



ETHNIC COUNCIL OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.

P.O Box 585 Shepparton, 3632.
158 Welsford Street, Shepparton, 3630. Registered No. A 6321
Email: info@ethniccouncil.com.au

Ph: (03) 58312395
Fax (03) 58313764

Successful Settlement in Shepparton – A Case Study on the role of the Ethnic Council of Shepparton in supporting settlement and social cohesion. FECCA Melbourne June 16th / 17th 2022

Presented by Maria Brown-Shepherd President and Chris Hazelman
Manager Ethnic Council of Shepparton

Greater Shepparton has a demographic profile unique for a provincial Australian city and has always been a destination point for migration from non-traditional backgrounds drawn by the employment provided by intensive agriculture, business opportunities and for many the chance to create a new life.

Shepparton is an island in two senses.



Firstly, a small green irrigated area surrounded by dryland and mixed farming and secondly a demographic island of diverse communities in the middle of mainstream communities. Since the introduction of irrigation in the early part of the twentieth century large migration from Italy, Albania and Greece occurred and post the war an influx from all over Europe.

In the 1960's a large Turkish community, in the 1980's the Sikhs, in the early 1990's Pacific Islanders and since the mid 90's with changes to Australia's migration policies to accept refugees Afghan, Iraqi, Syrian, Congolese, Sudanese and many others now call Shepparton home.

Without exception every new arrival community has got their start working in the farms and the second and third generation kids have become the doctors, lawyers and accountants.

Refugee and humanitarian entrant settlement over the last twenty years now represents 10% of the Greater Shepparton population.

Today Shepparton boasts four mosques, multiple Christian denomination churches, a Sikh Gurdwara and hopefully soon a Buddhist Centre all of which reflects Shepparton as being culturally and faith diverse. As an aside the most recent mosque supports the Afghan community who raised over \$1 million in 12 months and were supported in the Council planning process by the Ethnic Council and Sikhs from the Gurdwara next door who had already navigated the local government planning scheme.

The application passed through Council without a single planning scheme objection which I contrast with the community actions that occur when mosques are proposed such as the events in Bendigo and other places.

To accentuate that anecdote the planning permit applications for this mosque and the Bendigo Mosque were lodged in the same month.



Nabi Akram Mosque Shepparton

The Ethnic Council was born out of a response to exploitation issues impacting the Turkish community who were heavily involved in the tomato industry, David Wauchope a senior worker in the Department of Agriculture and City Councillor initiated public discussion and The Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc. was established in 1978 as a non-profit community-based service, comprised of elected representatives from the principal ethnic groups in Shepparton and surrounding districts. Motivation to form came from the pre and post war migrant groups who were seeking an organisation who could advocate on their behalf, support them with funding, be a forum where they could promote their culture and to receive information.

I am extremely proud that my father Aleski Czerkaskyj was the foundation Secretary of the Ethnic Council.

The Ethnic Council became a legal entity in 1985 when it became incorporated and today is a peak body whose mission is to promote and represent the social, cultural and economic well-

being of ethnic communities in the Goulburn Valley Region through the provision of quality and innovative services. Since 1985 the Ethnic Council has grown to become an integral part of Shepparton being recognised nationally as a successful model of settlement. That recognition being a dominant factor in Shepparton being selected to host FECCA's national conference in 2009, the first time the conference was held outside of a metropolitan area.

Some notable achievements along the journey include fundraising of \$1 million towards the establishment of a Multi-Cultural Hostel for the Aged in 1994,



Harmony Village
Shepparton

establishment of bridging English programs, implementation of the Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Planning committee, support for Goulburn Ovens Institute of Tafe in providing settlement English and Migrant Education and today being a major service provider supporting new arrival communities. Introduce Chris Hazelman

We deliver a comprehensive range of services including SETTS, Strategic Partnership Program, Strategic Coordinator, Social Cohesion Through Education, Family Violence Prevention, Community Employment Connectors, Anti Racism, Partners in Change, Emergency Management, Disability Support, Gambling Harm Awareness and a number of smaller Covid Safe Health Messaging grants.

In summary our grants do not operate in silos and all funding areas are integrated collectively to maximise the resources, to meet broad agency objectives and to minimise the glaring weakness of a flat management structure.

In practice collectively our programs can be summarised as providing direct client services, community capacity building and increasingly a growing role in cultural awareness programs

The Ethnic Council success in supporting settlement is based on a few simple principles:

- A person's language skills should not prevent them gaining access to information or services. As evidenced through Covid the distribution of vital information in first language can be as simple as a short video or voice message recorded on mobile phones and disseminated using the existing communication channels in communities.
- Our staff strategy is to recruit bilingual workers who can effectively engage with communities. Our contracted staff include Turks, Pacific Islanders, Iraqis, Afghans, Sudanese, a Sri Lankan and a Kiwi. Again, Covid provides a good example where we recruited over 30 casual bilingual university students to be customer service staff at the regional testing and vaccination hub. These staff assisted people with bookings, completed paperwork and acted as interpreters where necessary. This partnership

with local government and the regional health service as the funding body is a major factor in Shepparton achieving a vaccination rate of 98.5% and dispelling the myth that the refugee communities would be vaccine hesitant.



- New arrival communities should be supported and assisted to form their own community-based associations who can apply for funding in their own right, undertake community priority projects, advocate for themselves and participate in the forums where decisions that impacted them were being made.
- The development of community profiles in consultation with community leaders that identified priority issues. These profiles produced biannually since 2010 are published on the Ethnic Council website and are a major source of primary data for government departments, local government, service provider agencies and academic studies.
<https://ethniccouncilshepparton.com.au>



Shepparton today is a vibrant regional city with a strong economy built on the contribution of successive waves of immigrants who have made an enormous contribution to the economic and cultural growth of the region.

The Ethnic Council will continue to play a role in supporting settlement by adhering to our operating principles and providing an appropriate and effective range of services to meet the needs of multicultural communities.



Shepparton's history tells us that on the horizon will be another new arrival community drawn by the same pull factors that have encouraged migration to the region over the last 120 years. It may happen next harvest season or the one after that but whenever it happens the Ethnic Council will be prepared to maintain its role in facilitating the settlement of our newest arrivals.