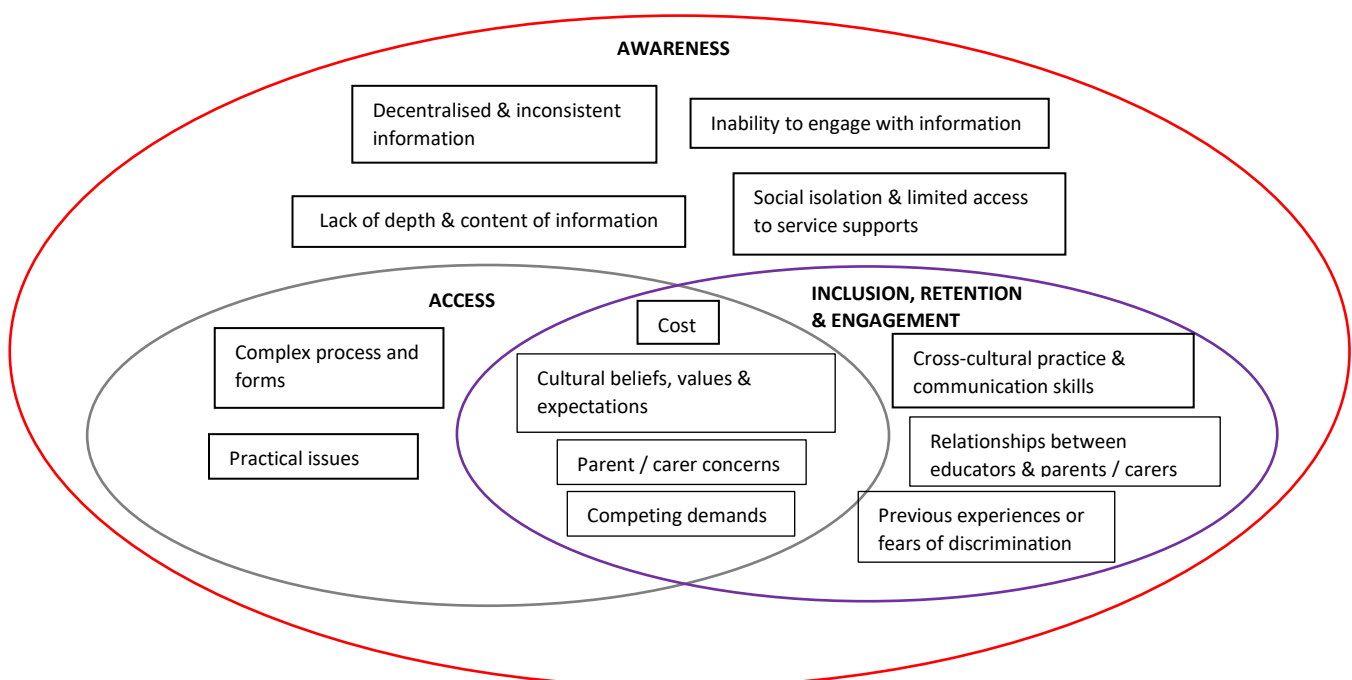
3.1.3. Barriers to ENGAGEMENT, INCLUSION AND RETENTION included:

- Limited **cross-cultural practice and communication skills** displayed by educators
- Limited or poor **relationships between educators and parents / carers**
- Families' **previous experiences or fears of discrimination** influencing participation and limited engagement
- **Cost**– (including actual fees or low awareness about subsidies or prohibitive without subsidy)
- **Cultural beliefs, values and expectations** that differ to the Western beliefs, values and expectations that underpin education in Australia
- **Parent / carer concerns**
- **Competing demands** (including impact of economic participation) such as parental work or study commitments, clashing school start and finish times, younger children requiring care or parents are responding to other challenges associated with resettlement such as instability of housing, settling other children into school, addressing health and mental health challenges etc.

Most participants who had accessed kindergarten reported generally positive experiences. Several participants shared highly negative experiences with specific services, and / or educators. Significant barriers to participants' ability to sustain engagement stemmed from educators having a lack of cross-cultural awareness and skills as well as a lack of positive relationships with parents and/or children. Most participants with little confidence in English raised a very limited ability to communicate with educators to understand their child's learning and experience of kindergarten, and to be able to ask questions or raise concerns. Barriers included challenges communicating across language where there was limited or no access to interpreters and different culturally informed understandings of how learning is thought about and discussed in kindergartens. This presented significant barriers to participants experiencing a positive sense of inclusion and engagement. However, this only impacted negatively on retention issues in a few instances.

The interconnectedness of barriers can be understood through the following:

Figure 1: Barriers across research lenses

The above figure demonstrates not only the interconnectedness between the three **research lenses** of **awareness, access** and **engagement, inclusion and retention**, but also between *barriers* within each area. Illustrative of this, a key theme in the area of **Awareness** – *Decentralised and inconsistent information* – requires parents know kindergarten is something that exists and is an option for their child, understand the value of learning in the early years related to school readiness and future opportunities and know where to access information. The ability to develop this awareness is directly impacted by a second theme – experiences of *Social isolation from and limited access to service supports* – if community members are not well connected to others in their community, where they might hear informally about kindergarten, and / or do not have access to services that are tasked with providing this information, families are less likely to hold an awareness of kindergarten in an Australian context, and are thus unable to make informed decisions about seeking further information. Further, even if minimal awareness exists, families are less likely to be able to actively know where or how to seek this information if experiences of social isolation or disconnection from informal and formal supports is a factor. Finally, if families can access the information, barriers related to the *depth and content of information* and *inability to engage with information* might inhibit comprehension.

Illustrative of further interconnectedness is the relationships between *barriers* across **research lenses.** This can be seen through the influence barriers in **awareness** have in **access**. For example, in **awareness**, families must be able to overcome the barrier to making sense of the, *depth and content of information,* to comprehend not only what kindergarten is and how it might benefit their child but to understand the *complex process and forms* for registration and enrolment. Navigating the *complex process and forms* requires many families to engage support to overcome barriers relating to *inability to engage with information,* including lack of English language, and to

One Arabic speaking Iraqi women's group discussed their confusion when learning of the need to enrol their children in kindergarten up to two years prior to them attending, explaining in Iraq they would have enrolled them on the first day of the kindergarten year, or first day of attendance if starting part way through the year.

make sense of differences in *cultural beliefs, values and expectations* that render Western processes of registration and enrolment culturally unfamiliar. Overcoming these barriers may be further impacted by *practical issues*, such as navigating competing demands and priorities, as well as the issue of transient housing for disadvantaged communities. The latter issue is also applicable to disadvantaged communities more generally.

3.2. ENABLERS

Enablers have been organised in relation to the four functional areas of participants' lives identified above.

3.2.1. Navigating the system

- Provision and ability to engage with information
- Engagement with service supports – such as resettlement services or services focused on supporting children and families

The data revealed *provision of and ability to engage with information* and *Engagement with service supports* as significant components (alongside other enablers) for those community members who overcame barriers of **awareness** and **access.** These enabling factors worked to directly overcome the barriers of *decentralised and inconsistent information*, *lack of depth and content of information*, *ability to engage with information* and *complex processes and forms***.**

3.2.2. Interacting with professionals

- Culturally appropriate practice
- Bridging language and culture
- Positive relationships

High quality and positive **interactions with professionals** arose as a key enabler across the three research lenses with the core components *Bridging language and culture, culturally appropriate practice* and *positive relationships*. These enablers operated in a multitude of ways to support overcoming barriers including the *ability to engage with information,* complete *complex processes and forms,* engage with *cultural beliefs, values and expectations,* understand and respond to *parent / carer concerns,* support *relationships between educators and parents / carers,* support families with *previous experiences or fears of discrimination* and demonstrate the importance of *cross-cultural practice and communication skills.* This is reinforced by the [Department of Health and Human Services' Child Safe Standards](#) which lists the aforementioned as key ingredients to create "cultural safety" for children and parents of CALD backgrounds.

3.2.3. Community Characteristics

- Social connectedness
- Engagement of community and religious leaders
- Cultural value placed on education
- Visible reflections of culture in the environment, or celebrations of cultural diversity

Community characteristics describe the enabling factors that can be harnessed when engaging the strengths within communities. The enablers captured within this description speak to specific community factors, such as *social connectedness* and *cultural value placed on education* that act to reduce the presence of barriers across the three research lenses. The enablers *engagement of community and religious leaders* arose in consultations as most useful in countering barriers to **awareness** and **access.** In the lens of engagement, inclusion and retention, *visible reflections of culture in the environment and celebrations of diversity* as reducing the effects of *previous experiences or fears of discrimination* and towards building positive *relationships between educators and parents / carers.*

3.2.4. Practical realities

- Access to fee subsidies
- Ability to navigate and travel within local community

- English language, or ability to communicate across language

Practical realities speak to those factors that enable greater **awareness, access** and experiences of **engagement, inclusion and retention** in kindergarten. The three key enabling factors to function across the three research lenses include *access to fee subsidies, English language or the ability to communicate across language* and the *ability to navigate and travel within local community*. These enablers act to reduce or overcome the barriers of *cost, parent / carer concerns, competing demands* and *relationship between educators and parents / carers.*

Figure 2: Enablers across research lenses
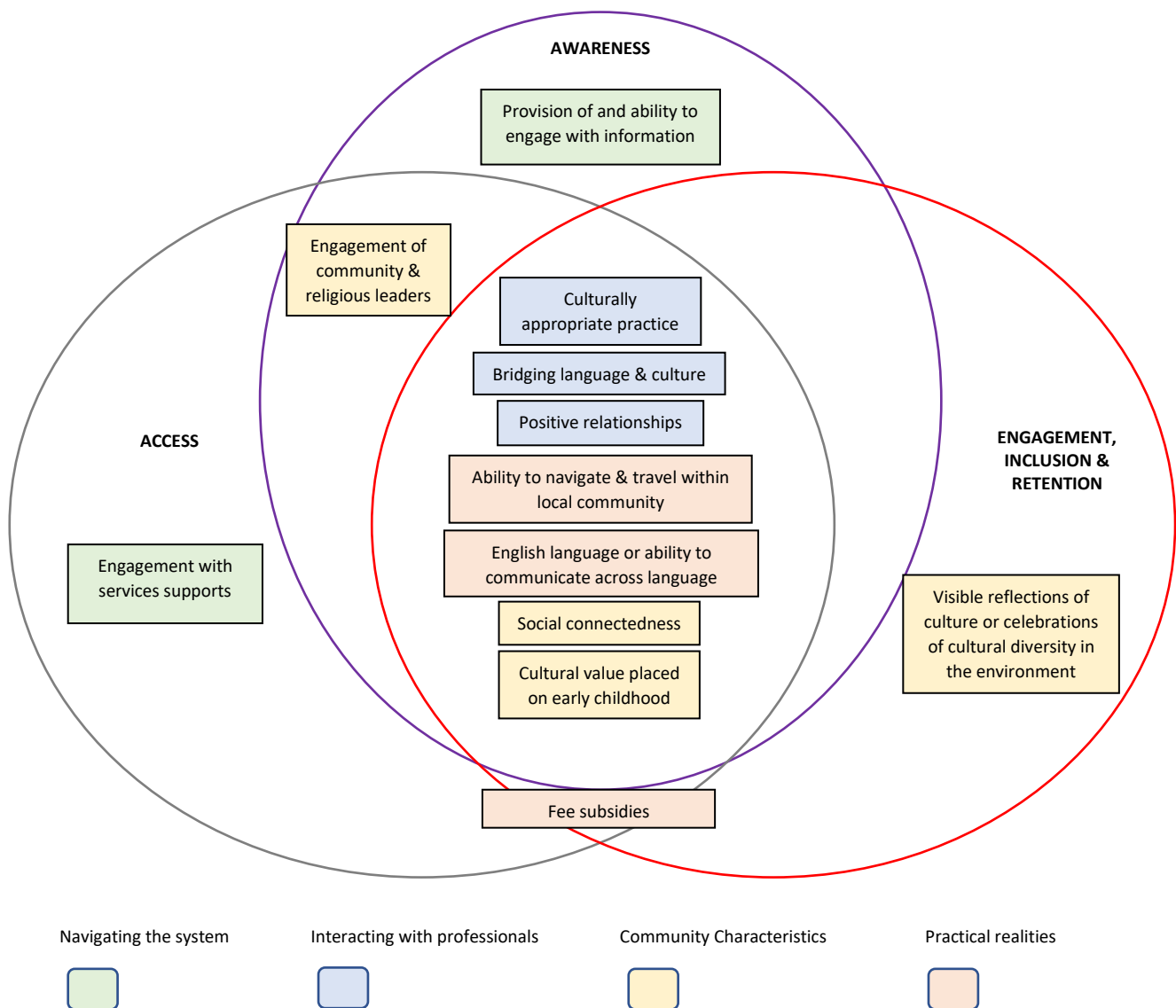
The above figure presents the enabling factors across the three interconnected **research lenses** of **awareness, access** and **engagement, inclusion and retention**. Enablers have been further grouped using colour coding to present their alignment with the four key aspects of community participants experiences of **navigating the system, interacting with professionals, community characteristics and practical realities.** This has the benefits of reduced repetition in presenting the function of these enabling factors as they relate to the barriers identified in the above section and highlights that many

of the enablers sit at the nexus of the three research lenses to support overcoming barriers to all three areas of **awareness, access** and **inclusion, retention and engagement**.

Illustrative of this, the functional enabling area **Interacting with Professionals,** which includes *culturally appropriate practice, bridging language* and *positive relationships* are fundamental in enabling factors for overcoming barriers in all three research lenses - **awareness, access and engagement, inclusion and retention** – and as such are located at the nexus of these three lenses in figure 2.

As an example of how one enabler can function across research lenses and multiple barriers, the enabler *bridging language,* which might include translated information to build awareness; the engagement of bicultural workers, interpreters or multilingual educators during information sessions offering a cultural as well as linguistic translation in addition to building relationship with community members and better enabling parents to ask questions and receive responses to concerns – may address multiple barriers in the lens of **awareness** including *depth and content of information* and the *ability to engage with information*, whilst simultaneously responding to barriers within **access** and **engagement, inclusion and retention**. Demonstrating this, *bridging language* might include support for families to understand, navigate and complete enrolment forms through translated information that explains processes; or the engagement of interpreters / bicultural workers to explain processes and support the completion of forms. It might also include the provision of translated forms, so families understand the information requested, even if they require assistance to then complete the forms in English. All these actions to bridge language barriers would seek to overcome barriers in **access** including *complex process and forms.* Support for families to bridge language barriers to enable increased communication with educators, either via the assistance of interpreters, bicultural workers or multilingual educators would overcome multiple barriers including *parent / carer concerns, relationships between educators and parents / carers,* and would suggest the presence of some *cross-cultural practice and communication skills* in the lens of **engagement, inclusion and retention**.

4. SURPRISING FINDINGS

4.1. High priority placed on multilingualism

Participants across communities, but particularly those from the Arabic speaking and Assyrian-Chaldean communities identified a preference for children to be engage with a Language Other than English (LOTE) at Kindergarten, even if that language was not the child's first language. This preference was shared by families who also hoped their children would develop English language skills at kindergarten, and those families who held concerns about the impact of kindergarten participation on the family's ability to embed children with a strong connection with language and culture prior to attending primary school. This finding reflects the priority placed on multilingual skills for many members of CALD communities, who come from communities where children are naturally raised with multiple languages. Some community participants connected language to engagement with multiculturalism, which they further hoped their children would have opportunities to engage with whilst at kindergarten – building their own cultural knowledge from a young age.

4.2. Low recognition of the universal interpreter symbol

Participants across all four communities identified not recognising the universal interpreter symbol. Many participants were either not aware that they could request an interpreter when in a kindergarten or council office or did not understand that services did not have to pay for these services if they were utilised – leading to some participants hesitating to engage interpreter services for fear of being seen as 'burdensome' or 'ungrateful', reinforcing potentially feared stereotypes of how typically Australian community members may perceive or view members of CALD communities

5 Discussion

This project, commissioned by DET and undertaken by BSL's Diversity Unit, sought to understand the experiences for four newly arrived communities in their attitudes and experiences engaging with funded kindergarten in metropolitan Melbourne. Adopting the families' point of view, the ICALDKE project was to identify why families choose not to engage in funded kindergarten programs, to build an understanding of specific concerns for each community and to identify barriers and enablers to kindergarten use.

"The first years of life lay the foundations for future skills development, well-being and learning.
Early Childhood education and care (ECEC) can improve children's cognitive abilities and socio-emotional development, help create a foundation for lifelong learning, make children's learning outcomes more equitable, reduce poverty, and improve social mobility from generation to generation."
– OECD, 2017. pp.11)

The consensus amongst the literature articulates many gains of kindergarten participation for all children, not just in the early years of childhood but holding positive influence over the course of a child and families' life. Review of the literature identified that where the quality of learning support is high enough, the experience of these gains is greatest for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds including those from CALD and refugee backgrounds (Greenberg et al, 2016; Tayler, 2016). Despite this positive connection between kindergarten services and children's lives, the finding by DET in 2019 which informed the commission of this report, identified cohorts of children, including those from CALD backgrounds, as over-represented amongst those not attending kindergarten in Victoria (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; Hopkins et al. 2017; OECD, 2017; Greenberg, 2016).

Although it is difficult to ascertain exact statistics detailing the participation rates of children from CALD backgrounds, data from the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing "…indicate a different pattern of numbers of children attending preschool for children in refugee-like groups than for Victorian children overall" (Paxton et. al., 2011. pp. 6).

In addition to review of available literature from commensurate contexts, this project consulted approximately 60 participants from each of the Afghan, Assyrian / Chaldean, Arabic speaking (largely Iraqi / Syrian) and Burmese communities by either focus group or individual interview. Consultations were facilitated by BKCE's employed as part of the project team, and who were either from the community themselves or shared language and cultural experiences with community participants.

The project co-ordinator consulted a total of 57 stakeholders across 4 service sectors (local government, CALD / Refugee specific services, Early Childhood Services, Kindergartens) in 19 interviews and 1 network focus group.

A strength of this project is the extent to which it has given voice to the experiences of participating members of the four selected communities – utilising community consultation to inform the basis of qualitative data collection and drawing on a cultural lens to inform the analysis and interpretation. This project, and House's (2016) ECAP project – which offers a strengths-based model of community consultation that seeks to support families to participate in identifying access barriers and solutions, and to increase engagement and retention of refugee families in program initiatives – offers direction to the importance of community partnerships in seeking to address the issues that inhibit CALD community participation in mainstream programs and activities.

Limitations of this study include that recruitment of participants already engaged in activities, such as playgroups that supported growing awareness of kindergarten, may not have fully captured levels of

awareness amongst community members not engaged in formal activities that offered such opportunities. 1:1 interviews sought to counter this limitation however it is difficult to discern how many community members face social isolation or other challenges that prevent participation in kindergartens or indeed in this research. Further, potential limitations exist in the ability for BKCE's to identify and successfully engage members of each community who face significant experiences of social isolation. Thus, this project acknowledges that although individual consultation did focus on engaging with families not well connected with service supports and formal activities, the project will not have captured the experiences of some of those most vulnerable to the effects of social isolation.

Project findings focused on barriers and enablers to kindergarten participation and are largely presented according to overall trends within and across communities. Where community characteristics varied, this has been acknowledged in the narrative. Barriers were arranged according to the three research lenses: 1) Awareness, 2) Access and 3) and Engagement, Inclusion, Retention. However, enablers were arranged according to four functional areas that align to the experiences of community members and which were then mapped across to the three research lenses (see figure 2). This was done because individual enablers were found to counter multiple barriers, and many functioned across multiple research lenses. This organisation of enablers supports a nuanced understanding of how enabling factors do and can be harnessed to function in participants lives (detailed descriptions and examples of the barriers and enablers identified as part of this research can be found in section 3 of this report).

Key overarching barriers to emerge included *information provision*; *language and literacy barriers*; *complicated processes and forms*; *cost*; *parents' concerns*; *competing demands* and *cultural beliefs and knowledge*. *Cross-cultural knowledge and skills* and *relationships with parents / carers, which* speaks to the impact of negative interactions with professionals – both within kindergarten services and the broader service sector (including those responsible for increasing awareness and supporting access to kindergarten) – that lacked cross cultural knowledge and were typified by poor cross-cultural practice, were a further barrier.

There was significant alignment between the barriers identified as part of this project and those highlighted amongst the literature. Barriers identified in the literature are broadly grouped into two categories – those faced by families are captured in the **principle of progressive universality** and **strategies to overcome the barriers of costs, location, social-cultural issues and asymmetrical power relationships**; and those **concerned with the ways Early Childhood Services are funded, organised and provided**.

Barriers captured in the principle of progressive universality highlight the fundamental need to support families and communities to overcome problems meeting basic needs so that they are enabled to engage in higher order activities such as educational programs including kindergarten. This is further captured by Greenberg's considerations of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Within the current project some of these barriers fit under the heading *competing demands* and mirror those in the literature including housing, addressing health and mental health problems, settling older children into school or juggling the needs of younger children, developing confidence navigating local community and using public transport, worry for family overseas, attending English language classes, study and / or finding work and building new community connections.

Greenberg et al. (2016) relates Maslow's Hierarchy of needs to CALD families' ability to engage with Early Childhood Education Services –

"Without being able to address housing and food security, health care, transportation—the parents simply aren't going to be able to prioritize and engage in early learning experiences for their children if they're dealing with much more fundamental sorts of survival issues…They're not thinking about quality settings for the child, not because they don't want to, but because these other things are the priority."
(pp. 9).

The barriers identified in the literature that are **concerned with the ways Early Childhood Services are funded, organised and provided** include structural barriers that stem from the organisation and delivery of kindergarten services. These include and align with barriers identified as part of the current project including *cost*, *complex processes and forms*, *practical* issues including difficulties accessing nearest to home services and inflexible or clashing drop off and pick up times (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Morland, 2016;).

Enabling factors spanned the three research lenses and were arranged according to four functional areas: 1) Navigating the System, 2) Interacting with Professionals, 3) Community Characteristics and 4) Practical Realities.

Organising the enablers within this framework offers additional depth and clarity to their function as they relate to community members' experiences with kindergarten. Simultaneously, this organisation supports the potential application of these enablers in other contexts that seek to improve support or increase access and participation of people of CALD background. This is because the four functional categories, and enablers within, are of relevance in many contexts in which members' of CALD communities are seeking to access programs or support through other institutions and services.

Within this framework the key broad enablers identified as part of this research included *provision and ability to engage with information*; *engagement with service supports*; *bridging language and culture*; *positive relationships*; *culturally appropriate practice*; *social connectedness*; *access to fee subsidies* and *ability to navigate and travel within local community*.

These findings are further reflected in the literature, which for example highlight language and cultural considerations through the utilisation of bicultural / bilingual workers, to overcome specific communication and cultural barriers, as significant in increasing participation of CALD communities in early childhood education programs (Harrison et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2017; House, 2016). The benefits of engaging bicultural workers were a significant finding of the current project and sits within the enabler *bridging language and culture*. Other findings amongst the literature aligned to the project's findings include community outreach awareness raising initiatives that utilised interpreters; interpreter support to complete enrolment forms; community engagement through recruitment of bicultural workers from target communities; the importance of building trust between families and

service providers and of families having support to guide them through registration and enrolment processes (Morland, 2016; Greenberg et al., 2016).

The literature highlighted the importance of greater collaboration between service systems as a key determinant in improving participation rates of newly arrived CALD families in early childhood education programs (Morland, 2016; House, 2016). Examples of beneficial collaborative initiatives include outreach support during resettlement; priority access to high-quality early childhood education programs for refugee families and cross-training activities to build the capacity of collaborating service systems (Morland, 2016). Although these findings, seen as systemic enablers, do not correspond directly with those identified as part of the project consultations, they work with the project findings to inform the recommendations made below.

The recommendations that follow present actionable guidance for DET that harness the enabling factors identified as part of the consultations and review of expert knowledge undertaken for this project. In accordance to this research, the dedicated uptake of recommendations may see greater awareness about kindergarten amongst CALD families – ensuring that parents / carers are resourced to make informed decisions about their child's participation in kindergarten; have greater ability to access kindergarten if they choose to and are better supported to engage, participate and sustain retention. Of course, this needs to be complemented by the systemic and localised levers led by DET, its representatives and educators on the ground, to foster greater inclusion ensuring that participation translates into long-term retention to see kindergarten attendance as a standard tradition normalised in newly arrived communities as it is for most Australian residents.

6. Recommendations

The following is a summary of the broader implications of this research, formulated into **10 recommendations** seeking to harness identified enabling factors in relation to the barriers identified through the **three lenses of the research**. As such, these recommendations have been arranged according to these lenses, while acknowledging practical crossovers between them.

6.1. AWARENESS

6.1.1 DET to provide state-wide high-level information in all main community languages as determined by either DET region or LGA

Provision and publicity for high quality state-wide information covering the benefits of kindergarten, practical information and broad direction on where to access further information. Information should communicate the key foundational benefits of play-based learning in the early years, which school learning scaffolds onto.

Information should be provided in the top 20 community languages relevant to each LGA and not solely rely on recipients holding strong literacy skills in their first language, thus some video or audio formats would be beneficial Multiple methods of disseminating information should be considered including use of social media and trusted community representatives.

Harnessing opportunities for communication via the new Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) would also be beneficial.

6.1.2 Local level co-designed communication strategies and materials for engaging CALD families

Develop at the local level co-designed communication strategies and materials for engaging CALD families. Utilisation of DETs **Kinder Improvement Advisors** could support exploration of how DET can work with community representatives, leaders and early years services to co-design communication strategies relevant to local communities. Funding must include access to NATTI accredited translations to ensure accessibility for CALD community members with low English ability. Further, funding should include capacity for other modes of information delivery as deemed most appropriate through consultations.

6.1.3   Increased development of one-stop hubs in areas of high CALD populations

DET to internally advocate for the increased provision of one-stop hubs in areas of high newly arrived CALD communities, given the alignment to its core objective of maximising engagement in kindergarten.

This research confirmed that centralised access points to early childhood services reduces the barriers to service access that arise from needing to navigate numerous individual services, in unfamiliar locations and navigate complex service systems. Centralisation of services provides the opportunity for families to build relationships and a sense of familiarity with a network of early childhood services and professionals – developing trust and feelings of safety that support families in overcoming other barriers to access; enables families to build awareness over time.

6.2 ACCESS

6.2.1   Support identification of areas with high CALD representation of newly arrived communities to inform local proactive engagement initiatives in relation to kindergarten programs

The Victorian Government should support local planning and engagement with newly arrived communities. DET may use a range of data sources to determine demographics (for example SEHQ and those identified in recommendation 6.1.2). This would better inform local strategic initiatives intended to build awareness of kindergarten and other early childhood services – such as the identification of relevant communities to develop relationships with and engage for co-design and other initiatives that seek to be informed by local community knowledge and expertise; inform language groups that would benefit from translated documents; identification of communities that may benefit from the recruitment and support of bi-cultural workers; planning specific language of culturally specific information sessions etc

6.2.2   To maximise connection to the service system and referrals to 3 and/or 4 year-old-kindergarten from a trusted service provider, ensure access to MCH for all newly arrived children, up to school age, in Victoria.

DET to advocate internally for greater promotion of the importance of the MCH service for newly arrived families and those of refugee background amongst universal, secondary and tertiary support services – ensuring all newly arrived families have the opportunity to build awareness of the MCH service and make informed decisions regarding access.

Secondly, DET to advocate internally for the establishment of an MCH catch up appointment for all newly arrived children to settle in Victoria regardless of whether the child's age aligns to the standard schedule of appointments, ensuring a standard access point and opportunity for early engagement with the MCH service for newly arrived children.

Thirdly, it is recommended that the Victorian Government explore a notification system between MCH and the CRES. Collaboration between these two service systems will further ensure those families wanting to enrol in kindergarten are supported to do so.

6.2.3 Support local community engagement initiatives to build both awareness and access to kindergarten

DET to influence and better target existing funding, such as that provided through DPC's Multicultural Grants programs, supported playgroups etc to ensure events / activities for young families engage newly arrived communities and utilise such opportunities to increase engagement with kindergarten / ECE services. This would involve engaging communities in the locations and events where community members are already attending, and utilising events and activities to disseminate both high-quality state level information (recommendation 6.1.1) and co-designed local level materials (6.1.2), in addition to engaging communities directly through face to face connection.

Such opportunities would also focus on reducing social isolation and promoting community connectedness, including ensuring ease and confidence of navigating the local area. It would involve the celebration of culture and cultural diversity to demonstrate a culturally inclusive and safe environment is a key value of the service.

6.2.4 Support for local level engagement of bicultural community workers to be utilised across early years initiatives and activities

DET should support local level engagement of Bicultural Community Workers to bridge the western models of services provision for CALD communities. Support should allow for flexibility and responsiveness regarding the identification of community groups that would most benefit from support and engagement of bicultural workers in the early years space.

6.2.5   Development of an incremental pro-rata kindergarten subsidy rate to ensure fees payable are not prohibitive for those ineligible to access additional subsidies, including access to a Health Care Card (HCC) but still of lower income

Restructuring of the subsidy scales would mitigate the significant jump in fees currently experienced by families whose income prohibits access to a health care card, or who are of refugee-like background but have navigated non-humanitarian settlement pathways resulting in an inability to access current additional subsidies on the basis of visa type alone. This may mirror the model in place to determine fee subsidies available to support access to childcare through the childcare subsidy. This would increase families' options for kindergarten to include sessional programs, rather than cost determining either non-participation or access only through long day care. Participants raised lengthy waiting lists (not enough services or places) and lack of cultural resonance as reasons they may not access kinder through LDCs.

Further, DET should make explicit in the provision of state-wide information on kindergarten programs, free access to four-year-old kindergarten for children of refugee/asylum seeker families who do not hold Health Care Cards. Such free access and communication of this should be extended to the rollout of the universal three-year-old kindergarten program. Further, DET should ensure all kindergarten services hold full awareness of the available fee subsidies and eligibility criteria to access.

6.3 ENGAGEMENT, INCLUSION AND RETENTION

6.3.1   Provide incentives for the training and employment of people with bicultural / multi lingual experience and expertise, representative of newly arrived and emerging communities, in kindergartens.

Provide incentives for the training and employment of people who bring bicultural lived experience and multi-lingual skills into early childhood services to simultaneously build cultural diversity, ensure a reflection of the local community, and increase cross-cultural capacity within the kindergarten workforce.

Actively encouraging workforce diversity in this context could facilitate greater awareness of existing free TAFE courses. A CALD community engagement strategy to support this may including proactive community outreach to communicate the importance of a culturally diverse workforce. This could include translated materials and images communicating DET's desire to build a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce.

However, further consideration of the barriers to participation of CALD community members in ECE courses at a tertiary level could provide useful direction for the mechanics of incentives. Greater culturally diverse representation amongst early childhood educators at a kindergarten level will both facilitate greater capacity for CALD families to communicate, engage and participate in kindergarten and other activities, whilst simultaneously ensuring greater knowledge and expertise inform the celebration of the multilingual and culturally diverse fabric of the broader Victorian community. Further, greater participation of CALD community members within the workforce of early childhood educators subtly combats perceptions of early childhood activities existing primarily for children of European Australian heritage or others who possess English language skills.

6.3.2 **A discussion to be held between DET and other relevant bodies such as the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) or relevant TAFE and RTO coordinators and the researcher to discuss implications of this research for pre-service training courses and continuing education.**

Support project learnings as a platform for advocacy with pre-service training institutions and to support teachers to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to engage with and include children and families from CALD backgrounds.

Utilising project findings to inform best practice curriculum for training organisations is one way these learnings might be utilised to ensure newly practicing educators are equipped to confidently implement and work towards the expectations outlined in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) – particularly in relation to the integrated set of practice principles and outcomes, many of which relate to engagement with culture, communication and identity. The identification of individual staff KPIs to address the VEYLDF might ensure a higher take up rate of items such as Cross-Cultural Training from the School Readiness Funding (SRF) menu.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to explore access to kindergarten for CALD communities through a literature review and original research with four target CALD communities in Melbourne. The literature review confirmed the importance and value of all children attending kindergarten, with some particular additional value to children and their families from CALD backgrounds. It also identified lower participation rates and significant barrier to access for these communities.

The original research provides a rich example of the barriers and enablers experienced by four local CALD communities from none-English speaking backgrounds in Melbourne, identified in the broader literature. The insights generated by the research provide important ways forward to systemically reducing barriers and improving participation rates to these high needs groups.

These children are an important part of our nation's future and we need to invest in them to ensure they have the best start in life.

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