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no. 42 ‘Everybody has settled in so well’: How migrants make connections and build social capital in Geelong

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‘Everybody has settled in so well’: How migrants make connections and build social capital in Geelong

ABSTRACT

Australian and Victorian Government policies encourage settlement in regional areas for international migrants, refugees and internal migrants. Migrants to regional areas are diverse in terms of their area or country of origin, skills and occupation, family status and other demographic characteristics. The regional cities to which they migrate are also varied in terms of their community resources, social and cultural capital. The objective shared by all of these cities is for migrants to engage successfully with their new communities. Just how this occurs is the subject of debate and a lack of clarity. This therefore calls for a sound, theoretically informed understanding of how employers and community groups (formal and informal) can effectively assist migrants to make social connections in regional cities, and practical strategies which respond to these insights. The well-established social determinants of health tell us that the more socially included, connected and stable workforce and their families are, the better will be their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

People in Australia generally move to live near family and friends; for better access to work or work opportunities; or to live in an attractive neighbourhood. Policies and programs intended to assist with settlement tend to be short term and project based. Good practice in assisting migrants make social connections however is long term and embedded into the community. Workplaces and community groups that are already established, and groups that migrants or others tend to form naturally, are good examples of such best practice. Workplaces, local government, institutions such as schools, community spaces and other organisations can also assist in the settling in process and can complement formal
and informal community groups, once a sound evidence base is established.

This is the second paper to emerge from a research project running over 2011-2012 at the Alfred Deakin Research Institute (ADRI), Deakin University in Geelong. The first Working Paper (No. 32) (Jackson et al., 2012) located the research theoretically. This second Working Paper will report on the research itself, its methods and outcomes as well as policy implications. The first section of this paper will briefly outline the project before considering those who have migrated to Geelong in the past two to five years: to investigate why they moved to Geelong; how they made connections and with whom; and, what was the value of those connections (Section 2). The third section of the paper examines how employers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and other facilitators effectively assist migrants to make social connections. The fourth and fifth sections look at the barriers to making connections but also those things – organisation and policies - that facilitated settling in. Section six summarises the findings and makes a series of policy recommendations for individuals, organisations and government on how to better the prospects for migrant in regional centres.

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The Making Connections Study

1.1 Purpose and aims of this study

The theoretical background for this study (see Jackson et al., 2012) illustrates that a strong correlation exists between how people make social connections and their health and wellbeing (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Ziersch et al. 2005; Caperchione et al. 2008; Stephens 2008; Berry & Shipley 2009; Umberson & Montez 2010; Zhao et al. 2010). Many new migrants, and particularly their families, lack social networks in their new location (McMichael & Manderson 2004; Le & Kilpatrick 2008; Zhao et al. 2010; Kilpatrick et al. 2011); but those with stronger social connections are healthier and are more likely to remain in their new location. Formation of a primary social contract has been identified as the joint responsibility of communities and migrants (Kilpatrick, 2011), and understanding this process is key to understanding the nature and quality of social connection. Social and cultural capital underpins the process (Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008).

The purpose of the Making Connections project was to investigate how the concept of social capital can be used to analyse how migrants moving to the regional city of Geelong make social connections. This information is vital to those who wish to foster a stable regional workforce and community in places like Geelong. This research project was conceived as a pilot investigation which would contribute towards understanding some of the issues associated with regional migration. It describes how a sound, theoretically informed understanding of social capital can assist employers and community groups (formal and informal) to effectively assist migrants to make social connections in regional cities.

This research project investigated the self-identified social and cultural capital of those who have migrated to Geelong from 2007 to 2010 and who therefore have had some time to become established and connected. The aims of the project were to:

- investigate policies and practices that assist migrant workers and their families make social connections in their new location.
- identify other ‘connection points’ and ‘connecting’ groups that assist migrants make social connections.
- identify the features of strategies and practices used by migrants, connection points and connecting groups that are effective in assisting migrants to make social connections, and lead to positive health and wellbeing, employment, or other outcomes for migrants and their families.
- determine the intersection of the practices and strategies used by migrants to make successful connections in their new city and those of the groups with which they connect, or the process of formation of the primary social contract.

The project focused on migrants from three subgroups: international migrants; rural/regional migrants; and migrants from Melbourne. Initially, a number of groups and organisations (‘bridging’ groups) were identified as likely to provide a leadership role in welcoming newcomers to Geelong. These groups of organisations ‘bridge’ connections between people who are different as well as to institutions of power. These groups included Diversitat, Committee for Geelong—Leaders for Geelong Program, Skilled Migration Program (City of Greater Geelong), the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and the Geelong English Language Centre (GELC) New Arrivals Program.

1.2 Design and methods

This section presents an overview of the Making Connections study, including background information on Geelong, in Victoria, Australia and why Geelong was chosen for this study. The final sections outline the methodological approach, sampling strategy, participants and procedures.

Approval to conduct this study was gained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Deakin University (2011-191).

This research project, conducted over 2011-2012, grew out of a shared interest in migration issues by scholars from a range of disciplines – international development, migrant health, demography, human geography, sociology and anthropology – at the Alfred Deakin Research Institute (ADRI), Deakin University in Geelong. The project combines these approaches to explore the ways in which migrants to Geelong forge social connections, with a particular
focus on workplace initiatives that grow social capital.

The project adopted a structured qualitative methodology consistent with the exploratory nature of the research. The theoretical foundations of qualitative methodology are based on the belief that human actions are the basis of social meanings which people attribute to and bring to situations, and that behaviour is not 'caused' in any mechanical way, but is continually constructed and reconstructed on the basis of people's interpretations of the situations they are in (Punch 2005:151).

The overall approach to the research was informed by a constructivist paradigm predominantly using qualitative methods such as interviews, observation and document reviews. Qualitative researchers 'place the interpretative process at the centre of their practice. The interpretative process refers to the way that people interpret and give meaning to events and things' (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005:4).

Interview questions were written with a number of prompts to 'capture lived experiences of the social world and the meanings people give these experiences from their own perspectives' (Corti & Thompson 2004:326). Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews with the two groups of participants: migrants to Geelong and representatives from key community and/or other organisations ('bridging' groups) that assist migrants to locate social connection opportunities, or 'connection points'. It was originally proposed to conduct focus groups with organisational representatives but due to work patterns and availability, it was determined that individual interviews would be more appropriate and effective. Additional background data on migrants was collected using written participant checklists, and included age, family status, household status, ancestry, education and employment.

Migrants were asked initial questions about why they moved to Geelong, how they had made connections after the move and the value of those connections. Organisational representatives were asked questions about the role of the organisation, whether the organisation had a deliberate policy for connecting with newcomers, what the organisation valued in newcomers and what outcomes were apparent for newcomers to Geelong from the activities of the organisation. In the interest of anonymity, respondents are only identified by number throughout this Working Paper, that is, Participant No. 1 becomes P1, P2, P3 etc. If they were members of a group interview they are identified as GI1, GI2, GI3 etc. Bridging Group interviews are identified BG1, BG2 etc. Direct quotes are used along with brief case studies, which appear as boxes to highlight the complexity and richness of individual stories.

What the qualitative research aimed to explore is how outsiders are incorporated into the Geelong community and how policy makers, community groups and planners work to effect connections between bonding and bridging groups. A key research question was how policy, programs and organisations support and foster bridging group formation and bridging activities through their policy and resources.

This exploratory scale study acknowledges that there are some migrants who do not participate in groups, either through choice or because they lack suitable opportunities and may be socially isolated. By targeting workplaces we hoped to identify both those migrants who are involved with community groups as well as those who are not. This means that a limitation of the study has been that most migrant participants were recruited through bridging organisations—this meant people who migrated to Geelong without these connections were excluded. These limitations in the sampling process as well as the small scale of the sample – of both migrants and the bridging organisations – mean that this account does not have statistical validity. However, because of its small scale and use of qualitative methods, the various experiences and insights which emerge still have real implications for policy and practice in this and other regional centres.

1.3  Context: The City of Greater Geelong

Geelong is the largest provincial city in Victoria, located 75km south west of Melbourne. In 2010, the estimated population of the local government area, the City of Greater Geelong, was 220,068, representing a 1.7% growth rate from the previous year (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). Almost 16 per cent (15.8%) of the population were born overseas, and 9.2% were from a non-English speaking background.

Geelong’s 93,493 multi-skilled labour force is predominantly concentrated in manufacturing (15,505 persons or 13.5%), retail trade (14,887 persons or 13.0%), health care and social assistance (13,228 persons or 11.6%), construction (10,249 or 9.0%) and education (7,342
persons or 8.6%) (City of Greater Geelong 2011).

Given the focus on regional development at federal, state and local government, regional cities such as Geelong 'have the capacity to accommodate an increased share of the state’s growing population' (Regional Cities Victoria 2009:86) but also need improved infrastructure and resources to support this growth.

1.4 Participants and sampling

The identification of participants was a key recruitment strategy. Organisations that employ or have initial contact with migrants new to Geelong were the site of first contact (see Appendix 1).

Representatives from these organisations were approached and asked to invite workers or clients who have moved to Geelong in the last 2-5 years to contact the Making Connections research assistant directly. Key informants were contacted either through internal newsletters of organisations or by placing flyers on notice boards. Key informants also assisted in recruiting other migrants to the study.

The first stage of the project identified members of three migrant categories who had moved to Geelong: those from overseas (n = 13), those from Melbourne (n = 3), and those who have migrated from other rural and regional Australian areas (n = 4). Of the total number of migrants interviewed (n=20), women were slightly overrepresented (n=12). Participants were aged between 18 and 65:

- Age 18-25 n=2
- Age 26-35 n=4
- Age 36-45 n=7
- Age 46-55 n=6
- Age 56-65 n=1

Most participants chose to move to Geelong for employment or lifestyle reasons. The exception was the case of refugees who had been ‘sent’ to Geelong by the Federal Department of Immigrant and Citizenship. Most participants were in full-time employment—except the refugees, most of whom were attending English language classes at Diversitat. One participant was actively looking for work and another was interested in changing jobs but had not had success in finding other employment.

The data source for organisations was individual interviews with representatives from the various bodies who migrants identified as effective in assisting them to become socially connected—'bridging' groups. Individuals were also contacted from a local primary school and two churches in Geelong that were identified by migrants during interviews. Other organisations contacted were the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, the Marketing Department of the City of Greater Geelong, and Deakin University.

1.5 Analysis

With participants' permission, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were entered into NVivo9© and coded by the research assistant of the project team with coding reliability checked regularly by other members of the team (Babbie 2010). Categories or themes were shaped from the data and also from the research questions that guided the study, as well as themes from the literature. Qualitative analysis is a process of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification occurring concurrently (Miles & Huberman 1994).

What follows then is the analysis of these interviews, firstly with migrants around a series of core questions:

- Why did respondents move to Geelong?
- How did they make connections once they were in Geelong?
- What was the value of those connections?
- What facilitated and what acted as barriers to making connections?

Secondly, the Working Paper focuses on those bridging sites – organisations and programs – which might be expected to be crucial in making connections. We asked of them:
- What was their policy towards newcomers?
- Did they facilitate the making of connections with new employees and how did this occur?

Finally, the Working Paper considers the lessons that emerge from this experience for others, in policy and organisational terms.

**Results: Why people move to Geelong and how they make connections**

**2.1 Migrants moving to Geelong – Why?**

Most of the migrants were motivated to move to Geelong for family or work reasons. Tied in with this was a sense of ‘choosing’ Geelong because the lifestyle or ‘place’ appealed to them. However, refugee migrants did not ‘choose’ to move to Geelong but were ‘settled’ by the Australian Government’s Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

A small number of the migrants had been to Geelong before or knew of people who lived in Geelong prior to their arrival. Some of the international migrants on the skilled migration program had done research on Australia and ‘realised Geelong was considered regional’ (P4)—moving to a regional area was a condition of the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) program for a Skilled - Regional (subclass 887) visa. To illustrate:

Well my mother used to live here way back in the 60’s. That’s all I really knew about it. My husband has lived in Melbourne before so he’s a Victorian boy. So I guess the only information that we really had, beforehand, was just what we could gather from the internet. We have to choose somewhere to live; we have to live somewhere … (P11).

Oh I’ve got a daughter that lives in Geelong, I love Geelong. We’ve always travelled here for holidays...We had planned when I retired to move to Geelong, so it has just brought the process forward about ten years, twelve years... (P12).

...I Googled the area and I knew the Falls Festival went on in Lorne – so that was great, that was kind of like there were things happening in the area that we would be interested in. And my partner’s a surfer, so I knew that the surf was really good because they have the Rip Curl Classic at Bells Beach and that wasn’t far from where we had bought. And that’s all we really cared about at that time (P13).

I only knew it in terms of professionally...because I used to stay overnight at least once a week for most of the year I knew – and only little pockets, only a couple of places to stay, a couple of places to eat – but for me, probably next to nothing about its history or what it offered...I’d heard a range of opinions about Geelong: that it was a town to avoid, it was rough. The media portrayal was quite bad in terms of the violence. Then on the flip side you’ve got its proximity to some of the most beautiful coastline. So no, I didn’t actually know much about it. For me it was just, it was a city...the only research I did was in terms of asking a few people which areas I should live, and which to avoid, because I didn’t want to wind up in a sort of ghetto area or a market that was too high. And that was about all the research I did (P14).

A number of the migrants from Melbourne moved to Geelong when the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) was relocated by the Victorian State Government. TAC staff who moved from Melbourne were offered generous relocation packages. Although not all staff took up the offer, those interviewed who did stated how ‘lucky’ they were and how grateful they were for the financial assistance. Two people interviewed who work for the TAC were not part of this relocation but either moved to Geelong after obtaining work or applied after they moved. One moved from Warrnambool, on the south-western coast of Victoria, and another person moved from Perth.

Another participant wanted to stop commuting from Warrnambool every week, as part of her job was based in Geelong. For another person, moving from regional Victoria to Geelong enabled her to find work in a place where ‘they really look after their staff’ unlike her previous place of employment where they would find ‘someone to replace you, or don’t bother’ (P14).

For a number of people with families, Geelong offered somewhere that was less busy than Melbourne and somewhere that was perceived to be safer and a better place to raise children. People were seeking a lifestyle that offered opportunities for surfing, fishing, being ‘near the water, near the bush and the Otways and the vineyards’ (P9), or looking for a home base after years of travelling and finding somewhere that allowed the family to be near events such as the Falls Festival, surf beaches, and in one case near her parents ‘who had just bought a dairy farm’ (P13). For others, the housing in Geelong is ‘more affordable’ as people ‘can pay half of
what I would pay in Melbourne’ (P9). Affordable housing was mentioned by many migrants. Being close to good churches was important too, and ‘Geelong has lots of choices’ (P11).

The importance of Geelong as a locality is consistent with findings by Adams and Hess who note that ‘both the social capital literature and community strengthening practices [are] central enabling conditions for addressing complex social issues’ (Adams & Hess 2010:141-2). One participant described Geelong as beautiful and lovely—it’s still ‘country but it offered everything’ (P1). Geelong was a stark contrast to the place this person moved from, where the negative social connections were ‘almost what drove you out’.

The sense that Geelong was a ‘nice place to live’ and that Melbourne was too big was a common theme. Another participant thought it would be a good place to retire because a family member was in Melbourne; it’s near the water and close to Melbourne. And ‘walking to work every morning is wonderful’ (P9). Geelong as a place attracted people who want to surf and fish because of its location close to Bell’s Beach and to lots of fishing spots. One international migrant who came on a skilled migration visa did not do much research but knew the family had to live and work in regional Victoria. They did little research and so it was ‘a little like blindfolded sticking a pin in the board’ (P2) and finding that Geelong was an hour from Melbourne:

And then all of a sudden we happened to – we were looking with some friends at Google Earth and we saw Geelong, and we saw the waterfront in Geelong and we thought, wow that looks a pretty awesome place, and we saw the swimming enclosure. And we realised that Geelong was . . . outside of Melbourne, and therefore that would mean that there perhaps would be more opportunities in terms of work for us, and decided that we would come here (P2).

Other international migrants who were refugees spoke about not having a choice where they would live once they had been offered resettlement in Australia.

On the form they say where to apply, which country first, you can say Australia country and we all apply here, but we don’t know what State or which suburb we are going to live, we are not sure (GI1)

Oh I ask here, I have my friend in Perth so I think you will drive me to Perth but he said no worry, we are sending in Geelong. There are many Karenni in Geelong, the same as you (GI2).

Migrants to Geelong moved to increase their employment opportunities and to seek a better lifestyle. These reasons were discussed by Greenwood (1997) and Matthews et al. (2009) and were also among the most common reasons people in Victoria move: being able to live near family and/or friends (23%); better access to or prospect of work (20%); and the desire for an attractive neighbourhood (19%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

2.2 How migrants make connections in Geelong?

How then do migrants make connections in Geelong? Who facilitates connections at the individual or organisational level? This section considers migrants’ new friends or acquaintances: how they had gone about making these contacts; how ‘strong’ they thought the connections were and if there were organisations, people or places that helped make the connections. The findings show that some migrants immediately decided to just ‘get on with it’ and actively sought out people and activities to meet and become involved with. Others described how they met people at work, through the church or involvement in other activities. Representatives from bridging groups were also asked what role the organisation played in connecting with people who had moved to Geelong and how they saw the value of the connections.

Many newcomers to Geelong started by actively driving around the neighbourhood, beginning with a reference point like the supermarket or the street where they lived and spreading out. It was important to get ‘tourist maps [that] normally have supermarkets and post offices and all that sort of stuff... and do a lot of walking for the first couple of weeks’ (P9), or to drive ‘around the city (deliberately) a lot going exploring and finding new places’ (P11).

These are the things ‘you have to learn for yourself. Even if you have to use public means, the bus. Sometimes maybe you get on the wrong bus which takes you somewhere else, then you learn from that’ (P8). Another newcomer noted that:

... you actually have to go out and seek it, it doesn’t kind of—it’s not advertised like it is in Melbourne. But is here if you look for it... Like I’m looking for a physio at the moment, and I keep forgetting but I’m going to ask them [at work]. And I guess I’m a bit sort of – I’ll make up my own mind what is a good shopping centre because I’ll go and look and check it all out myself (P9).
Some newcomers felt that they weren’t the type of person to initiate connections but if there are invitations to business events, seminars or other social events then they will go to meet people. This was really more about ‘networking than forming friendships, but I’ve found that those have been really valuable and I’ve met a lot of people through just attending the things like that’ (P13).

P13 also found that having children helped her and her husband make new connections:

So as soon as we had kids then we couldn’t believe all the people that we were meeting, because we were play-grouping and mothers-grouping – and they were the key. It was amazing. And from having kids was when our connections have started; yeah before that we – and I think that was what helped us to settle, was finding those connections through the kids more than anything else (P13).

These new connections through the children had also led P13’s husband to meet other dads who led him to being involved with a:

… group of guys who get together for mountain biking and beers round the fire every Thursday night. So it’s like the Men’s Shed. And I’ve seen such a huge change in him since he’s been involved in that, and I think it’s more that he got a group of guys – I don’t know what goes on, on Thursday nights; I don’t ask. But a group of guys to just de-stress with (P13).

P12 described herself as not being a really social person, yet she was open to meeting the neighbours, sharing lemons over the back fence, chatting to people in the shops and coffee shops and going to places such as Centre of Excellence which runs hair and beauty training courses on Yarra Street, Geelong so she could help the students in training by being a model and letting them cut her hair ‘anyway they liked’. She sought out tourist information to find out what was happening.

P14 did not want her employer to assist with her move to Geelong as she thought it important to keep the work and private life separate. But one of her work colleagues was wonderful in terms of providing support. ‘It was she that helped me set up house and she was really that contact point when I first moved here. And probably without her support it would have been a heck of a lot harder. Yeah, so for that first eight week period she was sort of my main focus outside of work’. P14 recalled how she had started making forays into a social group and ‘started attending coffee nights and making friends through there’ after about eight weeks. She had not yet made any other connections except to join a gym where she is known by name because she goes every day. ‘So I’ve really only made friends in a couple of areas. But for me that’s enough at the moment, and the rest will just happen’ (P14).

P6 explained she ran her own business and did not have time to socialise outside of work, except with her children. She spent time with them, sometimes going to the beach to play and get some exercise. However, most of her socialising came through her neighbours and customers who were ‘very nice’, especially one of the close neighbours who helped with English language and others who gave advice about what school to send the children and so on:

They understand so well. When we come … and speak English, we have problem for speak English but then we still try to speak to them, they correct, and that’s how we learn from them too. I learn a lot from customers … I’ve got nice customers. I treat them as my family so they very beautiful. They treat me as their family member either, so I’ve got nice neighbour, nice customer – they all so nice so I never feel lonely (P6).

2.3 Value of connections – to themselves

The value of connections was personal but also spilled over into the community, ensuring that new migrants intended to stay and actively contribute. When migrants were asked if they intended to stay in Geelong, some migrants were certain they would retire in Geelong while others were more circumspect. Connecting with others was a factor for some on whether they would stay or move:

We think so, but we’ll never say never. Sometimes I think I might want to go and live somewhere a bit warmer, but with that comes all sorts of other things: insects and such like. … really likes it here because of the change of the seasons, and I also think that if we are going to move we ought to have done it sooner rather than later … So weighing all of that up I would probably say, yeah the connections that we’ve made here have meant that we have more of a tie here, whereas if we hadn’t have made those connections and people hadn’t have been so kind to us and we hadn’t been as involved then it would be so much easier just to walk away. So I would definitely say that that is a very, very big factor for us to stay in Geelong (P2).
It was my wish to stay here. But sometimes my family, when they’re looking for the food and everything we need, we have to travel to Melbourne to buy everything there. But I think it’s a good place, it’s a good place I think . . . . I can stay here in Geelong. It’s a nice place (GI1).

It’s that same kind of thing, that feeling of permanency. ‘Cause it asks are you here to stay in Geelong? It’s that question that a lot of people are and it seems to be really important, are you here to stay to that sort of like sets the tone of the friendships … It was quite surprising, it had a huge impact on my husband, and he just loves it. So just, of course, it then has had an impact on how I’ve looked for work … and I guess if it hadn’t been that everybody has settled in so well, and made stronger friendships then they have had for years and years, I might have been tempted to say let’s move somewhere else, like Colac or wherever if I can get a job here. But now I’m just, there are more important things then money so I’m just very reluctant to go down that way [to move again] (P11).

For the Karen and Karenni community there was a sense that they were quite well established in the Geelong region compared to other groups such as the Sudanese who felt quite isolated in Warrnambool—so ‘for the first wave it must be really difficult’:

I’m thinking too of the people, the Sudanese people coming to Colac, a lot of them then went to Melbourne. Some stayed and I don’t know—it would be interesting to find out how many came, how many stayed, how many went on. That would be really interesting. But they had a big support in Colac and the community was behind them, but still some people went to Melbourne because it was a lot easier than being in Colac (BG1).

Some respondents on Skilled Migrant Visas felt it was difficult to find employment in regional areas despite the support offered through the Skilled Migration Program. For example, P13 discussed the difficulties she had as a new migrant seeking assistance with recruitment and finding a professional job.

Being able to find another job was echoed by P4 who took six months to find his first fulltime job in an area he was qualified in. However, he has been unsuccessful in finding another job.

In contrast to those who can’t find work in Geelong, employer groups argue that it can be hard to fill skilled vacancies, especially for some of the more senior roles such as lawyers for the TAC or town planners, maternal health nurses and truck drivers with the City of Greater Geelong. However, there are some opportunities for people at senior levels to find employment through Deakin University, Barwon Health and numerous accounting and legal firms in Geelong.

2.4 The value of newcomers to Geelong

GELC employs three Multicultural Aides who were also interviewed for this project. The value of Multicultural Aides, in addition to their employment skills, is that they bring all their experience and their culture, family, music, food—all that sort of thing which we try to acknowledge’ (see also Box 1). But these people also make a ‘huge impact’ on a particular school:

A school out in the northern part of Geelong that was considered a particularly difficult school with behavioural problems with the students enrolled there. When – can I say a particular cultural group? When the Karen came, because they’re very mild mannered, they’re very well behaved, they’re very respectful; it actually changed the culture in the school. The kids that were already enrolled there thought, you know these kids are very polite, they’re very quiet, they do their work. Just from an education point of view I’m talking about – just their behaviour really changed the culture in that school (BG1).

So the Multicultural Aides bring cultural diversity, but that is really only something on the ‘surface’. There are other connections which are far more profound:

But it’s those sorts of impacts that are the day to day impact on the kids around them that have a lot of difference to the community. And I think in that school as well, because there was a large group of students, the students of course take home their friend from school. And it was really evident that when a Karen student went home with a friend that the whole family went, “Oh they are a kid. They’re no different to anybody else: they’re a kid.” So those barriers were broken down, because they were just like any kid. You know they weren’t different, “Oh yeah, they’re just like me.” So I think that, actually breaking down those barriers without making it tokenistic, it was just those really basic things that really had a big impact (BG1).

The principal from a Geelong primary school described how there was ‘a very narrow view and a bit of intolerance’ when migrants moved to Geelong but that now there is a greater
acceptance and broader recognition that ‘these people have got something valuable to offer us’. While there was acknowledgment that the school probably did not recognise the skills of newcomers, sometimes this was because parents did not have the time or had different views of how schools worked.

The Skilled Migration Program is very employer focused—so that the people who migrate to Geelong are bringing their skills; from being a ‘specialist mechanic, boilermaker to very high level sort of specialist or GP, or engineer’. In a number of examples people have been involved in adopting a ‘new international practice for some sort of system and the employer has been able to benefit from someone who has had practical experience’.

For the Chamber of Commerce, newcomers have brought ‘some very innovative businesses’, ideas and suggestions:

Some have been quite supportive of the Chamber and offered their services and assistance to the Chamber as well. For instance in social media or those sorts of areas where they may have some expertise and perhaps they’ve volunteered to provide something on a contra basis to the Chamber … I think a lot of the businesses that are coming to Geelong, we are noticing that many are innovative, creative kinds of businesses … An example of that was last year we ran a number of Q and A sessions, workshops, seminars and so forth and we had members who volunteered their time and their expertise to present at some of these sessions. They were on topics like marketing, retail, social media, finance and risk management and we also ran some networking events. So there was a diverse range of subjects and topics that were presented and delivered by those members (BG3).

Some of the new staff at Deakin University have ‘a really good synergy together’ and are starting a book club and a theatre club. ‘They’ve just built up that connection together and developing these things outside of work. So it depends on the individuals’ (BG10).

**So explore that a little bit more with the communities. How do they want to connect? Like we had the, I think it was – I think it was just beautiful – I think they’re called Geelong Music Group. They’ve been having a camp … for thirty years. And one of them decided that they would like to invite a couple of the refugee families to go along. And so a couple of the Congolese families went, so it was about fifteen or sixteen people I think. And they camped in tents, and cooked over the fire … They had workshops of musical instruments, they danced. And the Congolese said it was the best time in their life. First of all it was overwhelming because I think there’s about three hundred people that go. But once the Congolese on the Saturday night got up and danced, and there were I think about eleven – sixteen of them I think – that was the thing that broke the ice, of dancing with people and showing their skill and their ability. They were there for I think three nights, and next year those two families have been invited back again because they know how the camp works and operates.

But all the families I think have got now ukuleles, and there’s one or two people from that camp that are coming in and teaching the kids how to play the ukuleles. And they will go back next year. So you sort of think of the richness of that. And just because somebody actually thought, oh wouldn’t be great to have one of the new arrivals and show them this side of Australian life, of camping in the bush. And things that they also recognised themselves that are innate, you know about where they’ve come from. It’s like, “Oh. So we don’t just do everything that Home Away and Neighbours do.”**

**Box 1: Geelong English Language Centre**

### 2.5 Migrant assistance

A number of participants felt it was important to assist other migrants new to Geelong. One participant felt that more people would stay in Geelong if the funding and resources were there to assist them better. She described other couples who moved out of Geelong and one person who went back home because they could not make connections in Geelong…’so I don’t really realise how difficult perhaps it is to crack that inner circle’…

Some you win and some you lose. There was another guy that came over from England, and he was on his own and really low so I would invite him to come around for dinners and stuff like that. Eventually it didn’t work out for him in Geelong so he went up to Mornington and they’re living up there now. So sometimes people want your help, and sometimes people don’t. So you’ve just got to accept that really (P1).
So that’s how I – sorry I’m rambling a bit - but that’s the long way round of saying that’s how I got involved with the skilled migration program … from my perspective it would have been really good, and I can see that it would have been really good to have been met by someone, to have been greeted at the airport maybe and taken to a nice place to stay. And met the following day and taken down the waterfront (P1).

And one of the things that I did … like if you were a newly arrived skilled migrant I’d get half a dozen coffee vouchers from the economic development unit and I’d say, “Right, I’m coming to take you out for a coffee.” So we’d go to Mr Hyde’s, and so therefore I’m not out of pocket if I’m always having to have coffee with people, and a chat and such like. And that seems to have worked quite well (P1).

On the other hand being self-sufficient was important for some participants.

There’s so much there the Council put out there, like the newspaper, the free “Independent”; the Market Square Information Centre, the Tourist Bureau. It’s about helping yourself; you don’t get anything on a platter. There’s no so thing as a free lunch, you’ve got to work a bit for it. But there’s information if you want it. If you go on the Geelong website there’s so much information there. It’s using your resources, because they’re brilliant resources if you want to use them (P12).

And I’m not sure how you – other than putting yourself out there – how you do that. (P14).

But all of that said we really wanted to be here, and we were really keen and we were motivated. I do know for all of the 50% of people that that applies to there are another 50% who really are quite apathetic about the whole situation… (P2).

I suppose the only other thing is, from different feedback of people who have made the move, is you need to make more of an effort, as in the person moving to Geelong (P5).

Yeah. So everything is not on your doorstep, there aren’t five beauty salons at the end of your street. You know what I mean, like you need to seek the information yourself. And I suppose that’s, you know for Geelong – yeah, if there’s any way to potential like any resources. And I think most people are on line, and you search in and those sort of things (P5).

Participant 8 also thought it was best to find things out for yourself:

Because when you ask too many questions you will learn slowly; but when you discover yourself then you keep asking a few things, you learn faster…So is better for you to have maybe one location. If you know it properly then you spread your wings quite easily…. But you can’t ask all those – you can’t, you have to learn it yourself. Even if you have to use public means, the bus. Sometimes maybe you get on the wrong bus which takes you somewhere else, then you learn from that … So you may advise somebody, “You come to Geelong.” And when he comes to Geelong he finds a different story. So somebody needs to . . . . the expectations properly. Otherwise they say, “Oh but you are the one that invites me to come.” But sometimes also we not know much. But generally somebody can just come and discover – if you don’t find what you need there you move on. I think that would be the only bit of advice. Come . . . . if you don’t get it then keep trying (P8).

Effective integration of people relies on their ability to tap into existing community networks and on the ability and willingness of communities to assist them (Honczarov et al. 2003; Hall et al. 2007; Hallaitken 2007; Kilpatrick et al. 2011). For this reason, Ryan (2011), argues ‘that more attention is needed to the ways in which migrants access, maintain and construct different types of networks, in varied social locations, with diverse people’ (2011:707).

A number of migrants indicated that there were things that they thought would have assisted them, or would assist others to make new connections in Geelong. Initially, some people needed assistance with ‘all of the criteria that we needed to assess’ (P2) and in particular, would benefit from the opportunity to talk to others in the same situation. This person has been quite involved offering this form of assistance to others ‘and I thought I wanted to give that back as well’.

We had actually met someone through [her child’s] school as well, and I thought, well it must be really daunting if you don’t know anyone, you’re staying in a hotel. And you come in the middle of winter and you think, blimey! Like I did. I thought that kangaroos would be hopping past my car every five minutes, the sun would be shining every day, and everybody was wearing cork rimmed hats. But that just wasn’t the case. And so if you come in the middle of winter I think –I think a very specific program of people coming here, a more informed community approach…The little things are really important to people arriving here. Mostly people come and they’ve either been on a really long flight, and they’ve arrived in Melbourne with just their suitcases and they don’t know where the hell to go. They arrive maybe in a taxi or on the … bus – and where do they go next? ... there’s no-one
to meet them, there's no-one to communicate with them before they come, there's nobody to have bought them a couple of pints of milk for their rented accommodation. Or knowing full well that they will probably be sleeping through the night and then waking up at a strange time, who can they ring if they're not sure about where to park? You know, what do the 2P signs mean? And someone to ask those questions. So probably a program of 'meet and greet', of maybe spending time in that first week of being that port of call, asking the stupid questions, helping the spouse (P2).

Maybe having a female mentor, somebody in the business community – that would have been something really useful for me as a professional woman, not really sure about how to enter the Geelong labour market (P2).

And if we want to, if the regional cities are serious about growth then we have to have a strategy to be able to retain them. It's not enough to just say, 'We've got great beaches.' It's about that professional integration and continued motivation to make sure that they feel part of the growing community (P2).

Joining in sporting activities or clubs was a good way to meet people. P4 played soccer for a while and met a few people that way. He has also made a number of friends through surfing. He commented that what helps him a lot is that he came by himself—and that 'families just do all things together all the time so they don't socialise, they don't have that need to go out there and meet people...I think that's a bit sad' (P4).

Migrants also suggested that it's up to the individual to find their own hobby or interests and that the Meet Up website was a good start for this.

I think it's up to the individual if they really do want to, but I think as you said like you're finding that hobby or that interest. I looked at some websites – and what's that one? Meet Up. There's a Meet Up website. So you plug in your post code and it tells you – and your interests, and you get updates about sort of the food – oh and it goes, 'What are your interests?' and I go, 'Food and wine, running, blah, blah.' And every week it gives me an update, it could be, 'These groups are meeting this week to discuss this.' So that's quite –There's not a lot in Geelong at the moment. I don't think it has really taken off, but those sort of things would be good. So just for that, you know it depends on how 'net savvy' people are though, to set those up or to go on and register (P5).

Reading the local newspapers from cover to cover, looking at tourist maps, noticeboards, and the monthly 'What's on' were common suggestions for people to find out what is going on in Geelong. Doing a lot of walking and driving around were two other ways people found their way around. Joining the local library was important and one of the first things P11 did was to get all the children their own library card so they would all feel it was 'their' library.

For refugee migrants who had many problems, there was a list of numbers to call, especially an interpreter's number 'and then they will help you... They will help, they know that if we don't have English, good English, well then we just do like that way' (P6).

P9 suggested that when she moved to Canberra 30 years ago and registered as a newcomer she was invited to special events such as Floriade, and a visit to Government House: 'and then you went to this – and saw a bit of Canberra, but you also met new people who had come to it. But I thought it was good. But in Geelong, no' (P9).

Finding employment for skilled migrants was difficult even with assistance from the Skilled Migration Program and also Diversitat.

No, no. Yeah it's more that – I would say the first year, especially the first year you will get that feeling of frustration, because the Immigration Department say, "Yeah, you qualify for the Skilled Migration." Then you have the Victorian government saying, "Yeah we need your skills." And then suddenly you arrive in Geelong, they go, "What. Where's the job?" You know, "Where's the job where I can make use of my skills?" And I'm sure it also happened to a lot of IT professionals who actually ended up, I think a few ended up working at Steggles (P10).

And that's frustrating. That is frustrating. In the end, because if it's just about the money I would be happy with just doing any odd jobs. But I guess it's more of that, "This is my profession, where are the jobs that will make me use my skills?" – which has been the primary sort of reason why the Australian government approved the entry....I don't know, perhaps something ... I'm just thinking it can be built in things say among the schools. Some sort of a program where they can easily ... or the government will say we will identify kids coming from overseas who will be studying in the school, or sort of have that extra support within the school system which can be built in I suppose within the school system (P10).
Making connections is therefore vital for the individuals concerned and their communities. What then facilitated this outcome was a set of organisations and sites.

Organisations and sites for making connections

3.1 Making connections through work

The research described in the first working paper for this project (Jackson et al. 2012) shows that when people move for employment, it may seem that networks are readily accessible via the new workplace, but this is not always the case. Employers can play a significant role in assisting migrants to integrate into the community (Kilpatrick et al. 2002; MacPhee & Scott 2002; Han & Humphreys 2005; Wilks et al. 2008; Kilpatrick et al. 2011). But migrants motivated to relocate for employment reasons also emphasised the importance of lifestyle and family-related considerations in their new locale (Hegney et al. 2002; Lonne & Cheers 2004; Kilpatrick et al. 2011). Social integration enhances workforce stability and efficacy; growing social capital in individuals also grows the capacity of host communities and workplaces.

Skilled Migration Program (SMP)

The Skilled Migration Program (SMP) (City of Greater Geelong) assists regional employers to source, attract and retain overseas skilled professionals to meet skill shortages that cannot be filled from the local labour market. In addition to assistance with information about visas and migration, newcomers are welcomed and provided with information about living and working in Geelong. Five participants in this study were contacted via the SMP.

In one example a family had already come to Australia and then made contact with the SMP in Geelong. The result of this was that the SMP was also able to assist with finding employment for the spouse and suggest a visa that was best for their particular situation:

We were able to put her in contact with a number of organisations who are from the Social Welfare area, because that’s her area of expertise. The organisation absolutely has embraced this lady whole-heartedly… I guess because her particular skill is in child protection, they managed to use her experience from the UK to introduce a new workplace system. They were really able to use her to sort of get their own processes in place.

The husband on the other hand was a train driver back in the UK. Here, until he gets permanent residency that’s not an option for him. So we were able to assist him and put him in contact with a couple of major transport and logistics companies, and he has now since got a job driving for one of them. And they have teenage children. By encouraging them to change the visas that they were on, we were able to make it much easier for, especially the much older child, to be able to enter into some tertiary qualifications – or tertiary study I should say, without having to pay international student fees which is what happens when you’re not a permanent resident. (BG4).

A number of migrants attended events organised by the Skilled Migration Program and had made a number of friends with other migrants. The following vignette in Box 2 illustrates this:

After coming to Australia for a holiday, P2 and her family decided to apply for a Regional Skilled Migration Visa. They moved to Geelong because of opportunities for her husband to obtain employment. Shortly after moving they found they knew someone who had also just moved to Geelong so they had somewhere to stay initially. After this, they had not felt, “as if we needed any support so we just kind of got on with it really”. P2’s husband met others in the workplace who then invited him “to go places, like soccer, so he made some connections there”. P2 decided not to work for the first six months but then went and found a part-time job as she was “climbing the walls”. At their child’s school they made many new connections through play dates, birthday parties and other things.

And you know this is the first time I’ve ever had a Chinese friend before, and she’s teaching me to speak Mandarin and I’m teaching her to speak English better. And all of that sort of stuff, interaction coming from [the] school which is really nice. And I’m volunteering there.

P2 reported that she had become quite involved with organising social events for the Skilled
Migration Program and has made many friends through this.

And that’s where we met one of our group of friends, because a group of friends came out from England – we didn’t know them at all before they arrived in Geelong – but she’d already got, ... had already got a job but her husband was struggling. And ... said to me, “I’ve got this family, they’re really lovely but he’s really struggling. Can you help?” And I spent a lot of time with him helping him with his CV and job applications, and just saying to him, you know, “Just get over the first six months. And I know that it’s really boring staying at home, but I can tell you this is how I overcame it.” And you know gave him a few tips and that. And that worked out really well, he eventually did get a job. And then they’ve become firm friends of ours.

Box 2: Making friends after moving to Geelong

Geelong Chamber of Commerce (CoC)

The Chamber of Commerce (CoC) organises networking events for people in business that results in ‘a lot of business activity that happens between Chamber members’. However, as an organisation, ‘we often don’t get the chance to identify people who are coming to the region who are starting a business’ (BG3). Sometimes, business people will seek out the Chamber of Commerce—but there does not appear to be any way to identify new businesses to the area.

Sometimes they will go to the City, perhaps looking for planning permits and the like, and we need to have some way of communicating that sort of information so that we can actually support them the minute they come into the City, and provide them with whatever they need. Our mission is for business in the region to be successful but it is difficult sometimes to actually identify these start-up businesses (BG3).

The CoC invites business people to Chamber ‘After Five’ monthly networking events. This event provides an introduction to other businesses and to people who might be relevant to assist them to grow their business. ‘And that often happens through introductions of members to one another – you know before we know it they’re doing business with each other’ (BG3). Opportunities have also been created with other Chambers of Commerce in Melbourne and there is the possibility of conducting a trade mission to Italy—with food, wine and olive oil—that has the potential to grow and expand some of those regional businesses. In another example, a fly-in fly-out organisation wanted to establish an operation in Geelong. ‘They were looking for a recruitment company to assist them with recruiting staff, and a training provider to provide training. So we were able to give them recommendations of organisations that could fulfil those requirements that they had’ (BG3). As the Chamber tries to look after the interests of businesses as holistically as possible, the excerpt in Box 3 shows an example from 2010 of looking after the health of the business and the physical health of people in business:

There’s obviously a link, you know, if people are feeling healthy, physically and mentally, then they’re going to be more productive, they’re going to run better businesses, they’re going to have more positive employee relationships and so on … What we actually did was we connected with a gym, Club Exec, and we ran Geelong’s Fittest Executive Corporate Health Challenge … We wanted leaders to be involved and lead the way by example and so the CEO of Barwon Health was one of the leaders involved in this program along with a few other senior people. We had the Mayor of the City, and we had the 2IC from Transport Accident Commission and various others involved in the challenge … The idea was to show leaders out there working hard and tending to their health and wellbeing, and that would send a really strong message of leading by example to their workplaces. And it was fantastic. So in a subtle and fun way hopefully it had some impact and changed the way people thought about health and wellbeing, motivating them to get involved too…It was undertaken in a spirit of fun and also it got those CEOs involved with their own health and fitness – some of them were already physically active, some were not. I think showing their leadership by being a positive role model and putting themselves out there for all to see was a terrific example for other organisations too. It created a lot of hype and interest.

As a side benefit, the health club did generate new members as a result of the challenge and they’re now continuing to actively run similar sorts of corporate challenges which is a very positive thing for all. It created a different way of thinking about health and wellbeing and got people talking about the benefits to their workplace and positive spinoff to team morale.
There’s a lot of hype out there with “Biggest Loser” and similar programs on TV so people are somewhat tuned in to that as a concept. The Chamber is very interested in the mental health and the physical wellbeing of our members and their organisations.

Box 3: Making connections through the Chamber of Commerce

**Transport Accident Commission (TAC)**

The decision to relocate the TAC from Melbourne to Geelong formed a central part of Moving Forward, the Victorian Government’s $502 million blueprint to make regional and rural Victoria the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family, released in November 2005 (Box 4).

The TAC headquarters moved to Geelong in January 2009 along with 650 employees. Planning started three years earlier to bring as many staff from Melbourne. This included a relocation incentive for purchasing or buying a house in the Geelong area or assistance to stay in Melbourne. For employees who chose not to relocate a redundancy package was offered as well as a redeployment package which allowed TAC employees to take up positions within other state government organisations.

When the new Geelong headquarters was opened in February 2009, the then Premier, John Brumby said that the new office would help create new jobs and drive economic growth in the region (TAC Media Release 26 February 2009).

“We are taking action to deliver jobs and lock in the future of Geelong,” Mr Brumby said.

“In a major boost to the local building industry activity, more than 800 people worked on the construction and fit-out of the new TAC over the past two years.

“And with 650 employees now based in the new Geelong headquarters, the TAC is expected to generate about $59 million each year in economic benefits in for the local community.

“This project delivers on our Government’s commitment to ensure regional centres are well-placed to continue to grow and thrive in the future.”

Box 4: The TAC move to Geelong

Because the TAC move from Melbourne to Geelong took several years of planning, the Human Resources department was split into two with one part running the day-to-day business and the Workforce Transition Division which took in training capability, knowledge management, recruitment and the design, planning and facilities management of the new TAC building. From a ‘people point of view’, the ‘Get Connected’ program was developed from the beginning to help allay concerns about the move with individual staff and the unions:

There were obviously a lot of concerns about knowledge management, losing a lot of staff and therefore losing a lot of our experience and not hitting the ground running when we came to Geelong. There was also a real lot of concern from the union and from the employees … pretty much from the announcement we started talking to the union to get some ideas about how the workforce was feeling and things like that. From about 2008 we started doing poll surveys to see people’s intentions, to look at their stress levels – you know, are they moving on, are they going to stay till the move, are they going to come for a bit. And that was rolling from that point forward. That then drove our people HR policies. So we were looking at the results of our surveys: what were the main concerns about moving, what was holding people back from making the commitment (BG5).

Once the key issues were identified the ‘Get Connected’ program focused on assisting people with these areas. For example:

One of the key things that came out was the ‘children’ issue. A lot of research we did beforehand was around schools, even just the actual basic getting the information to people. So people came in and would sit down and have a one on one with a ‘Get Connected’ officer, and they’d go through all their different either concerns or questions. I mean some people were quite excited about the move as well. And we had all different information packs. We were prepared for that, you know it’s really difficult to get into a doctor in Geelong … health care seems to be quite hard. So in solving that we eventually partnered with Barwon Health to create the Staff Care clinic for all our TAC staff.

And then as it got closer and closer, when we first focused on the big things, things such as linking into childcare, linking into schools, linking into even really helping people relocate was a really big
thing as well. Basic information such as electricity providers, phone numbers, Barwon Water – all that sort of stuff – just to make people’s lives as easy as possible (BG5).

The ‘Get Connected’ program continued to assist people with these day to day issues until the end of 2011. However, over time, the focus changed:

… to get into more of the detail of people’s lives to actually literally what makes you part of the community … And whatever things that keep you where you are. Because we are also very concerned that we’d get people come up for a year and then be completely disconnected from family, friends – and when we think we’ve successfully, “Yes we’ve moved. We’ve kept seventy per cent of our staff. We’ve done an amazing job.” And then a year later they’ve all gone. So that was a big concern for us as well.

… there has been a few people who, well quite a few who did the trial year but there hasn’t been too many people who have relocated that have left again at all. (BG5)

It was clear that the TAC worked hard to help people feel connected to others in Geelong (see Box 5). One informant identified that a big risk was that people would either ‘become isolated or leave, or become very insular’. One strategy was to partner with community organisations to showcase Geelong to the newcomers. Connections were made between people with sporting interests and local sporting clubs. For people with children, contacts were made with childcare centres, mothers’ groups and playgroups. A walking group was formed for new mothers to walk with their children in prams. Shortly after arriving, there was a ‘race’ around Geelong that lasted for two weeks.

That involved staff partnering up with people from all different teams – you weren’t allowed to do it within your own team – and going in to the different places such as the art gallery and stuff like that. So you went in there – it was like a treasure hunt, you had to get something signed off or you had to get a photo of it. So that gave us sort of a – what we tried to do was give you a real overview of Geelong, and then when people came back to us at the end we would go through and talk to them about what they found interesting. And so we could actually go, “Well to become a member of the art gallery this is what you need to do.” (BG5)

The migrants from Melbourne who moved with the TAC were ‘lucky too with work, because they’ve got an active social club there as well… And that’s probably what’s made it much easier for me because a lot of them were new to Geelong as well, so it’s made it that they’re more open, more welcoming’ (P1).

One of the migrants who moved from Melbourne described the importance of connections with people from the workplace who were Geelong residents so they could refer the newcomer to a good physio, hairdresser, waxer, ‘so word of mouth I think is really, really strong, and recommendations because they really help’ (P5):

There’s this one lady specifically from work who I count as a friend, and not just a colleague, and she’s been great. As in when I started renting and I’ve got the ad, and I just went, “I don’t know, Newcomb looks good.” She goes, “No. No. Nothing against Newcomb,” but she goes, “You want to look at these areas.” And that was really helpful. So you know drive around, get a feel for it – just little things like that (P5).

Helene – TAC mover

Helene moved from Melbourne to Geelong as part of the TAC relocation package. Initially, her friends thought she was just doing it for the package and thought it was ‘crazy’ for a city girl to move to Geelong. Even now “they can’t fathom that I’m actually happy here … I miss being able to go out for a meal after eight o’clock at night … the shopping and the restaurants … but I’m up and down with my work so often if I want to take advantage of that I can”. Helene commented that it was up to her to make the effort to go and visit friends in Melbourne as only two people had managed to make the trip from Melbourne to Geelong to visit her in three years.

In the first year she continued to travel to Melbourne for sports training and games but it became too much so she cut her ties and joined a club in Geelong. The main reason for doing this was to make new friends in Geelong. Helene expressed how she really wants to cross the boundaries and meet some new people but stated how hard it is to do.

Helene attends business type functions such as Business and Professional Women (BPW). She suggested that she wants to make more of these connections beyond the TAC to be part
of networking programs. These connections have been professional rather than friendship based.

Since moving to Geelong, many of the connections Helene has made have been within work—with people who were from Geelong and part of the TAC. She feels that many people had not gone beyond the TAC walls to make connections within the Geelong region, so “if you go to a friend’s barbeque the majority are TAC employees. So you know what I mean, because they socialise inside work and also outside of work … unless … you have the children factor and you meet other people that way”.

Helene stated that she thought the TAC had not really assisted people enough to make connections outside of the TAC—only within the organisation. And Geelong is very cliquey so if you’re a newcomer at the club it’s hard to fit in. So the TAC should “open up” to assist people making connections outside the organisation. For example, a sporting club or community organisation should be able to let the TAC know that they are looking for new members and then the TAC should let employees know that.

Nevertheless, Helene stated that as the newcomer you need to make more of an effort as the person moving to Geelong because everything is not on your doorstep so you need to seek out the information for yourself.

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**The Geelong English Language Centre (GELC)**

Geelong English Language Centre (GELC) connects with newcomers to Geelong after initial contact from Diversitat about new families arriving through the Humanitarian Settlement Scheme. Alternatively, when families on a Skilled Migrant visa enrol their children in school, the school contacts GELC. GELC provides English as a Second Language (ESL) to new arrivals to Australia who are enrolled in school and do not have English as their first language (with the exception of those on community detention program).

Although it is not its core business, GELC provides employment to three Multicultural Aides who were interviewed for this project. GELC is building the capacity of people to develop their skills and confidence and then go on to find other work. This is especially important for men who see paid employment through GELC as a ‘stepping-stone’ to finding another job—if they get employment there seems to be a sense of purpose—but the women ‘are quite happy to stay as a multicultural education aide’. These factors affect the ‘mental wellbeing of the whole family’.

The Multicultural Aides primarily help the student settle in to the classroom, but they do so much more than that. Because they are working with the student in the classroom, ‘they have a lot of impact on everybody else. And that’s something that’s often not evident straight away, but it is evident later on as it helps break down some of the stereotypes that children have’ (BG1):

> The man that we’ve employed from the Congo he works in the classroom at this school and he’s been working with the student, but he’s also been talking to the other kids as well. And just that interaction, that personal interaction, they’ve gone, “Okay.” Well he does look – he’s a big man, you know I’ve been told that he’s big and scary, whatever. But he’s not really. So just by making again those personal connections, it’s really important. And they talk to him just a lot about different – the other kids, not only the Swahili speaking kids, but everybody in the classroom just talks to him … (BG1)

**3.2 Making connections at school**

Organisations or institutions such as schools are obvious connection sites for parents and school-age children. One Geelong primary school has procedures and practices to welcome new students and familiarise them with the learning environment and some of the routines and expectations for the school setting. These procedures and practices follow a program used across the whole school community, ‘which is about inclusion and valuing diversity’.

With the children in particular we look at establishing some class buddies, so that’s probably the initial thing. So that other children from the class that they’re going into are given a special role and they will come out and meet that child and their parents and we’ll have some formal introductions. And then they actually facilitate the tour of the school. So children are talking to children, we find it’s a really good way to break the ice, and also establish a bit of a relationship with the group that they’ll
be learning and working with as they participate in the school community (BG6).

The outcomes from the activities at the school lay the foundation for the children to form friendships outside of school:

It's really about the strong relationships they build up with their peers and being able to form friendships quickly and being able to move across groups, which is really important. And certainly their self-esteem and connectedness (BG6).

These connections also enable parents to connect with other parents. In this example it is clear that these connections do not happen spontaneously but vary greatly from one family to another:

When I think of different families that have moved, whether it be families from different parts of Australia or from overseas, it varies greatly in terms of any existing networks that they have. When I think of another family and we were looking at some other services or supports, because there was this lovely extended family there was a whole network that we were unaware of. But I know there’s some other parents that once you enrol them you’ll see them perhaps at the beginning of the year, the end of the year and maybe when it’s parent teacher interviews and that’s about it. So ideally if you can get the parents involved through the sharing of something that the children are doing, that’s the best way to go (BG6).

The school’s Friday afternoon assembly is another place for ‘informal connectedness’ and networking as everyone comes together to acknowledge what has happened through the week. Everyone is invited:

So all the parents come – not all of them, but a lot of parents come. A lot of grandparents come, and aunties. And quite often you know that’s when you’ll see these new families, because they’re standing there with their kids who are friends or sitting beside each other in class. And then you get a discussion. And then they’ll want to have play dates. And then it sort of, that’s like the spill on effect (BG6).

Additionally, the educational support staff try to link up with new families as much as possible and the school uses community events such as a family dance night, carnival, performance or artwork—anything that involves ‘the kids to get families meeting and connecting up families through an informed meet’:

But everyone's different. I was just thinking about a family recently from France who’ve come in to the school with very limited English. But because of the availability of time there was a lovely opportunity just to include the mum of that family in lots of things that were happening throughout the school. So sometimes it can be helping out with tasks in the library; it can be attending some parent information sessions that we run. So it’s looking for those opportunities, and then tapping them on the shoulder if we get the opportunity to help out with something that maybe happening with making costumes for a concert or something (BG6).

3.3 Making connections at church

The Reformed Presbyterian Church welcomes people who have come to Geelong regardless of their background—there is no distinction between someone from Sudan or Melbourne ‘because the connection is in terms of Christ and the Christian faith. And it’s that which connects with people. And so in a sense you have the same needs wherever they come from…’ Those people who have come from overseas and don’t have an extended family here ‘are hungry for lots of personal connections, personal contact,’ so the church takes on a role, ‘like an extended family’. The church has the capacity to do this because there are enough people to be ‘surrogate grandparents or surrogate cousins’. For someone who moved to Geelong from Melbourne with the TAC, the church was able provide a ‘church family’ because ‘that’s what he was really concerned about’ (BG7).

Initially, people can connect and meet over a cup of tea after the Sunday service. After this initial contact, when people start coming to church more regularly, then visits in their homes will take place. The background of the person is not relevant here because ‘the church is meant to be the body of Christ, it's meant to be the family of Christ on earth’. When people come they open up opportunities, ‘whether it's their gifts or whether it's their friend's circle, contact, circle of friends and relatives’. The view is that people come to the church for a reason, so the question is asked: ‘What ministry might God be opening up through bringing that person or that family in? … are we being pushed or being pointed in a certain direction to say start whether it might be a kids’ club or whether it might be a school’s work or CRE [Christian Religious Education] in school (BG7).’
P11 moved to Geelong with her family and actively found a new church: people have been very welcoming and ‘then with everybody around you then makes the effort and responds to that’. The church has been a place to make ‘a lot of really good friends, really support friends too’:

… so when they knew that we basically coming here to settle and to stay, they were sort of, there was this like warm and all friendly into our circle, you know this is something very solid here … (P11)

A number of people from the Karen and Karenni community in Geelong attend St Andrews Anglican Church in Corio and find it a place to make connections. People are involved with a number of everyday activities such as cleaning the church and assisting with the collection, and a Burmese associate priest works with the Australian priest to bring cross-cultural elements to the weekly service. Along with church activities, there is a distribution program which offers maternal aid on a monthly basis to refugee families, homework club for high school students and an ESL program for adults. Help with paper work and other aid is also provided.

3.4 Making connections at Diversitat

Diversitat’s core business in Multicultural and Immigration Services is to provide communities and individuals with the support through a diverse range of services, programs and projects. This includes orientation programs and links with Centrelink, schools, housing and English classes. For example, Karen and Karenni refugee migrant groups have fled war and other political conflict in the Burmese/Thai border area and in Burma itself. As refugee migrants in Geelong, they now connect with each other in a number of ways—especially as many people are welcomed by others they might have known back in the refugee camp over 20 years or more. On arrival in Australia, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides settlement services through Diversitat in Geelong.

Initially at least, people appear to connect within their own ethnic community and with others at Diversitat who attend English classes. People go to church but ‘they tend to be together’ (BG8). Part of this is because of people don’t have English language skills, but also partly because of uncertainty about meeting other people: ‘it may not have happened to you but to one of your community members that has been spat on, had a rock through their window, all those sorts of things, then you’re never quite sure if people are going to say hello or not’ (BG8). Another factor may be that people are determined to make the move to Australia work for their children and do not consider themselves as needing to make connections with others. However, while this may be true of some individuals or cultural groups, others who were more urbanised before coming to Australia are always looking for ways to connect outside: ‘How do we do it’ and also ‘This is our country now we must get on’.

Some ethnic groups have been in Geelong long enough to establish their own association and become incorporated but the Karen/Karenni community is yet to do this. However, they have been involved in the Pako Fest, a yearly celebration of cultural diversity, and connect with Geelong Grammar School where people can attend English classes and access land for a community garden. Making connections at church is also very important as a place for people to meet and connect with other church members. The importance of these connections had a practical aspect as people from the church:

Like my church community when I moved house, they come volunteer me [sic], they bring the truck and when they come and give up like some second hand furniture, clothes from the church. So that is why we had to make strong with the church community and not only our own community, we need to link to the other community to be strong, to make friends (GI2).

What were some barriers to making connections?

4.1 Barriers to making connections

The findings indicate that some newcomers to Geelong reported that it was very difficult to break into the community and make new connections. For some, Geelong was very ‘cliquey’, yet others expressed how they just had to ‘get on with it’. In some cases it was difficult to make connections because of financial barriers, language barriers, racism, and personal circumstances. Some reflected that perhaps it was more that they struggled personally to make the connections.

P9 had moved a lot with work and then decided to settle in and retire in Geelong. She recalled how moving to Canberra about 30 years ago was very different as there were special
breakfasts, visits and other events provided to newcomers but there was nothing like this provided in Geelong. P9 had not been part of any employment program but had moved to Geelong independently. Initially she had run a small business and joined the CoC but found that it was too cliquey:

And I felt that you would walk into a room in Geelong and people just didn’t sort of come and talk to you. Like if I was hosting a business networking meeting I would actually walk up to the person, but even the host didn’t make an effort to. I don’t know. And then they’d all stand around in little threes, and you kind of stand there with your glass of wine and no-one would sort of open up their circle and let you in. In that way I guess maybe it is cliquey, yeah….And I just took it as being country people, they don’t have that degree of – they don’t know what it’s like to be new and therefore don’t open themselves up maybe. So I think actually I’ve joined a lot now I think about it. I went to a lot of things and then after a while just got so depressed I stopped going (P9).

4.2 Financial barriers to connection

Some participants described how not being able to find work in Geelong meant they would consider moving elsewhere if they had to. This point was made by a number of people who had come to Geelong as refugees and were unable to find work. However, another participant who was employed stated that work had to come first, before finding friends, ‘so as long as there is work in Geelong I will stay’ (P8).

The pressure to find employment is very difficult for many refugees—especially single men who need to pay back money they borrowed to come to Australia and then to bring their families here—means that their entire focus is on getting work. This means it is difficult to settle and we know that ‘the outcome of their families not being here includes just an impact on their mental health … How do I work to prevent them becoming mentally ill with high prevalence like depression, anxiety etc.’ (BG1)

4.3 Language barriers to connection

Language is obviously a barrier for a number of people who had come from overseas and had to learn English as a second (or third) language. P4 stated that the ‘language barrier is huge. I mean like my English is not perfect, but these days now I can communicate much better than I used to. And I would say that getting a job is a bit hard’. Language barriers made it hard to understand instructions if you had a job.

4.4 Racism

Tied in with language barriers, a number of participants reported that they had experienced racism since arriving in Geelong. One participant stated he had had to deal with ‘some silly questions that we do not understand, like “When did you come by boat here?” (GI1).

Participant 4 expressed the view that it had been pretty hard to find work in Australia and that he felt this was partially because Australians think they are:

…not, the multi-culture and all that, but they’re very protecting. But they didn’t like it at school you know, but I’ve found when come for jobs it’s a bit hard. I mean they like people that know the culture, and have to have that specific experience, you have to have the perfect English. And if you get, if the job comes down to you and an Australian, they’re going to go to Australian that’s for sure. That’s the way it is. I think that’s the only bad thing that I have in Australia, is that you know, because yeah that’s –It’s not only me, I’ve been talking to people a lot about that – and with the internet, and asking questions of people, and they all they say the same. They all say the same. I sort of understand you know because here that’s the price you pay. But the government, they should put out there (P4).

Although it was not expressed as racism there was a sense that because it had been a long time since Geelong had an influx of migrants:

placing people in neighbourhoods that are already disadvantaged, I think is a huge challenge for the people there. And I think it’s unjust because then the new arrivals are the ones that wear the hostility from some members in the community. So I think that’s really huge (BG1).

4.5 Personal circumstances

A number of participants’ personal circumstances were seen as barriers to them connecting with others in Geelong. For one participant, it was the unexpected responsibility of a family member, and for another it was because of a sporting injury that meant she was unable to play her favourite sport. As P5 stated, ‘….and not to be able to play anymore…I can’t participate at the club; it would be too hard for me. So you know I sort of left that behind’.
Some people from overseas found the extremes in weather in Geelong quite difficult and for some, it meant they would consider moving if they could afford it. The following excerpt illustrates how one participant who was a refugee felt that people in Geelong could not really understand what they had been through to travel to Geelong:

Who tells people that I came boat. No-one . . . . wants to come here by boat. But they couldn’t – can’t understand life. If you are not on . . . . and felt the life, felt the circumstances it’s very hard to understand that type of life. It’s not easy. We want to talk about I was a refugee, you can say that . . . to be refugees you come from here, from this house and to this other house. It’s a long trip full of hardship. It’s not easy to be a refugee . . . . when I hear talking about the refugees I remember many things. Sometimes I don’t like people calling me a refugee because I know when I was a refugee what I had, and what I faced in my life (GI1).

We lost everything. We lost our property. We lost everything in our country. Now we are here. Our families were cut everywhere – I don’t know where my relatives are. It’s very hard to live in a place and not knowing where your relatives are. If you can locate them where they are. But you want to know. It’s sad . . . . it’s very sad (GI1).

4.6 Other reasons that act as barriers for connection

Sometimes people expressed other reasons why they were unable to make the connections they needed. These reasons ranged from not being able to find a clinic and a GP who is actually taking patients and had spent a lot of time travelling around Geelong to find the right doctor (P5 and P12), to feeling age might have something to do with it as P9 stated:

Well I mean the people I tend to mix with at work as I said have all got young families. The people at the yacht club are all sort of, they stick together by their crew. Yeah I think age might have something to do with it. And maybe you know as you get older you, I don’t know, less adventurous. I don’t know (P9).

A number of participants stated that they felt their partner was finding it much harder to find people to connect with. For P13, this was because her partner was running his own business and was isolated from finding work friends. Being from another English speaking country was still seen as a disadvantage especially when trying to find a job because ‘sometimes we’re just clueless as to where you can get things and how you can get things done. I don’t know. I mean I love the “What’s on” magazines, and just we really didn’t hook up with anyone, because we went to the regions as well when I was trying to find jobs and things like that. And I didn’t even know where I could go find jobs’ (p13).

And I came in to a recruitment, like to assist me with finding a professional job – and they were just hopeless. I asked them to help me do a CV that I could tailor to the Australian market: they couldn’t help me. They didn’t point me anywhere else. And I mean I’m a pro-active person who was telephoning services to help me out but they weren’t helpful, so I shudder to think what it would be like for someone who…they just don’t have the work here so I had to go to Melbourne. And I was just so frustrated, and to the point I had spoken to most of the HR representatives in all the firms here, so I’d rung them all up then I’d come in to speak to a couple of people (P13).

P2 was conscious how hard it was initially ‘because as I said everybody’s got their own lives, and not everybody wants another friend to have to worry about or concern yourself with’. It was much easier for people who moved to Geelong and had a job, but for the ‘one that’s left at home either with the kids and they’re having to sort out doctors and dentists and schools, and all of that sort of stuff, bank accounts – that’s really hard. And driving licences: you know where do you go for that? So all of those things’.

One of the participants who was a refugee was very happy to talk about her life and her family in Geelong. However, she reflected that her eldest child who attended high school questioned her about why she was so proud to be a refugee. He talked about not wanting to be a refugee and asked his mother where she came from, where was her country and why people were fighting there.

Some participants talked about how difficult it was to make connections with people outside work. For example, P5 stated that ‘a lot of people haven’t gone beyond the TAC walls in regards to connections, as they stay within their family or their friend network. I haven’t heard a lot that other people have made external contacts within the Geelong region that aren’t linked to TAC…if you go to a friend’s barbecue the majority are TAC employees. So you know what I mean, because they socialise inside work and also outside of work’. The exception to this was people who had children who met other people with children.
For P8 there was a sense that life in Australia was quite different as people don’t sit around outside their homes or compounds talking to people passing by or walking on the road, ‘I think there they have more time, but here people don’t seem to have enough time for each other unless you know somebody’.

Enhancers for making connections

5.1 City of Greater Geelong

The City of Greater Geelong is obviously a point of first contact for many newcomers to Geelong who would generally initiate contact to find out basic information about council services. Although this information is available online, when newcomers email or call Customer Service they can be offered a tailored printed guide that contains basic information and can be used as a handy mini Geelong local phone book with specialist information and maps for each newcomer on local child care centres, swimming centres, animal registration, schools, and so on. The Council is looking to work with real estate agents who also are often the first port of call for many newcomers looking to either rent or buy in Geelong and some housing development companies have been proactive and asked for information kits for new residents to the City.

This research showed that a number of migrants felt that the council Welcome Pack was a good way to introduce people to Geelong. Some people mentioned the monthly What’s On publication and one migrant was very committed to getting to know Geelong, what’s on in Geelong, and especially what they can bring kids to. Indeed, newcomers bring to Geelong a new appreciation of the natural beauty of the area, the services, access to schools and kindergartens and so on that are available in the city. There is a view that if you have lived in Geelong all your life or for an extended period of time you become ‘complacent’ and newcomers bring a fresh set of eyes that the ‘locals don’t have’:

Often we find locals, when they have friends or relatives visit they look at Geelong through fresh eyes, because they’ll go to the Waterfront, they’ll go down the coast and they’ll show people around. And then it dawns on them how beautiful it is to live in Geelong. And then they become ambassadors for living in Geelong …While it’s getting less it is still pretty good compared to Melbourne. So I think having that new arrival people saying, “Oh my God, I didn’t realise how beautiful it was down at Barwon Heads” or “We went to the Waterfront and you can walk along there, grab a coffee, grab an ice-cream, sit down with beautiful open space” … All those kind of things. And they remind you of what is unique and beautiful about Geelong (BG2).

One migrant reflected how she talked to other people about what was happening in Geelong:

“Oh have you been to do that?” – or do that? And they say, “How do you know how to do these things?” And it’s just like, “Well.” It’s actually a really cool place, if you pick up the What’s On?” or you talk to people about what’s going on. If you go to the art gallery or into the library or anything like that you’ll find out about stuff that’s going on (P13).

While it can be relatively easy for newcomers to find a house and a job, it can be much harder to ‘move your social connections around … it’s more difficult for people who don’t have that social element to it’ (BG2). After moving, people will find social networks through their children, or if they are older, they might volunteer or join a club. There are plenty of volunteering opportunities in the Geelong region and many sporting clubs and ways for people to get involved actively ‘if they want to’ (BG2).

5.2 Geography and place

Most of the migrants interviewed were happy with their move to Geelong and many were planning to stay and retire. Many of these people were attracted to Geelong as a ‘place’, and had bought houses and formed relationships with people in their community:

It’s the job, the opportunities of employment of different areas as well. It’s the health care system … the easy access to Melbourne. It’s everything: it’s beautiful, it’s friendly. It’s got everything…But it is just wonderful. And it is big country town feel, and behaviour, because people are trusting and welcoming and that sort of thing, it’s not an issue that, you know, “we just don’t even notice you”… Instead of having to break your way in, you’re actually welcomed in. And it’s almost the opposite [of where she lived before] (P1).

I Googled the area and I knew the Falls Festival went on in Lorne – so that was great, that was kind of like there were things happening in the area that we would be interested in. … We made a choice for lifestyle reasons as opposed to work reasons …. We clearly love the ocean, like we need to be
here. And we’re just loving it and feeling really settled down there…. I love Geelong. My kids love Geelong, they’re just so excited to come here … But I also like the fact that you have to scratch the surface a bit here to really appreciate Geelong, so it’s kind of not a shiny, glitzy, you know this is how you go … I think it’s a really family friendly town too. I think it’s very geared towards kids, and open spaces. You know, so that’s why we really enjoy it here (P13).

Oh, I just love Geelong. Because I’m a medium and I work with the spirituality, Geelong is very spiritual. Lots of life here, and to me – when I drive into Geelong I can hear the angels sing. It sounds bizarre but that’s what I feel …. and I need to help more people to open up and find who they really are. That was another big push to come down and help people…which I do, and have people find me rather than I find them (P12).

But about eight weeks later I started making forays into – I contacted the [social group] and started attending coffee nights and making friends through there. So it took me eight weeks to make that. And I haven’t really made any other connections outside that as yet. Although I’ve joined a gym: and the girls thrash me, they know. They know who I am and they know me by name, because I’m there just about every day. So I’ve really only made friends in a couple of areas. But for me that’s enough at the moment, and the rest will just happen (P14).

For P4, moving to Geelong to be near Bell’s Beach enabled him to initiate connections through surfing and the move had given him the work life balance he wanted:

I love it down here, I love the coast and I love how the way the Australians balance the work and the balance between work and family. You know what I mean? I think that’s maybe what keeps me here, you know because I don’t want to work ten, twelve hours a day … I don’t have to be in a train and be stopped in the traffic for an hour and a half. So that’s not much reason. You know I have my girlfriend here, and maybe hoping one day we start a family and like then I have reasons to live. Then I have to leave my job and can find another one (P4).

P5 recently bought some land with her partner outside Geelong and was looking forward to moving to a smaller community accessible to countryside:

so I’m really looking forward actually – because it’s a small community where we’re moving, so I actually integrated myself in that community. It’s something external, outside of work, but being involved with you know the local community and the benefits. So I’m really looking forward to that … We’re just getting the house plans drawn up, so we’re going to have a nice big country ranch. I like the idea of being quite sustainable, so my own vegetables and food … probably a few animals, and maybe in a few years have a few children out there. So that’s why I’d really like get into the community, you know when you’re on a block of six acres with no-one within cooee around you it’s good that other people get to know you, so if anything does happen you’ve got someone you can call on (P5).

Moving to Geelong was a very deliberate move for P11 and her family. They had done research about good places to go fishing together as a family, the need to be able to travel and not be too far too visit relatives, and the need to find a good church. And having many children, it was important for them to fit in at their new school:

Yes I think they do, especially the older ones, especially in the church setting where they are just getting to know people and the other children are really make a big effort to get to know them … And even in the school … they put in a lot of effort into the relationship and it goes the other way, you know, oh you’re here to stay and you’re going to this school too … I think people, children, everybody needs friends … I think it is different [here] because, yeah, just knowing that it is here to stay makes you, changes the way you view it (P11).

5.3 Gender

A common theme for a number of women was that they commented that their husband or partner made connections normally came through work or even the Skilled Migration Program. However, after moving to Geelong, a number of men had initiated or formed new friendships that ‘surprised’ their wives or partners.

But because he … and with that comes quite a collegial approach through his colleagues at school so they’re quite social. And we have met families through his work, and you know been really, really pleased with how our relationship has developed even as far as that we’ve been on holiday with them. And that’s been really nice. And they’re from … and we became quite close and [he] sort of helped her through that sort of period of her life. So that’s been nice, and I think he’s really appreciated that (P2).
Yeah he has, and he’s made them through the kids as well. So I’ve met mums who then we’d get together and he would get on really well with the dads. And then that’s led to him being involved in the mountain bike, a group of guys who get together for mountain biking and beers round the fire every Thursday night. So it’s like the Men’s Shed. And I’ve seen such a huge change in him since he’s been involved in that, and I think it’s more that he got a group of guys – I don’t know what goes on, on Thursday nights; I don’t ask. But a group of guys to just distress with (P13).

For him, yeah, they really have been very strong…and just this week he lined up with a group of guys in the church just doing a book discuss. I just about fell off my seat, I’ve never seen him do that sort of thing before, so unusual…they all meet at a Café at 6.30 in the morning (P11).

5.4 Ethnicity

In some cases, ethnicity was a key factor to feeling connected to others in the community who were from the same ethnic background. For Karen, Karenni and other refugees, these connections were important on their arrival and settling in phase as well as after that as people tended to attend the same church and cultural events. Many knew other refugees before their arrival and were able to welcome new migrants from the refugee camp. One migrant expressed the need for the Karen community to set up its own community organisation (like the Indian community) so people could support each other, improve their knowledge and skills and learn more about the laws and rules (GI2).

Although many of these migrants came to Geelong as refugees, a number of people commented on the importance of welcoming newer migrants, especially those whom they had known from years before in the same refugee camp. Another migrant who is very connected to the Karen community in Geelong and Werribee described important celebratory events such as the wrist tying ceremony that symbolises the continuation of the Karen people (white threads are tied around the wrist to ward off illness and also to promote Karen cultural knowledge and practices). As stated earlier, many refugee migrants attend the same church which is an important for building connections within their own community and the wider community. Participating in English language classes through Diversitat and the Gordon TAFE provided many opportunities for connecting with other refugees.

The Karen and other ethnic communities have been involved in the Pako street festival which is organised by Diversitat. One participant interviewed for this project explained that events such as these (and similar events through the church connections) help reinforce the Karen community cultural knowledge and connections with others in the community.

Diversitat is the site for connections between newcomers and the many volunteers who come from all over Geelong to assist ‘with a range of programs and want to be involved’. One of the recent developments at Diversitat has been the number of invitations from groups such as the Rotary Club or the Men’s Shed, for a speaker on refugee and multicultural issues in the Geelong Region. This is a positive thing and ‘they’re challenging themselves about reaching out a hand of friendship to Muslim men that they have very little to do with, or might have stereotype views about’ (BG1).

But we get quite – you know across Geelong we get obviously the retirees; a lot of women, but the driver program has brought in quite a few men as well so that has been fantastic. The homework programs, primarily women: not always teachers, in fact more often than not, not teachers. Quite a lot of young people from Deakin have come in. It might be a lot of the medicos. I don’t know whether they’ve got to do that. But the short term people want to make a contribution. And probably the coast, the Bellarine, Ocean Grove has probably been quite a great area for us with people coming in and providing ...(BG1)

There are a number of challenges around ethnicity that influence how people make connections. For example, Diversitat trialled a family friends project to look at if a new arrival had an immediate contact and it was a family not just one individual, then how would they settle more. Although this program worked well for the Congolese for many of the host families it was ‘overwhelming’ and:

we needed to be much more aware of how some African families saw friendships … perhaps much more like Aboriginal communities, you know if you’re friends, you’re family, you know you’re available. And so there weren’t too many demarcation lines. And out of the nine families we’ve got – and it was only for six months, most families continued for twelve – I think there’s three that are still going. But the others have pulled back because they just couldn’t give the time that was required (BG8).
In one case, one migrant who was a leader in her community, was very happy and proud to be called a refugee and worked hard to assist newcomers to Geelong. However, her son who struggled at high school said: ‘Mum, I don’t want to be . . . refugee.’ And sometimes he asked about his country and why there was fighting there that had started before he was born:

So we had to look for to learn about our history … Now we start to learn where we come from. But here we are lucky in Australia. We have current class … try to at school … the history, current history. So we are pleased with that. Otherwise people would not hear you know that Australia is a multi-cultural country … (G1).

5.5 Workplaces

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce (CoC) and the Leaders for Geelong Program provide networking events and support services (CoC), and leadership programs (Leaders for Geelong) for emerging businesses and community leaders. Newcomers first need to initiate contact and then either become a member or join a program before they are able to connect ‘across a far wider Geelong region and communities’ (BG3). The CoC is able to assist people to gain access to levels of government and offers advice on key changes or impacts that will affect business. It has had a program for mentoring businesses, ‘Master class for success’ that paired businesses with another successful business. There are numerous events where people can meet and support networks such as the recently established Geelong Retail network which is designed to support retailers and provide a voice for the retail sector.

Finding employment was important for migrants to have ‘settled’ connections:

and with that comes quite a collegial approach through his colleagues … so they’re quite social. And we have met families through his work, and you know been really, really pleased with how our relationship has developed even as far as that we’ve been on holiday with them … and one of the things that we did do, when we first arrived in Australia …we enrolled her in learn to swim lessons. And while she was in those lessons we met a group of what we would call ‘swim buddies’, but they’re … younger than her because obviously she just couldn’t swim. So as she progressed through the levels, the younger ones sort of just carried on at their normal pace but we still remained in touch with these swim buddies. And one family in particular, and she happens to be from Canada (P2).

P4, however, did not socialise with people from work but had made a number of friends through surfing and with people from the same cultural background. He now had an Australian girlfriend and hoped to start a family in the future:

You know at the start pretty much all I did was surfing and work and I met my friends through that. And then the lifestyle there it helped me a lot because I think if I come here by myself like I did, and I set up myself somewhere inland I wouldn’t stay for that long. I wouldn’t stay at all, I wouldn’t you know because there’s no common thing, it wouldn’t be easy eating fish and chips and playing footy you know. That’s not, that’s not what I’m going to do you know (P4).

P5 was feeling very settled in Geelong, had bought a house and more recently a block of land to build a house with her partner whom she had met after both of them moved to Geelong.

She had observed that others from the TAC had moved to make:

the lifestyle choice to settle here… but that many of them had not gone beyond the TAC walls in regards to connections, as in they stay within their family or their friend network. I haven’t heard a lot that other people have made external contacts within the Geelong region that aren’t linked to TAC .

But my partner and I have just bought six acres … and so I’m really looking forward actually – because it’s a small community where we’re moving, so I actually integrated myself in that community. It’s something external, outside of work, but being involved with you know the local community and the benefits. So I’m really looking forward to that.

Yeah, not going anywhere. Not with six acres that we’ve got out there.

We’re just getting the house plans drawn up, so we’re going to have a nice big country ranch. I like the idea of being quite sustainable, so my own vegetables and food. There’s no power or water or gas, there’s no amenities out there what have to be. But yes, probably a few animals, and maybe in a few years have a few children out there. So yeah that’s the grand plan. And a couple of goats and a couple of sheep. And yeah that’s it.

So that’s why I’d really like get into the community, you know when you’re on a block of six acres with no-one within cooee around you it’s good that other people get to know you, so if anything does happen you’ve got someone you can call on (P5).
P6 feels very settled and wants to retire in Geelong:

I’ve got nice customers. I treat them as my family so they very beautiful. They treat me as their family member either, so I’ve got nice neighbour, nice customer – they all so nice so I never feel lonely…. Outside of work I have no time…because I have young children, seven and nine, they still very active. They need exercise, so then I don’t have any time to socialise myself.

...And when we come here I’ve seen – when I come here I see or compare with Melbourne property, and here is very different. That is why we said, “Oh we’d better buy the property in Geelong before that’s expensive.” So anyway we decided to live here, and it’s really good. We happy how we are now.

I see if everyone who knows Geelong is nice like this they move all to here. We’ve got nice area, people nice and not far away from Melbourne city. We close to the hospital, close to the shops, we’re close to everything. We’ve got everything here, we don’t need anything else (P6).

For some migrants, there was some uncertainty about staying in Geelong while unable to find employment:

It will also depend on also the job. The job, if he can find another job, we will stay but if he can’t find or if it is easier to find another job at another place. It is no problem for us and a very good place but only need a job. Some Karen move to Perth because they want to get a job. If it is easier to get a job at another place, Melbourne, Geelong, it is easier to get a job for our people (GI2).

P9 has bought a house in Geelong and described herself as a ‘joiner’ as she had joined the Art Gallery, the yacht club and an organic gardening club. However, although she felt settled, she also felt isolated ‘but I think that might be some internal stuff going on in my own head. You know still on my own after all these years, all that sort of crap you know. But no, I like the people I’ve met’.

I mean one of the tests for me is like I don’t have a car at the moment and my brother has lent me his old bomb from Sydney, and I’m really hesitant to drive around. And I said to him the other day, “If the car stops in the middle of the night the only person I would call is this girl that I met from Adelaide.” But she lives in Queenscliff. And I don’t know if I drove around at two o’clock in the morning, “Come and pick me up,” there’s no-one I would call. And that to me is what a friend is about. So friends, maybe only one (P9).

So her decision to stay, ‘out of like a hundred, I reckon 10% to do with work, maybe 50% to do with the house and its location, and the rest would be because of the people’.

P11’s settled connections had mainly come through the church, where each member of the family had made friends.

So there is a feeling of permanency, and so when they knew that we basically coming here to settle and to stay, they were sort of, there was this like warm and all friendly into our circle, you know this is something very solid here. Which is something you just can’t get in a place like Darwin because um there aren’t, a guess in the circles I was moving in, the church circles and the defence circles, there isn’t that feeling of permanency. You can open your heart out to this person and then have to say good bye to them the following year. And it does, it really does make an effect, have an effect on friendships (P11).

The connections everyone in the family had made, ‘stronger friendships then they have had for years and years, I might have been tempted to say let’s move somewhere else, like Colac or wherever if I can get a job here. But now I’m just, there are more important things then money so I’m just very reluctant to go down that way’.

P10 had previously studied in Australia and then gone back home (overseas) before deciding to apply to the Regional Skilled Migration Program. He had had casual work during his student days and did not feel entirely at ease in Geelong:

And so I guess after a couple of years of having that experience of working in Australia sort of built my confidence to deal with – and not be conscious of – Geelong is, you can still feel it say in Geelong that sometimes people give you a strange stare. You know it’s not something malicious, but I guess Geelong is still in that process of getting used to. Like in Melbourne, if I go to Melbourne like when I take my daughter for those PC review classes pretty much you’re anonymous.

But in Geelong you can still notice that sort of – and it still is a I would say bit of, yeah that regional like a lot of people would know each other, say on the streets. If I just walk say the CBD I’m pretty sure I’ll bump into someone I know. So you know if you compare it with say Melbourne it still is
small. And it’s just in the process of being used to interacting with people from a different culture or backgrounds. But you know now I would say I don’t let it bother me (P10).

Staying in Geelong was important for the next five years or so while the children were completing their education, involved in sport and sometimes at weekends went to visit friends, but after that, ‘see from there whether – yes if we can move somewhere perhaps’.

**Policies, programs and organisations**

The findings from this project show that there appears to be support from newcomers and the ‘bridging’ organisations identified in this project for regional growth in the City of Greater Geelong. One outcome of regional policy is that some migrants have not made the ‘choice’ to move to Geelong and there are some reservations about how well some migrants fit in. This includes refugee migrants and, to some extent, employees of the TAC who although they had a choice, were also offered very good incentives to move.

For the refugee migrants ‘the pull factors are the housing and the employment’ (GELC) but often people stay for a while and then move somewhere else. Citing an example, quite a few Sudanese refugees moved to Warrnambool because of employment at the abattoirs but only stayed for a short period of time because they were the first ‘new ones’ from their ethnic community. There have been similar experiences in Geelong with other cultural groups:

I think once you get an established – it must be really difficult for the first people of a particular group to come through and establish, but once you’ve got that establishment there then it seems to draw other people (BG1).

The findings show that now that the Karen and Karenni community is quite well established in Geelong, people are more likely to stay: ‘so even though you’ve got those policies and the pull factors, unless there’s a support there it doesn’t seem to last long’ (BG1).

Diversitat works with many of the same people as GELC and has been working with refugees for many years. In that time there have been significant changes and improvements in services for refugees, such as interpreter services and a refugee health nurse at Barwon Health, Corio Community Health, and the hospital has refugee clinics with midwives. People’s knowledge and interest to become culturally competent has grown. Diversitat also provides torture trauma counselling for clients who may need this service. But staff from Diversitat stated that they felt that the funding was not sufficient to support the need with so many new arrivals:

I don’t think there has been any recognition for the extras that are needed. And it doesn’t necessarily mean money, but looking at challenges, not just the fact that yes, there might be jobs at smaller communities … but there’s not recognition of the fact that the way the funding goes doesn’t really prepare the general community for new arrivals. So it’s just like, “oh well you’re here now, we’ll just lob this particular group in and just get on with it.” So it’s like, where are the resources to build these connections? And if there’s a policy for settlement then what does that mean in a rural context?

… Yeah and there are small programs around social inclusion, but really it’s I think fairly tokenistic. And it’s a little bit … Short term stuff. And how social inclusion is seen, you know it’s like, yeah. I mean Vic Health have been great like that. We have a sports program, but initially under there I think Mental Health and Wellbeing, and it was around sport as a means of linking people. And it’s great. But there’s only so many people that play sport, so why is it – yes sport is something that we do and important in Australia, but what are the other things around culture or other parts of culture like arts or music. No, the ways that others I guess historically connected have just all gone. (BG8)

The TAC move to Geelong has been successful although it was a lot of work to assist employees move and make connections in Geelong. For this reason from a regional planning perspective ‘it makes a lot of sense’ but without the support then it is not going to create a community but just create jobs.

The Skilled Migration Program is funded by the Victorian State Government and receives significant in-kind support from the Economic Development Department at the City of Greater Geelong. The program is only funded until 30 June 2012 and the findings show that while it can be difficult to attract skilled migrants to regional areas, Council is looking to find ways to support the program in the future because it is important to assist people make connections once they have migrated:

We have got this fantastic situation at the moment where the employer and the skilled overseas professional match is really working well. We are now making really fantastic connections with
different organisations in terms of welcoming people. It would be a real pity to lose all that work if there was no-one around to co-ordinate it all. We are making fantastic inroads with the Leaders for Geelong and I would really love (perhaps in this current program) to get one of our skilled professionals into that program. Also, through the work that BPW [Business and Professional Women] does, and just expanding those horizons. It would be a real pity to get all of that behind us and for there not to be a future for the program. From our own point of view, in terms of the program, it doesn’t matter what shape or form the program takes in the future, the settlement side of things is just as important as the employment side of things. Because you can’t have one without the other (BG4).

The organisations that specifically focus on bringing skilled migrants to Geelong or assisting them once they have arrived are very positive about the growth of Geelong. The City of Greater Geelong works with the State and Federal governments to actively promote Geelong ‘as a good place to work, invest and live’. The CoC has been involved with the G21 Regional Growth Strategy and the G21 Economic Development committee to develop regional plans.

So we’re across a lot of the issues in terms of regional planning and development, and I see that as being a real positive for the Geelong region. And it’s important these things are obviously planned for because growth will come; regardless of whether we like it or not, it’s going to come and we need to plan for that (BG3).

It is definitely good policy to move people from Melbourne:

For a city like Geelong to develop, to provide opportunities for people to live, work and play, we need to bring skills into the region. We’re going to be losing skills as much as we’re bringing skills into the region, so it needs to be constantly topped up. And I think that attracting people to this region will also attract business and industry to establish as well. So those sorts of things are very much interlinked and intertwined, so for business it’s a good thing (BG3).

These comments are echoed by the Committee for Geelong as Geelong ‘desperately’ needs people with the right skills. For example, as the number of jobs in manufacturing decline, Geelong is becoming a more service industry with IT, the TAC and so on. There is a mismatch in the available jobs while it is difficult to fill senior roles and the more skilled roles. The Committee for Geelong is working with its members to secure a diversified economy and sustainable future for Geelong.

One of the church representatives thinks that regional policy is a good policy because ‘overcrowding tends not to be very helpful’ with property prices, or for families. Geelong has the best of both worlds because it’s not overcrowded but yet it has good health facilities, big infrastructure things, schools, hospitals, GP clinics. And it means that the more Geelong grows it helps the church grow too.

**Summary and Recommendations**

Regional Cities Victoria’s regional settlement strategy seeks to attract and retain a skilled workforce. Employers can play a significant role in assisting migrants to integrate into the community (Kilpatrick et al. 2002; MacPhee & Scott 2002; Han, G & Humphreys 2005; Wilks et al. 2008; Kilpatrick et al. 2011). Not only does social connection enhance worker satisfaction but in the process, it grows the social capital of the individuals concerned and their localities.

This research has confirmed that good connections facilitate migrants’ ‘settling in’ and enhances their health, well-being, contribution to their communities and willingness to stay. There is no question then, that building such connections is a good outcome, one to be built on through positive policy interventions. By focusing on a number of migrants who had moved into Geelong, as refugees, as people moving from Melbourne and other parts of Victoria, a range of experiences have been documented along with insights into the processes by which connections were either facilitated or hindered by structures and policies. Some of the respondents just got on with making their own connections, using their individual social and cultural capital to engage relevant groups and organisations. Others though, have revealed the importance of organisations dedicated to the task of integrating migrants into the region – such as the Skilled Migration Program workers, the City of Greater Geelong officers, the Chamber of Commerce, Diversitat as well as large employers consciously relocating their staff to the region, such as the TAC. What was also apparent was the importance not just of dedicated organisations, programs and people but also places where sub-groups - defined by age, life cycle stage, class, religion, interest - can actually go easily, safely without complications and connect with others in the same position – such as venues and events.
where new business and professional people can meet, churches, mother’s groups, gyms, sporting clubs, playgroups, and schools where barriers can be breached and links across very different individuals established. Once established those individuals who come from outside the region often facilitate the connections between other new-comers and they themselves become a huge resource, to be utilised formally but also informally across the region. It is they, along with key organisations, who act as a bridge between new migrants and the multifaceted place that is Geelong. It is also they who most successfully negotiated the barriers – of class, ethnicity and personal reticence – and grew social capital in the region.

The main recommendations from this research then are:

To **businesses** trying to recruit staff to the region – to have dedicated programs and individuals to facilitate their removal and integration in not only the organisation but the place.

To **local government** to continue with their programs for welcoming and assisting newcomers, but also to make more use of those who have gone through these programs as mentors and facilitators of others. In addition, resources need to continue to support the provision of information packs, on the city and its services, but also ongoing activities, most usually web based as well as in the major community spaces (such as information centres and libraries). Such information also needs to be tailored to particular groups, differentiated by language and employment as well as perhaps by gender and life cycle stage.

To **organisations dedicated to the inclusion of overseas migrants** – such as Diversitat – to keep up the good work, but also to be aware of the importance of related organisations such as schools, mothers and play groups as well as churches as key sites where those from very different backgrounds can be linked to those already in the community, to positive effect. And to recognise the vital role of employment and housing to the inclusion of new migrants, without these there is no base on which any community can be constructed.

And **other social organisations** – gyms, sports clubs, community centres, schools – to be aware of their vital role in the integration of new comers into not only their particular space but also into the region as a whole and to be more pro-active in using their existing accommodation of new comers to facilitate a growth in their social capital, through actively integrating new members, social and bridging events.

**Appendix 1**

Organisations interviewed in the ‘Making Connections’ project

Organisations that employ or have initial contact with migrants new to Geelong were the site of first contact. These organisations were:

*Skilled Migration Program, Economic Development, City of Greater Geelong*

The Skilled Migration Project is part of the Victorian State Government’s Skilled Migration Strategy - Global Skills for Provincial Victoria - which aims to help employers attract and retain the skills they need when they are unable to source these skills locally.

*Communication and Marketing, City of Greater Geelong*

Within the City of Greater Geelong the Communications and Marketing Department deals with media enquiries and corporate marketing. In addition to dealing with media enquiries, advertising, and corporate marking for the City of Greater Geelong, the City provides information for new residents to Geelong.

*Transport Accident Commission (TAC)*

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) is a Victorian government-owned organisation set up in 1986 to pay for treatment and benefits for people injured in transport accidents. It is also involved in promoting road safety in Victoria and in improving Victoria’s trauma system.

*Chamber of Commerce (CoC)*

The Chamber of Commerce is a membership based organisation that works to promote, support and encourage business and industry in the Geelong region. The Chamber advocates on behalf of all forms of business—ensuring industries have a say on the issues that impact on the economic viability of business and the region as a whole. It provides networking events to connect businesses, training programs on a range of business topics, support services, and assistance with access to all levels of government and a mentoring program.
Geelong English Language Centre (New Arrivals Program) (GELC)

The Geelong English Language Centre has three briefs: to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) to new arrivals to Australia in the first 12 months; to provide ESL support to students who have enrolled in schools from one to five years; and, to provide a component for the community detention programs for people who are waiting for visas. There is also a regional project, an ESL regional project officer that oversees ESL programs in the region, in the Barwon South-Western region.

Diversitat

Diversitat is the peak regional body representing 45,000 residents in the Barwon South Western Region. Diversitat provides education, training and employment opportunities for both the CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) and CALM (Culturally and Linguistically Mainstream) communities. This includes the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP) which provides initial English language training to newly arrived migrants. Other services include Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS), Settlement Grants Program and Complex Case Support and introductory 100-hour Special Preparatory Program (SPP) classes for those with disrupted education, or torture and trauma issues.

Leaders for Geelong (Committee for Geelong)

The Leaders for Geelong has two programs: the Leaders for Geelong Community Leadership Program and the Barwon Community Leadership Program. The Committee for Geelong recognised the need to develop a new generation of business and community leaders with the skills, knowledge and networks to manage the region’s future responsibly and sustainably. Leaders for Geelong is for emerging business and community leaders and the Barwon Leadership program is for those who are living and or working in the low socio-economic sector of our community.

Reformed Presbyterian Church, Geelong

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has been in Geelong for over 150 years. Although Geelong has changed a great deal in that time, according to the Church, the gospel has not changed and is still as true and relevant to the needs of men and women as it was then. The historical roots of the Reformed Presbyterian Church can be traced from the New Testament Church, through a time in seventeenth century Scotland when the Bible’s teaching that Christ reigns as King of the Church and State.

St Andrews Anglican Church, Corio and Norlane

A bilingual worship service in English and Karen is held each Sunday and attended by some 35 Anglo Australians and 45 Karen. An associate Burmese priest and Australian priest work together bringing cross-cultural elements to the weekly service. This includes bilingual hymns and translations of the readings and sermons. Along with church activities, there is a distribution program which offers material aid on a monthly basis to refugee families, homework club for high school students and an ESL program for adults. Help with paper work and other aid is also provided.

Deakin University

Deakin University has campuses in Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool, providing convenience and accessibility for students in regional or rural Victoria or in the city. Deakin was established in the 1970s as one of the new generation of Australian universities. It combines university’s traditional focus on teaching and research with a desire to seek new ways of developing and delivering courses including flexible study options and courses which are informed by industry professionals. Deakin University employs over 3,000 people (full-time equivalent and casual staff).
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