

DELIVERING VET TO ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

SPRINGVALE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE – A SKILLS FIRST TRAINING PROVIDER CASE STUDY

Springvale Neighbourhood House delivers language, literacy and numeracy courses to some of Australia's most diverse and disadvantaged communities.

Its municipal area of Greater Dandenong is Australia's second-most diverse community with people from over 150 nationalities. The municipality is also among the top 2 per cent of Victoria's most disadvantaged.

Almost 95 per cent of learners at the Neighbourhood House are from non-English speaking backgrounds, and most have limited previous educational experience:

- 10 per cent have no formal education
- 70 per cent have less than 7 years of formal education in their countries of origin.

Diverse backgrounds

Neighbourhood House Manager, Melanie Virtue, says students are from diverse age groups, and include both recent migrants and long-term Australian citizens. Twenty per cent of learners are referred from rehabilitation organisations following work-related injuries. Twenty-five per cent have physical, intellectual or mental health issues. While some learners are well settled in the community and determined to build their skills, others feel more isolated and are less confident in their ability to learn.

Uniquely positioned to support learners

Melanie says the Neighbourhood House offers a strong support network for learners. It opened in 1983 as Springvale's first wave of migrants arrived and has a tradition of embracing people from diverse backgrounds. With a higher visibility

"Feeling individually supported and 'part of something bigger' is important to the learning of our students."

Melanie Virtue, Manager, Springvale Neighbourhood House

and role in the community than most, the Neighbourhood House is trusted as a safe and welcoming place.

Tutors at the Neighbourhood House are from diverse backgrounds themselves, and so bring a strong understanding of the learning journey their students are undertaking. The tutors hold Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) qualifications ranging from a Certificate 4 to Masters level.

Supported learning

Tutors work with each learner to develop an individual Learner Plan that sets out their learning goals and milestones. Learning is 'self-paced' so that students take ownership of their learning and feel they're in control.

Tutors design language, literacy and numeracy learning around practical and engaging tasks that also promote leadership and participation. Class sizes are small and paid tutors are supported by volunteer tutors so that students can receive one-to-one support. Examples of classroom activities include:

- The Literacy Cultural Kitchen, where students write, demonstrate and present cultural recipes

- Community excursions, which involve completing worksheets and making classroom presentations
- Real world learning, where students practice tasks such as ordering a coffee in a café or purchasing food from a local market.

Many learners also become involved in the wider activities of the Neighbourhood House, such as sewing groups and social events, where they informally practice their language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Success stories

Surveys conducted with students and employers show very high rates of satisfaction with the Neighbourhood House (75-93%) for trainer quality, effective assessment, training relevance and competency development.

Melanie says the individual stories of achievement are the most inspiring. Learners build their skills and confidence to continue with education, find more fulfilling employment or be promoted within their current workplaces as their language, literary and numeracy improves.

For example, a long-term unskilled worker enrolled with the Neighbourhood House after training as a nail technician but finding her limited English a barrier to full-time work. She built her skills and confidence in English speaking and received more shifts at the nail care business she worked for. When the owner decided to sell, the student purchased the business and maintains her involvement in the Neighbourhood House.

One young asylum seeker who spoke seven languages completed English language and computer courses with the Neighbourhood House and within a year was contributing her multi lingual and administration skills as a paid employee at a local primary school.

“Learning achieves more than just better skills for our students. It instils confidence in their ability to participate in their community and to improve their lives.”

Melanie Virtue, Manager, Springvale
Neighbourhood House
