

# KAREN COMMUNITY PROJECT

“ We don't want to be the next Taskforce ”

Access to Justice Community Leaders  
Consultation Report



Written by Ah Eh Soe, Maung Hnin Thwe, Mark Htoosaw Kunoo,  
Hser Law La Nay Blut, Sherinald Shwe and voices from the Karen  
community in Melbourne's West.

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# 1. Introduction

Since February 2025, threatening fake videos, fake news and misinformation specifically targeting the Karen community have been circulating on social media inciting fear within the Karen community in Melbourne's West. In response, Karen community leaders came together and established a working group to address the situation. They met regularly to share their experiences. Out of this several working groups were established. The working groups collaborated with services including local police, and wider community leaders in order to ensure that people feel safe regardless of their background, age or gender. An official statement from Australian Karen Organisation Victoria Branch (AKOV) was released online to reinforce community safety and cohesion.

Despite the hard work of community leaders who have been meeting regularly since February 2025, the situation escalated from online threats to multiple incidents of physical violence, perpetrated particularly against Karen young people in attacks that appear to be racially motivated. In several cases reported to community leaders, individuals were approached and questioned, with remarks such as "Are you Karen?" prior to the violent acts. This resulted in many community members and young people withdrawing from their day to day activities because of fear for their safety in public areas. This further recreates past trauma and mental health issues resurfacing for community members from refugee backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> Some community members and young people stopped attending school, soccer training and shopping centres to the extent that individuals fear expressing their cultural identity through traditional clothing in public spaces. Incidents were under-reported or not reported to police or authority due to cultural and language barriers as well as fear and challenges when navigating the justice system.<sup>2</sup>

Community leaders, although lacking formal legal expertise, have become the first point of contact for members seeking legal assistance, revealing a significant gap in access to legal support.<sup>3</sup> They are working tirelessly to contain the situation with the young people with limited resources as all are volunteers.<sup>4</sup> To address this gap, the community is advocating for investment in **Community-Led Solutions and Programs, Long-Term Community Advocacy and Strategic Partnership Plan** to support and break down barriers in overall access to services, particularly access to justice for young people and their families.

The Karen Community Project (KCP) aims to better understand the specific challenges the Karen community faces when navigating services and in particular, the barriers to accessing justice. The community working groups engaged Project Leads (PL) to guide the project. The PLs are made up of 5 community members with expertise and experience in community development and engagement, women and children's services, education, community services, youth advocacy and social justice backgrounds to conduct and oversee the KCP.

Currently the project is at the end of Phase 1. PL with support from the working group have conducted a successful Community Leaders Consultation reaching over 70 people. The comprehensive Community Leaders Consultation Report captures the voices from over 14 Karen community based-organisations across Melbourne's West. Phase 2 of the project aims to undertake a further 14 consultations which will total more than 1000 people reached. This Phase 1 report summarises what we heard from community leaders about the gaps and issues they face, as well as the opportunity the KCP is poised to capitalise on.



## 2. Overview of what we heard

Consultation participants provided feedback on barriers to accessing justice as well as insight into a wide range of topics affecting their lives and the way they access services in the Wyndham, Melton and Hobson Bay area. We have summarised the feedback into themes below - some of which are overlapping due to the nature of interconnection between social and economic issues. We have also outlined the methodology of the project and an overview of each topic in the following sections.

**The following themes emerged from the consultation and highlight the community needs:**

- **Access and Equity** -the need for improved pathways to services that increase understanding of service eligibility.
- **Information and Participation/Ownership** in decision-making processes that affect personal wellbeing outcomes.
- **Rights and Information** sharing in relation to social, health and justice issues.
- **Community Safety and Respect** is important that amenities/services provide trauma-informed care and culturally sensitive programs and service delivery.
- **Economic and Social Connection** in which the community feels safe, respected and can build social connection to promote an independent lifestyle.
- **Community Voice and Representation** access to opportunities that include community development and capacity building for community leaders and members.

### Barriers for community

The following barriers to accessing legal and social services were identified and increased in 2025. They include:

- Communities can be isolated by language and lack knowledge, understanding, and capacity in navigating support services.
- Lack of familiarity, understanding and experience of the justice system
- Contact with the legal system is frequently avoided due to stigma, shame, fear, mistrust and trauma stemming from experiences in country of origin and/or experiences with Australian authorities.
- Under-reporting of crimes including violence was consistently raised during the consultations due to negative experience with authorities.
- The community can experience the legal system as harmful, and are wary and distrustful of it especially when interacting with police and courts.
- When telling and retelling their stories, there is a lack of confidence and trust between service providers and communities.
- Culturally appropriate services are not readily available where communities are located, and the onus is on community members to individually ask for and find assistance without appropriate support in place

## Experiences and education of community safety and inclusion are low

- Community, young people and their families want capacity building training workshops and education programs to understand Australian law and the legal system. They also want to play an active part in the development of culturally-relevant crime prevention and early intervention programs including at the planning, design and implementation stages.
- Language difficulties, cultural differences and social isolation all act as barriers to community safety. Crimes carried out against community members such as trespassing on their private property, assault, stealing of phones) are frequently not reported or under-reported to police as community members feel their complaints are not taken seriously or dismissed by police.
- The court process itself is seen as intimidating. Arriving at court, concerns about safety while waiting at court, lack of understanding of court processes are also identified as barriers for the community to fully participate in the court process.
- Members are also impacted by the lack of cultural sensitivity from services in the court environment.
- Community also noted the lack of availability of men's behaviour change programs in the area.
- Service Providers frequently demonstrate a lack of understanding of the impact of pre-arrival experiences and the refugee trauma experienced by community members when interacting with services in the justice space.
- Young people and their families often feel they are not included in the decision-making process when it comes to their care, wellbeing and personal safety.
- Lack of knowledge of the law, particularly in areas of youth justice, family violence and family law, and limited awareness of available services – by community, but also across services and agencies themselves.

## Lack of social and economic inclusion for community

The community identified that lack of social and economic inclusion opportunities can lead to consequences like poor health, homelessness, and social tensions, and can be a result of barriers such as discrimination, lack of access to services, and inadequate education and employment opportunities for their young people.

Community and young people themselves want opportunities to include:

- Access to education and training that includes mentorship with people from their cultural background.
- Sustainable and fair employment opportunities in jobs where people feel safe at work.
- Community would like to be treated with respect and dignity and have security and opportunities to lead a better life.
- Have a safe, secure home where young people and their families can thrive.
- Be safe and protected to use healthcare, public transport and other services.
- Connect and engage with family, friends and the local community in ways that they want.
- Culturally appropriate support to deal with personal crises such as ill health, mental health or interacting with the justice system.
- Be heard and influence decisions that affect them.

### **According to community, examples of best practice service provision include:**

Despite many barriers and gaps in access to justice and services, we also heard examples of best practice community engagement and approaches to service provision. Best practice in community group service provision includes:

- Community identified Comfort Care and Community Services, Wyndham Community and Education Centre and Foundation House as positive examples of organisations that use a client-centred, collaborative approach, culturally appropriate programs, and strong collaboration that promotes community networks.
- Services in which Community members feel welcome and safe in an environment where they see people from their background such as bi-cultural workers to break down barriers and gaps.
- Community feels included when they are invited as guests to share their lived-experience as part of services and staff are culturally responsive and offer trauma informed training.
- Some organisations are delivering programs and information in multiple languages; however, it is not widespread across all sectors.
- The importance of hiring bi-cultural or community liaison workers in organisations where the community are accessing services.
- Services promoting training and development opportunities, developing effective information sharing and referral systems, and supporting strategies to drive and disseminate best practice across all sectors.
- Services committed to a strong focus on increasing inclusion and independence for the community.
- Community leaders identified what has worked in the past to address youth disengagement in the community is the strong coordination and collaboration between community and local services. It included culturally appropriate programs and activities that involved community leaders, young people, youth services, other services including police and settlement agencies coming together to deliver preventative and early intervention programs. Unfortunately, these programs are no longer available due to funding cuts.

### **Community-Led Solutions Programs and Strategies to respond to barriers faced by the community:**

- The need for services to create greater opportunities for empowering the community by seeking their participation in a process of co-design and review to deliver culturally safe and fit-for-purpose programs and services-designed in partnership with the community.
- The need for accessible culturally appropriate intervention and prevention programs for young people and their families to reduce recidivism, including educational and training workshops (provided free) to empower the community to voice their concerns confidently.
- The development of sustainable relationships and meaningful engagement platforms between community groups and local services including social, settlement, legal and police.
- Community-run cultural competence training for services and government to increase understanding by service-providers and to break down barriers.

In summary, there is a need for a comprehensive, culturally responsive, and multi-level approach to address the challenges faced by the Karen community in Melbourne's west, many of whom have refugee backgrounds and who continue to live with the impacts of trauma, displacement, and systemic disadvantage. The well-being of the community is impacted by multiple factors and achieving meaningful outcomes requires coordinated efforts across education, housing, employment, health, justice and community services.

The recommendations listed are based on priorities identified by the community and lived experience. They aim to improve the cultural safety and accessibility of services, strengthen trust between the Karen community and service systems, and ensure culturally sensitive support for young people, adults and families. They are also based on the collective strengths and needs of the broader community, and these actions will help build a more inclusive environment that fosters resilience, supports positive development, and enhances social and economic participation for all members of the Karen community.





### 3. Methodology

Community leaders from across 14 Karen community-based organisations came together from February 2025 to discuss strategies to ensure community safety and cohesion. Listed below are the 14 Karen community – based organisations across Melbourne’s West.

1. Australian Karen Organisation Victoria Branch (AKOV)
2. Australian Karen Organisation Victoria Branch Youth Department (AKOVYD)
3. Australian Karen Preserving Promoting Cultural & History Association Inc.
4. Comfort Care and Community Service
5. Hill Light Church
6. Karuna Compassion in Action
7. Melbourne Karen Baptist Church (MKBC)
8. Melbourne Karen Buddhist Association (MKBA)
9. Pwo Karen Baptist Church
10. Shepherd Centre Church
11. St Stephen’s Anglican Church - Karen Authorised Congregation
12. Werribee Karen Baptist Church (WKBC)
13. Westgate Karen Baptist Community Church (WKBCC)
14. Werribee Karen Seventh-Day Adventist Church

The leaders formed a Committee which met regularly for 2 to 3 hours on a weekly basis. From this Committee, a Working Groups were established, with five leaders nominated as Project Leaders to oversee the Karen Community Project (KCP).

These included:

1. Ah Eh Soe (Secretary of AKOV),
2. Hser Law La Nay Blut (Youth Advocacy Officer, AKOV),
3. Maung Hnin Thwe (Women and Children Services, and Vulnerable Community Groups, Advisor Melbourne Karen Buddhist Association)
4. Mark Htoosaw Kunoo (Education, Westgate Karen Baptist Community Church)
5. Sherinald Shwe (Social Justice, Community development and Engagement, Karen Community Member)



The KCP is split into Phase 1 and 2. See below for reference:

For Phase 1 of this proposal, Community Leaders is engaging:

1. 5 project leaders to conduct a detailed community consultation with Karen community leaders from 14 community groups.
2. The consultations will include training workshops for community leader attendees to confidently run their own consultation using a Train the Trainer model.
3. Community leaders will be equipped with resources and support to lead their own consultations with their own community groups.
4. The project leads will then prepare a report on the outcomes of the consultations.
5. Planned project and 1<sup>st</sup> community leaders report launch in November 2025 to inform the wider community and services.

For Phase 2, Community leaders who attended the consultation will use the outcomes and conduct further 14x consultations with their own community members.

1. The community leaders will then prepare a report on the outcomes of the consultations with the support of the project leads.
2. Planned 2<sup>nd</sup> report covering findings from community members consultations.
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> report to launch in November 2026 to inform the wider community and services.
4. Consultation participants will be remunerated with \$30 and catering.

The timeline above serves as a reference for the working group. The project is currently in Phase 1, with Phase 2 scheduled to begin in early September 2025.

The PL started by connecting with community groups through the working groups, where community leaders had existing relationships and took a collective approach to advertise consultation. Through word of mouth, community networks, community chat groups and social media, the team conducted a formal community leaders consultation at Wyndham Community and Education Centre on 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. Consultation participants were remunerated with a catered dinner.

The consultations started with a 60-minute presentation from the PL about the project background, what is community consultation, how to run a successful community consultation, and why we are seeking community feedback. Participants were provided with training resources and materials to conduct their own consultations within their communities during Phase 2 of the project.





The rest of the session ran for 180 – 240 minutes, where participants broke out into small groups to answer questions such as:

1. **What is your understanding of the Australian justice system?**
2. **What are the barriers/issues that you or your community are experiencing?**
3. **How do you or your community access support services in your area?**
4. **What support or resources would help you or your community to thrive?**

The breakout groups then reported back to the main group and the PL then transcribed notes, which are edited for brevity under relevant consultation findings in **Chapter 5 ‘Karen Community Leaders Consultation Report’** and inform the basis of our recommendations.

We prioritised leaders who worked with the most vulnerable community members, especially those at higher risk of criminal justice involvement or with limited access to existing services. All demographics listed below were included in our sample. These included:

- Young people
- Youth leaders
- Community Leaders
- Faith-based and religious leaders
- Community Elders
- People with lived experience of the justice system
- Culturally and racially marginalised women
- People from refugee and migrant backgrounds
- Families
- People with a disability
- People who speak English as their second or third language
- People with Neuro-diverse needs



## 4. Limitations

**The small sample size limits the generalisability of the consultation findings across and within communities.**

Participants were likely individuals already engaged or invested in the project, which may have introduced selection bias. Additionally, the timing of the consultation sessions—typically held after hours—may have excluded individuals who were only available during standard working hours, further limiting the diversity of perspectives captured.

**Project Leads are currently evaluating strategies to better engage underrepresented demographics, particularly individuals under 18 years old, who are statistically more likely to interact with the criminal justice system.**

Several participants have also expressed interest in a follow-up consultation to discuss how the collected information will be applied and to further strengthen collaborative relationships.

**To date, neither relevant services nor the Victorian Government have conducted consultations with the Karen community when developing youth justice approaches for young people and their families from this cultural background.**

Therefore, this consultation process represents the most extensive engagement with Karen communities in Melbourne's West regarding current issues and barriers to service access. As detailed elsewhere in this report, many participants were unaware of existing services or the procedures required to access care.

**The consultation process was impacted by language barriers and a lack of appropriate linguistic and cultural expertise.**

Participants often relied on Project Leads to interpret both resources and presentations, highlighting the absence of professional support. While community engagement was ultimately successful, there remains a significant shortage of translated materials in Karen S'gaw, Pwo Karen, and Burmese—languages frequently spoken within the community. In several instances, due to diversity in Karen languages, we had to rely on community members with only basic interpreting skills to assist at short notice. As a result, some key information—both shared by the project team and communicated by participants—was inevitably lost in translation. This experience reinforces a recurring theme throughout the consultation: the urgent need for more bicultural and bilingual workers to support meaningful and inclusive community engagement. The ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious practices of the Karen community are diverse. The PL acknowledges that we may lack some experience when interacting with the larger community, but we were able to overcome some of the obstacles with the help and guidance of the working groups.

**The issue was further compounded by the limited accessibility of community centres in Melbourne's western suburbs, where many community members gather.**

For those without access to a car, attending consultations was particularly challenging, as one participant noted.



**Securing an appropriate venue for the project launch posed significant challenges for the community.**

Despite project leads beginning the search two months in advance, there were limited suitable options available. Venue hires often came with restrictive conditions, complex guidelines, and high costs, making them inaccessible for a community-led event. These barriers highlight the broader issue of limited access to affordable, community-friendly spaces for local initiatives.

**Phase 1 of the project relied solely on community capacity and volunteerism for both planning and implementation.**

All costs associated with the project—including catering, venue hire, translation of resources, printing, resource development, and equipment—were covered through community donations and sponsorship. The working group and project leads committed their time voluntarily, often meeting regularly after hours and on weekends to advance the project. The project needed \$6000 to cover costs associated with catering for the community leaders consultation and report designs and printing. The working group and PL rallied Karen local businesses for sponsorship including individuals who wanted to donate to the project need. On Saturday, October 18, the community came together for a fundraising event to support and raise money for the remaining project expenses. The project started with 10 Karen community groups coming together, and as the project progressed, another 4 more joined, a total of 14 groups participated. Still, there are other groups in the community who wished to participate in the project but were excluded due to capacity. The working group is exploring funding options for additional groups to participate in the project at a later stage.



## 5. Karen Community Leaders Consultation Report

More than 70 people attended the Karen leaders community consultation, which included a diverse group of participants: faith and religious leaders, youth and youth leaders, elders, volunteers, families, people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, people with disabilities, people who speak English as their second or third language, and individuals with lived experience of the justice system. The session was delivered in **S’gaw Karen language**, ensuring language accessibility for participants as S’gaw Karen is the language that most of the Karen community are able to speak and understand.

During the consultation, community members highlighted the **complexity of both pre- and post-arrival experiences** as major barriers to accessing essential services, including health, education, employment and legal support. The Karen community faces a range of barriers that affect their ability to seek help and maintain wellbeing — including trauma from war and displacement, limited English and legal literacy, and lack of access to culturally appropriate services. While many of these issues could be eased through early settlement support, service gaps have left many people without the care and support they need.

**The Karen community identified the following barriers to seeking help:**

- Need for **culturally responsive services** and better **service coordination**
- **Low language and legal literacy**
- Impact of **war, torture, trauma**, and **family separation**
- Lack of access to **health care information** and **legal rights**
- These things negatively affect **mental health and wellbeing**
- Many people **missed out on early intensive settlement support**, which could’ve helped
- There are **gaps in resettlement services** particularly the restrictions and set timeframe that services can provide assistance

### The Karen community resettlement context

Persecution, political instability, and ongoing conflict in Myanmar have led to the displacement of ethnic minorities, notably the Karen people, who are an indigenous population in both Thailand and Myanmar. Over the past several decades, more than 1 million individuals from Myanmar have been displaced or sought asylum in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh due to war and human rights abuse.<sup>5</sup> Within Myanmar, displacement is widespread—with approximately 3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) recorded as of mid-2024.<sup>6</sup>

Emerging data suggests that displacement numbers in southeastern Myanmar, particularly among the Karen community, may be significantly higher than published UN estimates.<sup>7</sup> On the Thailand–Myanmar border, refugee populations remain substantial. Although exact figures fluctuate, historically large numbers—including Karen, Mon, and Shan—and refugees have sought refuge in camps with some eventually resettled. In the past decade, the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have been the most common destinations for resettled Karen refugees.<sup>8</sup> Between 2008 and September 2013, just over 4,000 Karen refugees from Burma resettled in Australia.



Like many new arrivals, the Karen mostly settled in metropolitan areas. In Victoria, for example, of the approximately 3,000 Karen language speakers in the state, nearly half — around 1,450 — were living in the Wyndham Local Government Area (LGA).<sup>9</sup> However, between 2017 and 2022, approximately 1,645 to 2,043 people from Myanmar were granted humanitarian visas to resettle in Australia, with many choosing Melbourne as their new home.<sup>10</sup> People from Myanmar have consistently been one of the largest groups arriving under Australia's humanitarian program, most of whom belong to ethnic minority groups such as the Karen and Chin.<sup>11</sup>

A recent military coup in Myanmar in 2021 continues to impact the resettled Karen community here, creating ongoing uncertainty, anxiety for the well-being of family and community back home.

### Culture and language barriers

The Karen people of Burma have been subjected to significant persecution and oppression by the Burmese government for many years, which has caused many of them to leave their homeland. Due to Burma's military regimes, a significant amount of this has taken the form of limited access to education, excluded from community participation and inclusion, economic and political exploitation. In an effort to keep the Karen people under control, the government has suppressed their culture and violated their human rights, forcing many of them from their homes.



Karen people are generally opposed to being called Burmese, as they prefer to use their Ethnic identity of Karen. It is important to be mindful that ethnically, they are a very different group and many have negative trauma experience with Burma as their oppressor. The Karen people typically come from rural backgrounds and have often had limited access to formal education, having spent many years in refugee camps. This experience has shaped a strong sense of community among them, with a deep respect for family, elders, and community leaders. Their cultural values emphasise collective well-being and mutual support, which plays a crucial role in their self-seeking behaviours.<sup>12</sup> Often individual decisions are made for the overall wellbeing of the whole family and “self” or “I” diminishes.

The Wyndham region hosts one of Victoria’s largest Burmese/Karen refugee communities. Between 2011 and 2016, approximately **36% of humanitarian arrivals** in Wyndham were born in Myanmar, making it the most common country of origin for this group.<sup>13</sup> Data also shows significant English language challenges: in the 2016 Census, **12,440 people** in Wyndham who spoke a language other than English at home reported that they spoke English “not well” or “not at all.”<sup>14</sup> Among Wyndham residents who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all,” the most commonly spoken languages at home were **Mandarin (17.1%)** and **Karen (10.1%)**, highlighting the need for targeted language and services.<sup>15</sup>

This is especially true for newly arrived Karen families who may have limited English, from rural backgrounds, and have low educational attainment. Services for children—kindergarten, playgroups, health services—are in high demand. For example, the Child and Family Hub in Wyndham Vale offers integrated support including health, speech pathology, parenting support, and assistance in areas like community connection.<sup>16</sup> However, the community identified that they have little to no knowledge or interactions with the available services or programs.

***“I came to Australia so that my children can have a future, get education and be safe.”***

*Community leader*

***“I never went to school, I struggle to learn the English language. AMEP classes are not enough.”***

*Community member*

***“When you come from a refugee background, services don’t exist back home, so It’s very hard to know about all the services and how they can help me and my family.”***

*Youth leader*



**Language and literacy barriers significantly affect how communities engage with government, housing, education, legal, and social services.**

Limited awareness and understanding can both contribute to problems and prevent them from being resolved effectively. Many community members require basic support with everyday tasks—such as completing forms or interpreting official correspondence which often fall on community leaders to assist. Without this assistance, individuals may be unable to access essential services, which can negatively impact their overall health and well-being. Services need to meaningfully engage and build partnership with the community in order to **understand the full extent of Cultural Barriers**. The community may face challenges in trusting and navigating the systems due to cultural differences with service providers.

Furthermore, the community identified that there is a **strong need for the co-location of services** to increase accessibility and equity and to promote community help seeking behaviours. Currently, community members must travel to different locations to access various services.

The community disclosed that some parents have no choice but to rely on their children to do interpreting and translating for them when services fail to book an interpreter. This places significant and inappropriate responsibility on the child to ensure that their parents have access to the correct information.

***“I find going to appointments very daunting, my child’s GP is in one location, but their specialist is all the way in the city. Most of the time there are no interpreters booked.”***

*Parent*



## Access to justice barriers

The community identified access to justice as one of their biggest barriers and need ongoing support to navigate the justice system to help their young people and their families. The community wants community legal education (CLE) training and workshops for community leaders, women and young people so information can easily be disseminated about laws, legal services, rights, and their role in the community in educating others and supporting those interacting with the justice system. The community wants to be included in developing strategies to strengthen community legal literacy education programs, including regular focus groups and the establishment of community advisory groups.

The community noticed that there is a gap in research on Karen community barriers to access justice especially in the youth justice space. The community and young people want to be part of the advocacy process to create a strong knowledge base to drive appropriate action to address youth crimes.

The community discussed awareness and disseminating strategies of legal information through community leaders, using different means like a community newsletter, community radio for example SBS Karen and digital platforms such as social media, Facebook or YouTube to provide free information in Karen languages where the community are already engaged in these platforms.

Some barriers identified in the consultations affect women exclusively; others are issues that affect many women experiencing family violence. However, women in the community may experience these barriers more severely because of language, cultural barriers and social isolation due to low social connection with services and the community.<sup>17</sup>

The community suggested 'justice partnerships' between the community and legal and other services in communities for the purpose of improving access to justice. There is already precedent identified in the Report for developing collaborative practices between settlement services, legal services and health clinics, councils with communities. See **Appendix** section under **What has worked for the community?**

***“We want to collaborate with government, local settlement and mainstream service providers, and the wider community to promote awareness, develop culturally appropriate resources, and share responsibility.”***

*Community leader*

***“Our Karen young people need programs which combine fun social activities such as sports, art, and culture, with legal literacy workshops to understand our rights and responsibilities so that we can make changes.”***

*Young Person*

For example, collaboration might include:

- The use of space and other facilities to promote community participation
- Practical assistance to guide and assist community members with processes (eg accessing information, applying for citizenship, or superannuation queries);
- Place based legal assistance like Lawyers in School programs and Lawyers in community centres.
- Community Hub in school or community centres to increase access and promote integration through community development

Some services in Wyndham are offering this kind of practical support to assist the community through bi-cultural or support workers employed in the organisation but this is not enough.

Community often feels left out in decision making processes when it comes to achieving the best outcomes for their wellbeing. The community wants continuous support and assistance when they are interacting with the justice system. Karen community leaders have the capacity to work with complex legal and non-legal needs of Karen clients, including their need for cultural safety and connection.

To improve community understanding of processes and outcomes in the criminal justice system, the Karen community suggested establishing a designated position situated within the justice system designed for this purpose to work with the community at a grassroots level. The designated position would have power to make changes and improve community understanding and access to justice. When people are interacting with the justice system, often they are faced with both social and legal issues. The community discussed the need for social worker/s, financial counsellors, youth workers, community development workers and mental health support to work collaboratively to support the young people and their families.

***“We really need legal services to consider the feasibility of expanding bi cultural roles to community justice roles. Consideration should be given, in this context, to collaborative solutions across the legal services.”***

***Youth leader***

***“There is a need to work holistically to address the complex needs in which our community members can get caught up with various legal and non-legal issues.”***

***Community leader***



The community leaders want legal services to support and engage with community leaders and young people to build their capacity to develop community-led and based solutions that might directly work to improve community access to justice.

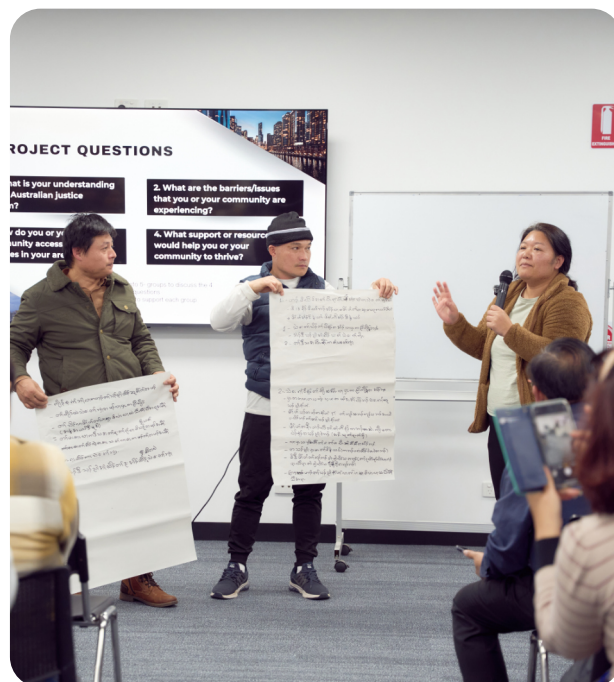
These might include:

- Working with Karen community leaders to enhance self-resilience and improve outcomes
- Building local strategies to address conflict in communities using community-based knowledge and skills
- Assisting with programs that upskill community members (for example to work as financial counsellors, youth support workers, social workers)

The community identified the need for legal services to provide collective input both on legal needs and on issues impacting access to justice. In this context it is also worth considering the role of justice reinvestment, often implemented through a collective impact framework, to progress community priorities and enhance justice outcomes. As one community leader put it:

***“We don’t want to be the next taskforce.”***

*Community leader*



The community needs ongoing support from government and services to build relationships that lead to partnerships and collaboration with settlement services, domestic violence services, legal services, and police. This would enable the joint provision of community education forums for everyone, as well as the sharing of expertise between community and services.

***“We need services and government to walk next to us, not in front, not behind, but beside us.”***

*Community leader*

## Justice and young people related issues

We talked to 25 young people during the community leaders consultation. The group was divided into smaller groups of community leaders and young people to ensure a safe space for young people to give independent feedback and share ideas openly. The community and young people discussed why young people are likely to interact with youth justice as well as their awareness of the legal system? The group also came up with strategies to reduce youth crimes and recidivism. The community, young people and their families identified that they need creative early intervention and prevention programs that are culturally appropriate and tailored to their needs. This includes youth-focused legal information for students at schools, TAFE's and universities as young people from Karen background face significant discrimination in the community, workplaces, school and institutions including legal settings and services.

The community encourages the police and the justice department to meaningfully engage with community leaders and young people through cultural exchange workshops, where the community can train police, judicial officers, administrative staff and the jury in cultural awareness and sensitivity. The community often felt dismissed when interacting with the police and the justice system. When faced with legal issues, community members report them to their community or religious leaders instead of the police.<sup>18</sup> The community reported 12 incidents that were recorded during the course of the project (details can be found in **Appendix** section under ***Incidents reported to community leaders***). We note that there were additional incidents reported, but that they still need to be verified. Young people noted that when it comes to reporting they are not familiar with the process and scared of the consequences both legal and from home.

***“We need to foster stronger police engagement by designing programs and activities that encourage relationship building and trust between young people and the police.”***

*Youth leader*

***“When we tell our parents about incidents that happened, they don’t want us to go out anymore. We lost our sense of safety but also our freedom to go shopping or hang with our friend.”***

*Young Person*

People from refugee and migrant backgrounds may under-report crimes due to fear of legal consequences, lack of trust in the police, and cultural unfamiliarity when navigating the formal justice system. They may also experience isolation, language barriers, and discrimination, which further hinders their ability to seek help and report incidents.<sup>19</sup>

***“We need people who look like us and from our background to be employed as staff to address barriers faced by our community in the justice system.”***

*Youth leader*

To address language barriers when young people is interacting with the justice system, the community urges the regular practice of engaging interpreters and translators to work with lawyers and other legal professionals to assist in explaining the legal system and legal process. Parents, young people, community leaders, support workers and services need to be part of this process as often the young people and their families are not included or isolated due to language barriers.

***“It is sad for young people who are in the system and have no support from their community or families. Not because they don’t want to be involved or help the young person but due to limited pathways and knowledge of the process and systems.”***

*Youth leader*

Both community leaders and young people identified that there are various misconceptions within the community about the Australian justice system. Many community members from refugee backgrounds bring with them trauma and bad past experience when interacting with police and government. The community would like to be involved in developing strong feedback mechanisms which act as a point of reference for improving the quality of service and respect for diverse cultural practices.<sup>20</sup> The feedback received can assist in identifying and changing court rules and procedures that impede effective access to justice for recently- arrived people from refugee backgrounds. Karen culture is extremely hierarchical, with a strong emphasis on leadership and deep respect for elders and leaders. People are taught not to ask questions and not to question authority. This itself presents an additional barrier for the community in providing feedback on the services they receive. It is, for them, a new experience. The process of participating in community consultations and forums together with services can assist in reducing a significant barrier to understanding the real issues that the community are experiencing at the grassroots levels.

***“We need courts and legal professionals to make referrals to culturally appropriate services that can assist young people and their community with legal advice and representation.”***

*Community leader*



The community identified that currently, there are no culturally appropriate programs that address youth offending. Services are also faced with challenges when trying to assist young people from Karen background to access programs while they are interacting with youth justice. There is a strong emphasis that government and services working in the justice space need to invite Karen community leaders and young people to begin the conversation on how to help young people and their families who are interacting with the justice system.

***“We have faith leaders, youth workers, cultural connect programs but no one is talking to us or involving us to be part of talking to our young people who are in the system.”***

*Faith leader*

Employment opportunities within the justice space are important for the Karen community in addressing barriers. The Community is seeking collaboration and partnership with services to develop strategies to effectively use the knowledge and skills of community leaders and young people to create bicultural workers roles. The bicultural workers will be able to promote affordable and accessible court services such as legal aid, free community legal clinics, legal literacy, and free interpreting and translating services to the community.

***“When we need to go to court, there is no availability of female interpreters and other culturally appropriate support for victims of sexual, domestic and/or family violence and abuse.”***

*Woman leader*

The community pointed out that the pre-court and court process itself is a barrier for the community. The information and forms are only provided in English and are too long and complicated for me to be able to complete without assistance. The government needs to invest in ensuring that all court information and forms are in language and that, at least appropriate language support is made available to the community.

The young people found that while mental health, drug and alcohol abuse is high in the community, especially among young people. This can cause high levels of stress for families in prevent them from seeking early help due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with Australian systems, and a new culture, as well as stigma and trauma associate with it. In the Karen community, stress can therefore be a major issue for both young people and families. The volume of questions asked during counselling can cause further stress for people who are not familiar with counselling procedures.

***“Everything is connected, our mental and physical health but we need to go to different locations to get help. This can be too much for a young person.”***

*Young Person*

## What are the community needs?

Throughout the consultation, the community identified the need to access culturally safe and appropriate spaces to grow, reconnect and solve problems together as a community. Currently, the Karen community groups have no designated ownership of community spaces except for faith based groups that have arrangements with different churches to meet and pray. The community wants to develop and implement a Strategic Partnership Plan with services and all levels of government in the creation of a **Multicultural Community Centre or Community Hub**. This could include Community Support Program (CSP) model or multidisciplinary services tailored to the needs of refugee, asylum seekers and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to reduce the complex issues facing the community. There is a significant gap in the availability of culturally appropriate programs to address the causes of overrepresentation of Karen young people in the youth justice system and to provide support services for their families.



***“Our young people need holistic support when they are going through the justice system.”***

*Community leader*

## **While this project began with a focus on justice, community consultation revealed a broader set of interconnected needs.**

Key issues identified include access to affordable housing options, drug and alcohol services, mental health support, disability services, and culturally appropriate early intervention and prevention programs for young people and their families in a timely manner. Although the community is aware of various services, many remain inaccessible due to funding limitations, restrictive eligibility criteria, long wait times, and the absence of certain services—such as specialists—in the local area.

## **The community consistently emphasised the importance of place-based services delivered where people naturally gather.**

They highlighted the need for co-located service models, where a comprehensive range of health, therapeutic, community, and legal services are available in a single, accessible location—such as a community centre. This integrated, community-centred approach is seen as essential to effectively supporting vulnerable individuals and families, improving access, and reducing service fragmentation.

## **Transportation was identified as a major barrier to accessing essential services.**

Community members shared the challenges of navigating public transport due to limited bus and train services, with frequent delays and cancellations. In newly developed areas, public transport infrastructure is often non-existent, making it even more difficult for residents to travel. As a result, community members are frequently required to travel long distances to access basic services and amenities. These include employment opportunities, education, recreation, retail outlets, and access to fresh and culturally appropriate food. Even when such services do exist, they are often located far from residential areas, further exacerbating accessibility issues.

**There is a significant shortage of essential services in the area, particularly youth mental health services, specialised legal and migration support for the Karen community.**

Often, the only available option for specialised legal and migration advice is through costly private providers, which many cannot afford. Additionally, access to legal information in community languages is both limited and inconsistent. Online information is often unclear or confusing, creating further barriers for community members trying to navigate complex systems. There is a clear need for increased service provision for the community, including services delivered in-language and tailored to the specific needs of diverse communities.

**Young people need safe, inclusive spaces to connect and engage.**

Currently, public infrastructure—such as parks, playgrounds, transport, and community facilities—does not adequately reflect the needs or interests of young people. Recreational spaces are often not designed with diverse age groups or cultural backgrounds in mind, limiting their accessibility and relevance. Creating youth-friendly environments is essential to fostering inclusion, belonging, and positive social outcomes.

**Vulnerable community members—such as single-income households, young people, and seniors—report a severe lack of affordable housing options.**

There is little to no affordable housing or rental availability in the area. As a result, young people and families are often forced to relocate to meet financial demands. This is compounded by a lack of ongoing, local employment opportunities—particularly for community members, youth, and seniors—making it difficult to achieve long-term stability and remain connected to place and community.

**Access to mental health and other essential services remains limited and inequitable.**

Services are often not physically located within the community, and when they are, they remain inaccessible to people facing language and literacy barriers. The current service system is siloed, lacking coordination and warm referral pathways, which makes navigation difficult. Additionally, long waiting periods across sectors—including mental health, legal, and social services—mean that people are not receiving timely support when it's most needed.





## 6. Recommendations

All levels of government and service providers are urged to consider the following recommendations from the consultation outcomes. They outline practical strategies for engaging more meaningfully with communities including implementation strategies to improve community engagement, address inequities, and ensure culturally appropriate programs.

There is a specific need for governments and services to **invest in and re-evaluate existing programs and systems** to ensure they are culturally appropriate, accessible, and effective. This includes initiatives such as:

- Parenting programs tailored to diverse cultural contexts.
- Early intervention and prevention services that reflect community needs and values.
- Programs designed with communities, not just for them.

### 1. Access & Equity

To enhance access and equity for the Karen community, a coordinated, culturally responsive approach is necessary. This includes cultural competency training, professional language services, workforce diversity, strategic planning, trauma-informed healthcare, educational access, legal literacy workshops, community participation, and partnerships, fostering trust, reducing barriers, and ensuring inclusion in decision-making.

### 2. Information and Participation/Ownership

Engaging communities in the design and implementation of services and programs is essential to fostering trust, building ownership, improving outcomes, and ensuring that decisions align with community needs and values. Community need to be regularly updated at every stage of a project or policy development to manage expectations and maintain engagement. Adopt Participatory Decision-Making (PDM) to engage stakeholders in a structured way to inform and legitimise the decision-making process, creating buy-in from community and ensure shared ownership.

### 3. Rights and Information

Increase community accessibility and awareness of existing services and the law through production and dissemination of information through Community Legal Education (CLE), printed material and online. This should include producing information in language including various forms of communication with the community. All levels of government agencies and services ensure that community members have access to basic information essential to ensuring effective interaction with government systems and about relevant rights and responsibilities. Further, the government agencies and services need to ensure that they are also aware of relevant referral pathways and information sharing where required. Information about and processes of referral must be monitored and improved on an ongoing basis. Enhance community accessibility to services through outreach, CLE, and culturally relevant programs. Improve information sharing, address language needs, and understand cultural barriers for effective interactions with government systems and services.

### 4. Community Safety and Respect

Community safety and respect for community, women and young people involves a combination of governmental, services, community, and individual actions aimed at ensuring people are safe, their rights are protected, and they are integrated into the community with dignity and opportunity. To understand how their individual experiences affect their perception of community safety and what matters to them, the community and services must be included in the conversation into community safety.

To ensure that early intervention programs are accessible, community safety promotion strategies require open, secure spaces and platforms to raise awareness and provide options for managing safety among the community, including women and young people. To improve community safety and support young people in the Justice system, early intervention initiatives are needed to foster engagement, skills, and mentorship opportunities.

## 5. Economic and Social Connection

The Karen Community are more likely to access services that are **co-located at community hubs**, where they can connect with a full range of supports such as food banks, casework, legal services, family services, and social groups. Strengthening economic and social connection requires coordinated, community-led initiatives that build trust, resilience, and opportunity.

## 6. Community Voice and Representation

**Invest in community and bi-cultural workers**, to ensure that services remain accessible and culturally safe, and to guarantee that any programs or services remain a viable employment option for the community.

All levels of government and service providers should commit to meaningful community development and embed it into decision making processes to address current barriers preventing communities from thriving. This includes the importance of addressing and closing the **systemic** inequities gaps, acknowledging lived experiences and community expertise by fostering meaningful collaboration to increase community participation and aspiration. The promotion of integrating the perspectives and insights of the community who have direct experience with a particular issue or service into policy and program development, service delivery, and system design.

**Develop and implement Strategic Partnership Plan** with services and all level of government in creation of a **Multicultural Community Centre or Community Hub** that includes multidisciplinary service tailored to the needs of refugee, asylum seekers and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. There is a significant gap in the availability of culturally appropriate programs that address the need of over-representation of the Karen young people in the youth justice and support services for their families. **Community Support Program (CSP) model** is worth noting to address the above community need.



## Key Actions in the following Plan:

The following are ordered to reflect community priorities and will involve a multi-layered response over time by the community in partnership with services, local government and government through **Community Support Program** model.

1. **Community-led Solutions:** Empower communities to co-design and deliver culturally appropriate services, including early intervention and prevention programs for young people and families, as well as education and training workshops to build confidence and advocacy skills.
2. **Cultural Leadership & Facilitation:** Engage staff and community leaders to run programs and initiatives, ensuring to promote cultural knowledge, sensitivity and safety, and relevance.
3. **Mentorship & Education Support:** Develop mentorship programs led by community members or mentors with shared backgrounds. Provide bilingual support in schools and targeted early intervention during key transition periods (e.g., primary to secondary school, or school to vocational training). Engage parents in culturally appropriate ways to strengthen family involvement.
4. **Co-Located Services:** Establish community hubs that bring together health, therapeutic, social, community, and legal services in one accessible location for vulnerable community members.
5. **Recreational & Cultural Programs:** Develop programs within multicultural hubs that provide culturally relevant activities—such as sports, arts, music, dance, language, and leadership workshops—to promote physical health, creativity, social connection, and community pride.
6. **Employment & Economic Participation:** Embed community employment opportunities in all proposed strategies to promote long-term economic participation, supported by sustained funding.
7. **Multicultural Community Centre or Community Hub:** Create a welcoming, safe space for intergenerational activities, diverse cultural celebrations, health, education, and community events. Such hubs will strengthen belonging, cultural pride, and social cohesion.





## 7. Next steps

While services are supportive of the need for comprehensive community consultation to determine the most appropriate design and delivery model, the Karen community will continue to lead this once-in-a-generation project. The aim is to establish a community-led model that not only addresses the significant service gaps in the Karen community but also reflects the needs of the other fast-growing multicultural and First Nations populations across Melbourne's West.

We will seek funding to progress to Phase 2 of the project, which will focus on mapping community-led solutions and innovative outcomes that enhance community safety, social cohesion, and overall wellbeing through further community consultations. The Karen community groups will be actively involved throughout the project, co-designing the services they want and need within a culturally safe, fit-for-purpose service delivery model. We will also strengthen collaboration with the broader community and service providers by increasing community awareness and education around access to justice and available services. This approach will empower and equip community members with the knowledge and confidence to engage effectively with the justice system and support services.

### Why does this work need to be done?

There is an urgent need for a dedicated, culturally appropriate early intervention initiatives and programs for Karen communities in Melbourne's West—particularly in the Wyndham area. Wyndham has the highest population of the Karen community. Despite this, culturally sensitivity service infrastructure has not kept pace with the growing Karen community demand in the justice space.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified challenges already faced by Karen local community, particularly in areas such as justice, health, mental health, employment, housing, and family violence. Now, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis is further straining already limited services and supports, placing vulnerable groups at even greater risk of falling through the gaps. To prevent deteriorating outcomes for vulnerable Karen community, there is an **urgent need** for culturally appropriate, early intervention services for young people and their families interacting with the justice system.

- **Melbourne's West is growing fast** and is one of the **most multicultural and disadvantaged** areas in Australia.
- **COVID-19 made things worse**, especially around justice, health, housing, and more.
- **Services haven't kept up** with population growth.
- **Cost-of-living pressures** are increasing the demand even more.

This project is a rare opportunity to genuinely engage the Karen community in shaping the services they truly need. By involving the Karen community in the co-design and delivery of these programs, we can build community governance, capacity and improve long-term wellbeing. These services are essential for addressing the complex social and justice challenges in the region—particularly when they focus on prevention and early intervention to address systemic inequities.

## 8. Project contacts

If community members, organisations, service providers, or government representatives have questions or feedback about this project, please contact the project representatives listed below.

We welcome opportunities for **collaboration and partnership** to help advance our goals and break down barriers in supporting our community, young people, and their families.



**AH EH SOE**

Project leads

0404 377 703

kcpmelbournwest@gmail.com



**MARK HTOOSAW**

Project leads

0434 155 321

kcpmelbournwest@gmail.com

# 9. Appendix

## Incidents reported to community leaders

**Community leaders have reported several incidents believed to be Prejudice-Motivated Crimes (PMCs).** In multiple cases, individuals were approached and questioned with remarks such as, “Are you Karen?” before being subjected to assault and acts of violence including robbery. These incidents have instilled fear within the community, particularly among young people, and have significantly disrupted their daily lives. Community members have expressed fear for their safety in public spaces, leading some to withdraw from school, extracurricular activities such as soccer training, and visits to shopping centres.

For many from refugee backgrounds, these experiences have resurfaced past trauma and triggered mental health challenges. In some cases, individuals have felt unsafe expressing their cultural identity, including wearing traditional clothing in public.<sup>21</sup>

These incidents were often underreported or not reported to police due to language and cultural barriers, fear of repercussions, and the complexity of navigating the justice system.<sup>22</sup> This highlights the urgent need for culturally safe reporting pathways and community-led responses to PMCs incidents.

The incidents are listed below:

- 1. 5<sup>th</sup> September 2025, Time 8:15am, Location: Werribee Station**  
Two Karen boys and one of Karenni background in school uniforms waited for the train to go to school in Laverton. Three people wearing masks attacked two of the Karen boys. Both boys sustained serious injuries. Bystanders looked on and didn't offer any assistance to the young people. The students ran into the train seeking safety, and when they arrived at school, they received first aid. The school reported the incident to police. The three young people provided accounts of the incidents and gave their statements to police.
- 2. 4<sup>th</sup> September, Time: 9am, Location: Wyndham Vale**  
A 19 year old man of Karen background was reversing his car when another vehicle blocked him. He managed to drive away but was followed by the offending car, which forced him to crash. The man got out of his vehicle and was struck by the offending car before it sped away.
- 3. 10<sup>th</sup> August 2025, Location: Wyndham Vale**  
Three young people were walking, when a vehicle tried to run them over. Two of the Karen young people sustained serious injuries and received medical assistance at the Werribee hospital. The other went to another hospital. The incidents were only reported to community leaders.
- 4. 9<sup>th</sup> August 2025: Time: 4:40pm, Location: Werribee**  
After winning a soccer match, a group of 4 Karen boys was waiting at a bus stop near Werribee Plaza. A car pulled up and six people got out of the car and attacked the Karen boys. A 14 yr old Karen boy was stabbed with a machete at Werribee Plaza by the group. He is receiving medical treatment at the Royal Children's Hospital. Police are in contact with the victims and their families.



5. **3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025, Location: Wyndham Vale**  
After a soccer match, some 6 Karen young people waited at the 192 bus stop to go home. A black and red car pulled up next to the Karen boys, and 6 people got out of the car and started to chase the 5 Karen young people with machetes. The 5 Karen young people managed to escape. The incidents were only reported to community leaders.
6. **28<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Time: 8pm, Location: Wyndham Vale**  
A 16-year-old Karen boy was returning from a friend's birthday in Wyndham Vale. A car stopped in front of him blocking his way 6 people got out of the car and assaulted him. The young Karen boy sustained facial, leg and stomach injuries. The young person did not report the incident to police or tell his parents. Only the next day, he told his teacher at the school, the school raised the incident with his mum. Mum reported the incident to community leaders. Community leaders organised medical appointments and reported it to the police.
7. **25<sup>th</sup> May 2025, Time: 12pm, Locations: Wyndham Vale**  
Police were called to Manuka Drive in Wyndham Vale with a report of 4 males chasing a male with a machete. The victim of Karen background was taken to Royal Melbourne Hospital with stab wounds to the chest and arms.
8. **14<sup>th</sup> May 2024, Location: Werribee**  
A young Karen boy was attacked at school by 3 students. The students involved were all suspended, including the victim.
9. **3<sup>rd</sup> May 2025, Location: Wyndham Vale**  
A Karen boy waiting for a bus at Wyndham Vale Station. A car stopped and 6 people from African background got out of the car and asked, "are you in a Brotherhood gang?". The boy answered "no". The group started to assault and punch him. The incident was not reported to police.
10. **20<sup>th</sup> March 2025, Location: Werribee Plaza**  
A young Karen boy was attacked in Werribee Plaza car park. The boy sustained serious injuries requiring surgeries. The incident is under police investigation.
11. **March 2025, Location: Manor Lake**  
A 12 year old and his 21 years old brother both from Karen background were exercising and walking around a park. A White Hyundai car drove past, 3 people got out with ski masks. They asked the younger boy "how old are you and who do you represent?" The boy answered, "12 yrs old". The group said, "let's go" and left the boy alone. The incident was not reported.
12. **1<sup>st</sup> March 2025,**  
A Karen boy and girl were travelling on the train when a male approached them and told them to move their seats. The 2 got up and moved seats. The person followed them and assaulted the male Karen youth. The case was reported to Altona police station.

# Sponsorship

## Local Karen community business and individual sponsorship

We would like to express our sincere gratitude on behalf of the Karen Community Project to the 14 Karen community and faith-based organisations, as well as to our generous donors and local Karen business sponsors. We are profoundly grateful for their invaluable support. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals and business:

1. A & P Bricklaying
2. Aye Driving School
3. Paw Driving School
4. Tai Yin Thar
5. Comfort Care & Community Services
6. Poekoothay
7. Kaw Thoo Lei Shop
8. Kay Say Bricklaying
9. Tree Shade Supports
10. Pay Ther Pu Karen Ethnic Clothing
11. LCKELECTRICAL.PTY.LTD
12. Mr Law Baw Law Mu
13. Universe Karen Grocery
14. G & G Virities Grocery PTY.LTD
15. Emmanuella Auto Repairs
16. Living Hope Community Care Pty.Ltd
17. Zun Nal Driving School

# What has worked for the community?

## What has worked for the community? Community-Identified Programs

The community identified several programs as effective in addressing barriers faced by young people and their families. However, due to funding limitations, some of these programs are no longer running. Others continue but are restricted in scope, with access limited to certain groups—for example, newly arrived cohorts.

**Don't Settle For Less:** The Settlement Justice Partnership and Fairer Outcomes for Refugees in Melbourne's West. (Westjustice, MiCare and Wyndham Community and Education Centre)  
The initiative placed community lawyers in settlement support agencies in Melbourne's West where they saw and helped clients alongside community and settlement workers in a known and trusted environment.

### Ucan2 (Foundation House The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)

A 16-week education and settlement group program which supports the social inclusion of recently arrived young people of refugee background aged 16–25.

### Breaking down Barriers Camp

The Camp was made possible through a collaboration of service providers in the City of Wyndham which this year included, Wyndham Council Youth Services, Werribee Police, SpiritWest Services Western Bulldogs, New Hope Foundation (Werribee Refugee Resource Centre), Country Fire Authority (Geelong CFA), Pinnacle Adventure Services and new program partners and Open Family Australia.

Activities included a tour of the Geelong CFA, including a presentation on fire safety in the home, Open Water Learning activities at Eastern Beach (through the generous contribution of Lifesaving Victoria), abseiling, flying fox, traditional Australian bush dancing, art and music therapy, trust initiatives, as well as the infamous "Pinnacle of Terror". The camp activities are designed to challenge the young people's mental and physical strengths and for them to learn about themselves as well as gain invaluable social, leadership and teamwork skills.

### CALDplay (Western Bulldogs, SpiritWest)

The CALDplay sports program provides newly arrived people to the West of Melbourne with social participation opportunities through the medium of sport and physical activity, whilst promoting healthy living. Working alongside English Language Schools in the West, the CALDplay program runs for 6 weeks during each school term, with participants having the opportunity to learn four different team sports. This sustainable model is set-up in conjunction with partners including Netball Victoria, AFL Victoria and Western United FC.

### Transport Connections Program

In Wyndham, Link Community Transport established a partnership with a bicycle recycling organisation and organisations that work with refugees. The aim of the project was to provide access to recycled bicycles, bike education and bike maintenance training to refugees.

**Foundation House The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture** ran "The Engaging Youth Project - A Community Capacity-Building Approach to Working with Karen Young People." The project had three main parts:

**Engaging Youth:** A two-year project supporting young people who were struggling with a range of issues in their resettlement including AOD. The project employed a Karen Youth Worker and a CLW and was guided by a Youth Advisory Group, comprised of 20 young people, including vulnerable members, which met monthly to explore issues. Three sub-working groups focused on a logo, AOD harm minimisation messages, and building relationships between vulnerable young Karen and the wider community. Two group programs and camps were conducted.



**Development of an AOD Health Promotion Resource:** This involved using music to deliver health promotion messages about alcohol and other drugs and harm minimisation strategies to Karen young people. It involved a project team, participation from New Hope and Open Family, and a core working group of young people, with assistance from a professional filmmaker and sound editor. Four music video clips with harm minimisation messages were posted on YouTube, and the project received media attention.

**Strengthening Relationships:** This project focused on strengthening the relationships between vulnerable young Karen people, their parents, elders, and the wider Karen community. It involved continuing conversations between elders and young people, establishing a working group comprised of elders and young people, working together to design and run activities to build inter-generational connections. Themes discussed and shared included hopes and dreams for the future, family relationships in a new culture, cultural values, and coping with the challenges of resettlement.

Outcomes from the working group highlighted the value of increased opportunities for communication, connection and understanding between young people and elders.



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- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/about-council/wyndham-community/research-and-statistics/community-profiles> .
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.ipchealth.com.au/services/child-family-hub-wyndham/>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://jcdi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Migrant-Refugee-Women-FACTSHEET.pdf>
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# Project activities



