



MAY NEWSLETTER

A Reflection on the Bilingual Worker Program at the Regional Testing and Vaccination Hub.

Since the commencement of the Hub at the MacIntosh Centre the Ethnic Council has been providing bilingual staff to be Customer Service or Administration. These staff were predominantly young bilingual students from La Trobe University studying Social Work or Nursing and Ethnic Council vaccine coordinator Susan Johnson penned her thoughts on the program. Below Susan's comments are some personal responses from three program participants.



I realised this opportunity for many multicultural community members would be rewarding, but I did not comprehend how gratifying it would be for them to proactively assist a community, who were dealing with misinformation and confusion regarding Covid vaccinations in the grips of a pandemic.

- 30 multicultural people were engaged
- 25 languages were supported

For young multicultural people who have completed their English studies, they will never again get an opportunity to deal with the volume of people from the wider community, who are not connected with their own CALD community.

Dealing with the wider community was initially challenging, our staff were learning how to deal with 1000's of people who were often in a heightened state of anxiety, they experienced occasional

disrespect and racism but with the support of GV Health staff as well as GSCC staff they were able to overcome their own anxieties. The Vaccination Hub became a safe place to work.



Additionally, they became familiar with policies, procedures and systems that enabled the Vaccination Hub to operate in a professional and friendly manner.

As the photo left shows our Ethnic Council staff worked in partnership with staff from Greater Shepparton City Council and Goulburn Valley Health.

Our staff were looked upon by their own community with respect and were turned to for information.

Each of these staff members were confidently able to encourage their family members, as well as other community members, to get vaccinated and supporting them during the process.

I personally think this is one of the reasons why our vaccination rate was so high amongst our CALD community.

Some of their reactions have been:

- “character shaping”
- “best decision of my life”
- “not being just a job but a life experience”
- “so etched in my life that you live with it and identify with it”
- “this was the onset of a new self and believe that it shaped my values and character”
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3 staff members have since enrolled in nursing at GOTAFE

1 staff member is completing her final year in nursing

2 staff members have been employed by GVHealth

1 staff member finished her Bachelor of Teaching and is now employed locally

1 staff member is completing his Masters in Social Work degree

3 staff members have enrolled in Diploma of Community Service

This partnership with GV HEALTH has been rewarding on so many levels, most importantly, it has allowed us all to learn more about the CALD communities we live with in multicultural Shepparton.

Furthermore, this has given 30 CALD community members a unique opportunity to learn, understand, and interact with the wider community. Additionally, this has provided an opportunity

for the wider community to interact with the CALD community and appreciate the diversity within the Shepparton community.

As the Covid Response Co-ordinator for Ethnic Council of Shepparton & Districts, I feel extremely proud to have been associated with this partnership, to witness our whole community working together navigating our way through the complexities of ground-breaking vaccinations in what I hope is a once in my lifetime pandemic.

Ethnic Council vaccine coordinator Susan Johnson with Jabba the Bus at African House:



Bilingual worker comments

Worker 1

Working at the hub has been the best workplace I've ever worked in by far! Starting work at the vaccination hub was initially very scary and nerve racking considering the amount of people we were coming in at a time, I found it difficult to confidently speak and communicate with patients/clients- especially the higher positioning people like the police, fire fighters or talking to a large group of people at a time (taking them over to monitoring) etc.

Throughout my time at the hub, I gradually gained more and more confidence in communicating and even willingly chatting with a range of different people weather it was staff or clients.

Today I can say my confidence in speaking to people has shot straight through the roof indescribably.

I found it very rewarding helping clients and patients with the smallest things such as wheeling patients who can't walk, finding further help for non-English speaking people and even things as small as helping people check in or showing people directions around the hub or something as simple as being the reason somebody gets to have a nice chat with somebody or to give them a reason to smile

Lastly and most important positivity I have observed is the work of the nurses- Never in my life (and I'm not just saying this)



have I ever met a group of staff who are so passionate and genuine hearted who nurse people beyond their uniform and or titles!

Considering I am studying nursing- it gives me the best ever, highest standard bar I would admire to reach as a nursing student/future nurse. The vaccination hub has been more than just a job for me!

Worker 2

I am a 3rd year student nurse. I have been working at the hub since last year July and it has been the best decision of my life. Working at the hub has not only helped to gain experience for my future career but has also helped me gain confidence in meeting people from different ethnicities. Coming from a refugee background (Congolese) I was able to help my community by encouraging them to take their covid vaccination in the language they understand.

I was able to organize zoom sessions for my community in order for them to have a better understanding of the importance of being vaccinated. All these experiences have helped in preparation for my future career.

Worker 3

It started as a part-time job that was fairly accommodating my monetary needs. With time, I came to a realisation of a continuum of how I understood and interacted with people. This triggered a change in how I felt about working at the vaccination hub. When people around you realise and appreciate a change in you, it now goes beyond being just a job, but a life experience, so etched that you live with it and identify with it. This, I certainly believe, was the onset of a new self and I strongly believe it shaped my values and character.

Taste of African Cultures: Saturday 7 May at St Paul's African House (from Shepparton News)

Whether it was nibbling on fried cassava, playing the marimbas, or watching people strut their special outfits, about 450 people attended A Taste of African Cultures on Saturday, May 7.

Event organiser Kate Radevski said the event brought the African and non-African community together.

“More new people are coming to experience what it’s like and hopefully building some of those relationships and breaking down some of those barriers between the African community and the non-African community,” she said.

Master of ceremonies Tina Mukasa, a proud refugee with Congolese heritage, said the day was important to embrace diversity.





*King of the festival:
Master of ceremonies
Tina Mukasa with Eze,
who was awarded best
dressed at the festival.
Photo by Youssef Saudie*

“When we come together, we get to

understand where we come from, it’s also important because it’s our identity,” she said. “I was wearing my Congo flag shirt, but also embracing my African afro.”

Ms Mukasa said she wanted to highlight young people in the community.

“Me being myself as a youth, it was good to volunteer and engage with the community and get the audience going,” she said.

Second year of Shepparton Culture Kitchen comes to a close (from Shepparton News)

A variety of cooking and food events wrapped up this year’s series of Shepparton Culture Kitchen at the weekend.

But plans are already in the works to bring the successful workshops and dining experiences back next year. Participant Ane Fotu is set to co-ordinate the program next year. She said it helped her realise she was “an artist in my own way”.

“I can’t sing, I can’t dance, so I tell my stories through cooking,” she said.

“What better way to share your culture but through food?”

Ms Fotu hosted a three-course meal on Friday, May 13 using traditional Tongan recipes and methods, but “with a twist”.

“We’ve got to make do with what we have here,” she said.



Sharing culture: Shepparton Culture Kitchen organisers (from left) Shakilla Naveed, Mimi Leung, Leaisa Pele, Jamie Lewis, Agoness Kuol, Ree Peric, Ane Fotu and Anita Larkin. Photo by Georgia Rossiter



Tradition: Shirin Hussaini with Shakilla Naveed as she demonstrates homemade Afghan cooking. Photo by Georgia Rossiter

Shepparton Culture Kitchen also hosted East African coffee and cakes, served by Agoness Kuol, and Shakilla Naveed demonstrated how to cook home-style Afghan food.

Eman Alabbassi spent time at the program asking children what traditional foods they enjoyed.

“I just want to get the message to young people that your culture and your food is important,” she said. “We’re lucky because we live in a diverse community with many different backgrounds, and we all respect each other.”

Hosting people for coffee:
Agoness Kuol and Fatma Saadalli.
Photo by Georgia Rossiter



Multicultural Arts Victoria senior projects advisor Anita Larkin said the program was a vehicle for people to experience different cultures.



“This has been about experiencing the culture and the stories behind the food,” she said.

“It’s a chance to experience some more aspects of culture people would tend to keep in community.”

Shepparton Culture Kitchen is produced with Multicultural Arts Victoria, Greater Shepparton City Council and Point of Difference Studio.

ETHNIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Applications are now available for community members to become members of the Ethnic Council. Members get the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the Ethnic Council, can nominate to become a Board Member and vote for membership of the Board.

For an application form please contact Rhonda on 58312395 or info@ethniccouncil.com.au