

Exploring the Lived **Experiences of Migrants** in Regional Victoria, Australia

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SCHOOL OF ARTS

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Executive Summary

This research project has been undertaken by Federation University Australia and was commissioned by the EVOLVE Strategic Multicultural Capacity Building Partnership. The purpose of this research was to examine the lived experiences of migrants living and/or working in the areas of Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill from 2009 to 2018 in accordance with the nine key priority areas set out in the Department of Social Services *National Settlement Framework* (2016). These include language services; employment; education and training; housing; health and wellbeing; transport; civic participation; family and social support; and justice. The research analysed the lived experiences of migrants to identify key benefits and barriers to settlement within Central and Western Victoria, and will be used to enhance service provision available to migrants in Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill.

The research has utilised interpretative phenomenology, which is a qualitative methodology that draws on participants' multilayered descriptions of their lived experiences. In accordance with this methodological framework, nine individual interviews were conducted in Ballarat as well as two focus groups that consisted of one group of women and one group of men. In Horsham, four individual interviews were conducted in addition to one focus group. In Nhill, the research team conducted five individual interviews and one focus group. Participants were presented with a range of open-ended questions concerning their settlement experiences across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill.

Findings

Participants provided rich, detailed, and nuanced responses to the questions addressed to them by the researchers. The report categorises the responses of participants across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill into four dominant themes:

- 1. Identity and Belonging: Imagining a 'Regional Area' as 'Home'**
- 2. Connectedness through engagement with community based and/or multicultural organisations**
- 3. Service engagement with government services**
- 4. Barriers to settlement**

An abridged version of the findings will be presented below in accordance with the four main themes expressed by participants situated across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill. Where there were marked differences in responses from participants across the three locations, this executive summary will explore the themes by looking at each respective area separately. Where there is congruence amongst participants' responses across all three sites, the findings will be collated.¹

1. Note that in the 'Findings' section of this report, each location will be examined separately.

Theme 1: Identity and Belonging: Imagining a 'Regional/Rural Area' as 'Home'

BALLARAT

Participants' reflections on migration and settlement in Ballarat were collated into two sub-themes that represented the benefits of living in a regional locale along with the shifting attitudes of local residents accompanying increasing diversity in the region. In relation to the first sub-theme, which is focused on the benefits of living in Ballarat, participants discussed the accessibility of the city, the clean and unpolluted air, the warm and welcoming attitudes of local residents, and the affordability of housing.

In terms of the second sub-theme that emerged from participants' lived experiences of settling in Ballarat, it was noted that the shifting demographic of Ballarat was accompanied by significant changes in community attitudes towards people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) backgrounds. Where some participants had experienced discrimination when they had first arrived in Ballarat, they noted a marked difference in the way they were treated in more recent times. This went a long way in making participants feel more connected to the local community and heightened their sense of identity, belonging, and feeling at home in a regional locale.

HORSHAM

Participants in Horsham similarly reflected on the benefits of settling in a regional area in terms of its "slow-paced" life-style, the low cost of living, the kind attitudes of the local community, the pleasant weather, and the availability of services afforded to them in the region. While numerous benefits of living in a regional town were noted, some participants reflected on feelings of isolation and loneliness. Participants also stressed that their senses of identity, community connectedness, and belonging were enhanced through joining playgrounds, attending English classes, and connecting with other services available to them in the town.

NHILL

Participants reflected on the benefits of living in Nhill in terms of the friendly attitudes of the local community, and relaxed and slow-paced lifestyle, and ease of accessing the rural township. These benefits provided participants with heightened senses of identity, belonging, and connectedness in a rural locale.

Theme 2: Connectedness through Engagement with Community-based and/or Multicultural Organisations

Participants across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill reflected positively on their heightened senses of identity, belonging, and community connectedness through involvement with multicultural agencies, sporting clubs, churches, volunteer networks, and local community groups. Engaging with community and multicultural organisations played a tremendous role in participants' feelings of connectedness, assisting them in forging ties with the community and developing meaningful friendships.

Theme 3: Service Engagement

Participants situated across the three sites under consideration had much to say about their experiences engaging with local services. In particular, participants reflected on access to health, education, employment, language, and multicultural services available in Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill.

BALLARAT

In Ballarat, participants had the most to say about access to education, employment services, and the health sector. In relation to education, participants remarked on their positive experiences accessing the system and were impressed by the availability of free education. Where fees were applicable, participants expressed gratitude towards local multicultural services for assisting them with tuition fees. In terms of employment services, participants in Ballarat reported attending career workshops and receiving targeted assistance applying for specific jobs.

Participants in Ballarat reflected on the high-quality health services available to them and noted the numerous advantages of having access to Medicare. Some participants found it difficult navigating the health sector and suggested that further information on how to access the system would help to empower migrants and that more migrant-specific health services or programs would be beneficial.

HORSHAM

In Horsham, participants reflected most on their engagement with migrant-specific services, with a specific focus on English language classes. Participants found these services to be enormously useful, but experienced barriers accessing welfare organisations such as Centrelink and the health sector due to issues speaking the English language. Some participants noted that they were unaware of the services available to them when they first arrived in Horsham and suggested that further promotion and advertising would be beneficial.

NHILL

Participants in Nhill had positive interactions with the various services available to them and remarked on the education system, the health sector, and childcare services. Participants noted the benefits of having access to an interpreter and a refugee nurse at the local hospital. Some participants did, nonetheless, experience barriers to accessing services due to a lack of GPs, medical specialists, and limited childcare in the area.

Theme 4: Barriers to Settlement

Whilst participants across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill remarked on the numerous benefits of migrant settlement in regional and rural locales, they did experience barriers to successful settlement. Across all three sites, participants expressed feelings of isolation, a lack of belonging, and difficulties with written and verbal communication.

BALLARAT

The most pronounced barrier expressed by participants in Ballarat pertained to employment. While participants reflected on the ease of accessing employment services, they found it difficult to secure work. Highly-skilled migrants remarked that their qualifications were not recognised in an Australian context and that they were required to accept work

incommensurate with their qualifications. Some participants experienced discrimination in the employment sector and others felt that they did not have suitable networks in place to secure employment.

HORSHAM

The most pronounced barriers experienced by participants situated in Horsham related to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and difficulties speaking the English language. While many participants experienced cultural and language barriers, they also stated that attending English language classes assisted them in overcoming these barriers.

NHILL

In Nhill, participants expressed specific barriers pertaining to infrastructure. Given the geographical isolation of the town, participants noted that there was a lack of affordable supermarkets, public transport, GPs and medical specialists, and childcare facilities.

Suggestions for Policy and Practice

The suggestions for policy and practice outlined below speak directly to the discussion in the literature review and participant experiences described in the findings section. In particular these suggestions speak to the operationalising—current and potential—of both the broad ideals and policies of migrant regional settlement.

1. The ideals and policies of migrant regional settlement, in the sites under study, need to be strengthened and promoted by federal, state and local governments.

RATIONALE: Participants endorsed the idea of ‘regional place’ as a place of belonging and home.

2. Funding and other supports from federal, state and local government and community-based organisations need to continue and potentially increase in order to support migrant settlement services in regional areas.

RATIONALE: Participants endorsed the ways in which settlement focussed services for migrant settlement in regional areas, from both government and community-based organisations, provided support and assistance in areas such as English language development, seeking employment, housing, health, schooling, and the building of community networks through voluntary work.

3. Programs that encourage promotion of the benefits of migration and of the settlement of migrants in regional areas need to be further strengthened at federal, state and local government levels.

RATIONALE: Participants mentioned that although community attitudes towards migrants are changing, there is still a need for greater community understanding of the benefits of migration.

4. Community-based programs and practices to enhance participation between migrants and mainstream Australians and support the development of robust cross-cultural understanding need to be significantly increased.

RATIONALE: A majority of participants expressed an experience of social isolation and discrimination due to cultural differences and a lack of fluency in English language. Participants also expressed a desire for deeper and meaningful community engagement, for both themselves and their children. Participants also noted the importance of

developing their own understandings of the cultural context of their settlement area, including the need to better understand Australian laws, organisational policies/procedures, and service provision in such fields as health and housing.

5. Policies and programs to deliver suitable and relevant employment to migrants, and also to encourage regionally-based employers in the employment of migrants need to be strengthened and increased.

RATIONALE: A majority of the participants expressed concern over their employment prospects, and about their perception of employers' willingness to offer them employment opportunities. Participants also noted that they saw their employment prospects as hindered by their lack of cultural understanding and fluency in English language.

6. That local agencies, with support and input from local, state and federal government agencies, develop and implement a coordinated 'settlement type program,' which is offered in rotation at regular intervals. The program or discrete modules would be available to migrants within the first two years of arriving in the region, as distinct from their arrival into Australia. The program could include a series of modules designed to address particular needs, identified by participants. These are:
 - a. practical assistance with completing forms such as Centrelink, applying for a Medicare card and understanding the application process;
 - b. information about the health services including GP services, Community Health Centres and hospitals;
 - c. Employment specific module which includes developing a CV, strategies to find work and attending an interview;

RATIONALE: Participants in all three locations identified that information and assistance was required in one or more of the listed areas. Offering the modules in rotation would allow migrants to participate in one or more of these modules when the need for such information is most critical.

Area Specific Suggestions

The following area-specific suggestions are informed by the dominant sentiments expressed by participants in each of the sites:

BALLARAT SPECIFIC:

1. Increase programs that allow migrants to access employment opportunities that recognise their previous qualifications and other relevant experience gained prior to settling in Australia.
2. Develop employer education and training on diversity and cultural competence. Develop programs that tailor English language services specifically to increase cultural knowledge that can be used in everyday interactions.
3. Develop programs that emphasise and facilitate cultural partnerships between mainstream and migrant communities.
4. Develop and disseminate resources to improve health literacy in migrant communities and improve knowledge of health providers in areas, including cultural competency, refugee health needs and local and regional services and supports.
5. Develop programs that target changing community attitudes towards migrants.

HORSHAM SPECIFIC:

1. Develop programs that facilitate cross-cultural participation of mainstream and migrant communities.
2. Advocate for greater funding and access to the training opportunities for migrants to assist with pathways into employment in fields such as hospitality and childcare.
3. Access to interpreting services, particularly to walk migrants through the filling of forms and other documentation required at for example, CentreLink, Transport Victoria.
4. Develop programs that tailor English language services specifically to increase cultural knowledge that can be used in everyday interactions.
5. Develop programs that promote volunteerism and provide diverse opportunities that involve migrants and mainstream communities to facilitate deeper engagement.
6. Increase access to child and family services with specific emphasis on providing childcare to support families better.

NHILL SPECIFIC:

1. Increase funding for programs, such as English language support services and health, ensure services are available for migrants from a range of CALD backgrounds.
2. Increase access to interpreting services for migrants from a range of linguistic backgrounds.
3. Increase access to child and family services, including child care.

Introduction

This project examines the lived experiences of migrants living and/or working in the areas of Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill from 2009 to 2018. The research draws on the Department of Social Services' (DSS) *National Settlement Framework* (2016), which is derived from the Settlement Council of Australia's (SCoA) National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (2015). The *National Settlement Framework* outlines the following nine priority areas for service and support:

- **Language Services**
- **Employment**
- **Education and Training**
- **Housing**
- **Health and Wellbeing**
- **Transport**
- **Civic Participation**
- **Family and Social Support**
- **Justice**

These have been prioritised as focus areas within which government and stakeholders are anticipated to work in partnership together to effectively plan and deliver service provisions that support and accommodate the needs of migrants settling in Australia (ibid.). 'Settlement' in the context of this project is broadly understood as the process of adjustment subsequent to one's arrival at a given destination regardless of the mode of entry and/or visa class to Australia (Boese 2015, 402). The *National Settlement Framework* defines the settlement period as the first five years of permanent residence after a migrant's arrival. Hence, this project—which examines the lived experiences of migrants in regional Victoria between 2009 and 2018—aims to provide a more comprehensive view of migrant settlement, one that exceeds the five-year period of adjustment identified by the *Framework*.

Other policy frameworks relevant to regional/rural settlement that have informed this research include the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC), the City of Ballarat's *Intercultural City Strategic Plan 2018–2021* and the *Welcoming Cities Standard* (2018).

Aims of the Project

The aims of the project are:

1. To contribute to research that analyses the lived experiences of migrants in regional areas of Victoria;
2. To develop an evidence-base for regional priorities and programs that are developed for migrants to improve settlement outcomes, and;
3. To promote collective impact strategies through regional partnerships and collaboration based on well informed understanding of migrants' subjective experience and needs.

To achieve these aims, this project will:

1. Explore and document the lived experiences of migrants who have settled in Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill from 2009 to 2018;
2. Explain migrants' understandings of the notion of 'regional settlement'; and
3. Analyse how migrants interpret, access and reflect on social, economic and cultural networks such as cultural support, housing, education and training, access to healthcare, employment and civic participation.

Outcomes of this research will be used to assist with designing regional and/or area specific projects related to the specific needs of migrants. Furthermore, information from this research will be used to develop strategies and recommendation to showcase the Central and Western Victorian regions as preferred destinations for regional settlement.

Clarification of Terminology

REGIONAL AND RURAL

The terms 'regional' and 'rural' are widely used in the literature but there is no consistent or clear definitions. Sometimes regional is used interchangeably with such words as rural, countryside and bush (Hugo 2002 2). The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses five classes of remoteness and notes that relative remoteness is derived by 'measuring the road distances from a point to the nearest Urban Centres and localities in five separate population ranges' (ABS 2018). Within the literature, the terms regional and rural are often used interchangeably (Hugo 2002 2). Nhill, one of the sites under study, is considered a 'relatively small, isolated agricultural town' (Deloitte Access Economics 2015, 4), as opposed to Ballarat which is considered a regional area. As definitional issues are outside the scope of this research, for consistency we will use the terms 'regional' and 'rural' interchangeably.

MIGRANTS/REFUGEES/ASYLUM SEEKERS

There is discussion in the literature on the definition of the terms 'migrants' and 'refugees/asylum seekers' (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency). While the UNHRC makes a clear difference between 'migrants' and 'refugee/asylum seekers,' the United Nations report on International Migration simply defines an "international migrant [as] a person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth" (United Nations, Economic and Social Affairs 2017, 3). Detailed discussion about the differences in the pathway to migration and mode of entry is outside the scope of this project. While we acknowledge that the category of 'migrant' is far from homogeneous, the term 'migrant' will be used in this report as an umbrella term to include refugees and asylum seekers, international students, skilled and unskilled migrants, and migrants through family reunification.

Project Background

The successful settlement of migrants is conventionally measured by their integration into the labour market as well as social, cultural and economic participation (Boese 2015, 402). Successful settlement is thus dependent on a range of service provisions being made available to migrants. These include employment; accommodation; housing; access to education, health services and transport; the development of social networks; and supportive attitudes from host communities (Bansel et al. 2016; Boese 2015; Boese and Phillips 2017; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009).

In recent years, settlement of migrants in regional and rural areas of Australia has gained momentum (McDonald et al. 2008). Many regional areas in Victoria—such as Bendigo, Mildura, Ballarat and Shepparton, as well as regional towns in other states of Australia—have witnessed an increase in migrant settlement. These developments have been mapped in the burgeoning literature that analyses the social and economic impacts of migration on social cohesion, integration and cultural diversity by looking at employment, housing, family and child supports and service provision. To illustrate, a study undertaken by AMES (2014) argued that migration was an important driver of economic benefits in regional towns. Other studies (QCOSS 2014; AMES 2015) have also extolled the positive impacts of resettlement for the economies of regional towns. However, there is also research (Correa-Velez & Onsando 2009; Correa-Velez et al. 2012; Schech 2014) critical of the regional resettlement program for a variety of reasons—namely, a lack of service provision; exclusion and discrimination; and a lack of support services to enable greater employment and educational opportunities in regional areas.

Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill, located in the Central and Western regions of Victoria, are the focus of this study. Ballarat is a regional inland city located in the Central Highlands of Victoria and is the third largest city in Victoria. As of 2016, the population of Ballarat was 101,686 (ABS, 2016). The latest Census data reveals that 9.5% of Ballarat's total population was born overseas (ibid.). Additionally, three of the top five countries with the largest number of overseas arrivals in Ballarat are non-English speaking (ibid.). The main countries of birth for Ballarat's migrant population are: England (where 30.2% of Ballarat's current total population was born); New Zealand (0.9%); India (0.6%); the Netherlands (0.6%); and China (0.5%) (ibid.). Of Ballarat's migrant population, 57% were shown to speak a language other than English at home (ibid.). The City of Ballarat's *Intercultural City: Strategic Plan 2017–2021* reports that 7.4% of Ballarat's migrant population are not proficient in English and that the largest group of migrants—27% of Ballarat's migrant population—spoke Mandarin (12). The *Strategic Plan* also reports that there are migrants in Ballarat from at least 89 different countries (ibid.). Since 2011, 67% of Ballarat's migrants came through the skilled migration stream, 32% came from the family reunification stream, and 2% came from the humanitarian stream (ibid.).

Horsham is a regional city in the Wimmera region of Western Victoria with a population of 14,543 (ibid.). Horsham has a migrant population of approximately 13.1%, with three of the four countries of birth being non-English speaking (ibid.). The top countries of birth for Horsham's migrant population include: England (where 2.2% of Horsham's total population was born); India (1.1%); Italy (0.9%); and the Philippines (0.8%) (ibid.). 10.2% of Horsham's total population speak a language other than English at home (ibid.).

Nhill is a rural township in the Wimmera region of Western Victoria with a population of 2,184 (ibid.). Nhill is located approximately 74 km from Horsham, which is the largest regional centre in the area. Nhill has a burgeoning migrant population of approximately 17.2%, with three of the five main countries of birth being non-English speaking (ibid.). The top countries of birth of Nhill's migrant population are: Myanmar (where 3.8% of Nhill's total population were born); Thailand (2%); England (1.4%); South Africa (0.8%); and the Philippines (0.7%) (ibid.). 13.9% of Nhill's total population speak a language other than English at home (ibid.).

Significance of the Project

There is growing interest in analysing migrant experiences in regional areas due to a focus on economic regeneration in these areas. As stated above, however, the concern of the majority of current studies is primarily social and economic in nature, taking little account of cultural capital which refers to constructions of belonging and social connectedness. Another gap in the literature relates to the paucity of literature that directly benchmarks the nine priority areas outlined in the *National Settlement Framework* (2016). By conducting research across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill, this project is thus able to identify and explore the range of supports and barriers that contribute to the experiences of migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers, international students, skilled and unskilled migrants, and migrants through family reunification) in these regional areas. This research is also able to emphasise how social constructions of gender, class, and ethnicity play out in migrants' experiences of settlement.

This research will contribute to developing an evidence-base for multicultural organisations to use in developing, establishing new and enhancing current projects that benefit regional communities in Victoria.

Setting up the Scope of the Study

Before examining emerging themes in the literature, there are two contextual points that need mention. The first is to outline the key features of the Department of Social Services' (DSS) *National Settlement Framework* (2016). This will be a key framework for evaluating the outcomes of this study. The second concerns research previously undertaken with respect to the sites under consideration in this study. Together these will set up the context for scoping the literature and identifying gaps that the current study will seek to address.

National Settlement Framework

The Department of Social Services' *National Settlement Framework* (2016) details a range of structures and initiatives for the three tiers of government—i.e. national, state and territory, and local—to plan and deliver high quality settlement services that support migrants. As a “high level structural blueprint for Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Government” (*National Settlement Framework* 2016, 2) the Framework highlights the shared commitment of the government to improving the outcomes of migrants settling in Australia with regards to their “economic, social and cultural integration in Australian society” (ibid., 4).

The precursor to the *National Settlement Framework* was work conducted by the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA), a peak body for settlement. SCoA undertook a national consultation process, subsequently developing The National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (2015) in partnership with government. Laying the foundation for the *National Settlement Framework*, the SCoA notes that “[t]he National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards seek to drive improvements in the outcomes of settlement service provision, such that clients who access these services experience a consistent level of support that enhances their potential for effective settlement” (2015 4). The result of the two documents is a set of national standards through which stakeholders can benchmark their service delivery against the nine key priority areas outlined in the Framework. Accordingly, a series of outcome standards and indicators are provided with regards to education and training; employment; health and wellbeing; housing; language services; transport; civic participation; family and social support; and justice (See Table 1 for details).

TABLE 1: NATIONAL SETTLEMENT FRAMEWORK

FRAMEWORK PRIORITY AREAS	COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT	STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENT	LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English language and literacy programmes for adults, the elderly, youth and children Early childhood, youth, and adult education and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an additional language (EAL) programmes in schools and a variety of complementary programmes Early childhood services such as Maternal and Child Health and Kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifelong learning and partnering and supporting local community Local libraries as knowledge and learning hubs
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education and training programmes for the workforce Workplace job assistance programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-funded employment and training programmes Economic development initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local economic development initiatives Community based volunteer programs
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted community care programmes Specialised settlement support programs Assistance for Asylum Seekers Specialised health/medical/ disability assistance programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of mainstream/targeted health services and interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventative health programmes, community gardens, walking groups, community recreational activities
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing assistance and homelessness prevention programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public housing programmes including social housing, affordable housing and homelessness programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community housing and affordable housing programmes
Language Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translating and interpreting services Targeted access and equity policies facilitating communication in languages other than English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpreting and translating services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community language service programmes Resident information kits in multiple languages
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects under settlement grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public transport Driver education and mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community transport services
Civic Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of settlement and multicultural services and community engagement Australian citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of programmes and initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to the Community Kits, community festivals, events, ceremonies, Australia citizenship ceremonies
Family and Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income, family and child support programmes Family relationship and support programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes and initiatives to support and protect children, youth and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community centres, recreational activities, aged and childcare services
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects under settlement grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted initiatives for agencies to work with specific groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on example, dispute resolution, fines and local by-laws

The Framework recognises that settlement is not necessarily a linear process and that migrants might not progress through the available services in a sequential order (ibid., 2). It also acknowledges that the needs of migrants are varied and diverse, with some migrants requiring special targeted services. This can particularly be the case for refugees and asylum seekers who may have had difficult pre-arrival experiences (ibid., 3). The Framework further lists women, young people, children, and the elderly as possibly requiring additional services and supports (ibid.). The Framework also notes that not all migrants will require targeted support during their settlement process, especially those who are proficient in English and hold formal qualifications (ibid.).

The targeted groups of the Framework include permanent, long-term, and temporary migrants under a range of visa sub-categories, as well as those who fit within the Humanitarian and the Migration Programmes, the latter of which consists of Family, Skilled, and Special Eligibility streams (ibid., 3). In accordance with Australia's international obligations under various human rights treaties, including the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee (1951), assistance is also provided to asylum seekers who have either arrived in Australia lawfully with a temporary substantive visa or who arrived without a valid visa (DSS 2016, 3-4). The Framework includes a caveat that eligibility for the above services will depend on a number of criteria, including "*visa subclasses and status, period of residence in Australia and personal circumstances of a migrant. There are also variances in eligibility across jurisdictions and between agencies*" (DSS 2016, 9, emphasis in original).

In summary, the *National Settlement Framework* acts as the main policy framework and driver for federal, state, local and other community-based organisations to benchmark initiatives centred on migrant settlement.

Previous Research of Migrant Settlement in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill

Despite burgeoning literature related to regional migrant settlement in Australia (discussed in the literature review below), there have been few reports in relation to the sites under study that have examined the efficacy of regional settlement directly or comparatively either with respect to the *National Settlement Framework* or through documenting the lived experiences of migrants. In 2009, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship commissioned a report on the regional humanitarian settlement pilot in Ballarat (Piper 2009) which included twelve refugee families from the nation of Togo in West Africa. The research reported mixed outcomes from the Togolese settlement in Ballarat. Positive elements of the settlement included: a safe and welcoming environment for the Togolese entrants; affordable accommodation; a demonstrated capacity of health and education sectors to provide a range of services for refugees; and the commitment of Ballarat stakeholders to host future refugees (ibid., 5). Some of the obstacles to the successful settlement of the Togolese refugees were identified as: the refugees' difficulty in coping with the winter climate of Ballarat; the lack of availability of suitable interpreters; and a lack of continuity and significant staff turnover in multicultural services. Also problematic was the complex trauma experienced by the Togolese migrants; a lack of commonality with and insight into the experiences of the Togolese; the lack of trust from the Togolese that was the consequence of "a range of incidents and events" (ibid.); and the impatience felt by these refugees to reclaim their lives immediately after settlement (ibid.). Given the mixed outcomes of the humanitarian settlement project, and the short amount of time that had transpired between the Togolese settlement and the commissioning of the report, the research concludes that it is "too premature to make a definitive assessment of the overall success of the project" (ibid., 4).

A group of industry stakeholders in Ballarat, involving local government councils and community based organisations have, however, made a series of recommendations around commitments to greater cultural diversity, increasing capacity building and coordination among service providers (Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, 2016). Other initiatives relate to The City of Ballarat's *Intercultural City: Strategic Plan 2017–2021* and Destination Ballarat. This strategic plan highlights the importance the local council places on migrant settlement as a tool for enriching the social, civic, economic, and cultural life of the city. Indeed the city's five-year *Strategic Plan* "is about building social inclusion by pursuing and enhancing the social, economic, cultural, health and wellbeing of the city's culturally diverse CALD communities" (6). The Plan echoes the *National Settlement Framework* in terms of the role of the council in leading the development of socially inclusive strategies and policies. Recognising this explicit stress on supporting CALD communities by the council, Boese and Phillips (2017) note that a number of local councils in Victoria have taken measures to address issues of diversity and the sense of belonging experienced by migrants (392).

Apart from one report focusing on participants' experiences of settlement and attempts by the local council and community-based organisations, there is little formal research that has been undertaken on the lived experiences of migrants in Ballarat. Nor, for that matter, is there any formal research on migrants who have settled in Horsham. There is, nonetheless, one significant study based on secondary analysis that has examined the impact of migration on the rural township of Nhill.

In 2015, AMES and Deloitte Access Economics published a report on the social and economic impacts of migrant settlement in Nhill. The study examined the successful resettlement of Karen refugees in this area and noted that the socio-economic benefits of the Karen resettlement were extraordinary (ibid., 11). Identified benefits included a redress of the declining population of Nhill and lack of suitable workers to enter the labour market; the revitalisation of local services; improved living conditions for Karen families; and increased social and economic capital for both the local community and Karen people alike (ibid., 19). The Karen resettlement in Nhill was further identified as having led to an increase in employment in other sectors of the economy to meet the needs of increasing population (ibid., 14) with the increased spending in the community also generating "flow on benefits to other businesses in the region" (ibid., 16).

The ease with which the Karen refugees were able to integrate into the community owes much to their willingness to contribute to the local economy. Although the residents of Nhill are largely politically conservative, the report describes the community as embracing and opening "their hearts and minds to the Karen" (ibid.). Members of the community have further remarked that the Karen resettlement "has made Nhill a better place to live" (ibid.).

A scoping of the policy context and the sites under study thus identifies one, namely, a dearth of literature on specific migrant outcomes in the regions of Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill. Before the study progresses to address these gaps and contribute to the emerging literature on migrant settlement outcomes in regional Australia, it is important to survey broadly the debates in the field of migrant settlement.

Literature Review

A review of the literature identifies two focuses:

- **Migrant settlement in regional and rural areas**
- **Regional Migration and economic, social and cultural capital**

1. Migrant Settlement in Regional and Rural Areas

Research on migrant settlement in the last two decades has focussed on the viability, and the enablers and barriers to successful settlement in regional areas of Australia (AMES 2015; Beer and Keane 2000; Birrell and Rapson 2002; Birrell 2003; Boese 2015; Boese and Phillips 2017; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2014; FECCA 2015a and 2015b; Feist et al. 2014; Griffiths et al. 2010; Hugo et al. 2006; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Massey and Parr 2012; McDonald et al. 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; Miles et al. 2006; Penman and Goel 2017; QCSS 2014; Radford 2016; RCV 2013; Schech 2014; SCoA 2016; Taylor 2001 and 2017; Withers and Powall 2003; Wulf and Dharmalingam 2008). Since the 1990s, federal and state government initiatives have encouraged migrants to settle in regional and rural Australia (Collins 2008, 260; Boese 2015, 401; FECCA 2015; Hugo 2008a, 554; Piper 2009). Such promotion has been driven by the need to address population decline and labour and skill shortages in regional and rural settings, as well as the need to tackle condensed populations and overcrowding in major cities (Beer and Keane 2000; Kilpatrick et al. 2015).

In particular, researchers are concerned with the social and economic costs of out-migration, insofar as these impact the long-term viability of regional centres and small towns (ibid. 3; Eacott and Sonn 2006), and threaten the sustainability of smaller communities, which may be struggling to support industry, employment, and the quality of life for residents (ibid., 4). Since voluntary in-migration may not be enough to off-set the effects of out-migration (especially when it comes to younger people leaving the regional centres they grew up in to move to bigger cities), the three tiers of the Australian government—that is, the national, state and territory, and local tiers—continue to develop programs to assist in attracting and retaining migrant populations in regional areas (ibid.). Concurrently, studies are not only researching initiatives that attract migrants to regional destinations, they are also concerned with the question of how the likelihood of successful settlement and retention of migrant populations in regional areas can be strengthened (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2014).

The benefits of migrant settlement in regional Victoria, and Australia more broadly, have been well-documented (AMES 2014; AMES 2015; Bansel et al. 2016; Boese 2015; Boese and Phillips 2017; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). A report conducted by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) notes that the presence of migrants in smaller communities benefits the society and economy of the towns in which they settle, helps to maintain populations, and fosters innovation (2015, 1). Studies further highlight a number of benefits, including, as noted above, addressing labour and skill shortages and population decline, and increased economic capital, social capital and cultural diversity. Boese and Phillips (2017) describe the State of Victoria as being particularly active in promoting and facilitating the engagement of local regional governments in migrant settlement initiatives (389). For instance, to attract skilled migrants to regional and rural areas, Victoria adopted a Skilled Migration Strategy and set up an associated Regional Migration Incentive Fund (RMIF) in 2004 (ibid.).

Hugo (2008a) notes that the enthusiasm with which many rural and regional communities have both accepted and welcomed migrants undermines conventional stereotypes of these

communities as being dominated by conservative, and even racist, attitudes (568). Contrary to this view, Collins (2008) contends that while the business sector has been largely supportive of immigration, the general public have been less enthusiastic about the prospect of welcoming migrants into their towns (252). Although migration has tremendous potential to boost rural and regional economies—as exemplified by the successful Karen resettlement in Nhill discussed above (AMES 2015)—migrants are all too often blamed for a variety of economic issues, “from unemployment to inflation, to foreign debt, to falling productivity” (ibid.).

Studies have also identified barriers to the successful settlement of migrants in regional areas (Correa-Velez and Onsando, 2009; Correa-Velez, Spaaij, and Upham, 2012; Hugo, 2008a and 2008b; Schech, 2014). These barriers include a lack of infrastructure, support and provision services, limited employment opportunities, and social and cultural isolation (Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Correa-Velez, Spaaij and Upham 2012; FECCA 2015; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Schech 2014; SCoA 2016). Although migrants are being increasingly encouraged to settle in regional and rural spaces, it is not uncommon for them to vacate these areas due to perceived unsuccessful settlement outcomes (Kilpatrick et al. 2015, 208).

Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson (2006) reveal that skilled migrants settling in regional areas in Australia experience difficulty entering into the labour market. The employment available to migrants usually requires unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, when many migrants are highly educated and hold a variety of degrees (Hugo 2008a, 568; AMES 2014; Junankar and Mahuteau 2005; Ressia 2010). Further research carried out by AMES (2014) found that during a transitional settlement period, migrants with a multitude of skills and qualifications struggled to find employment in their areas of expertise (ibid.) and are not always able to transfer their experience and expertise into the Australian labour market (Ressia 2010, 64). Given this, migrants—especially those residing in rural and regional locales—are often required to perform jobs rejected by Australian-born citizens such as unskilled labour, cleaning, taxi driving, etc. (ibid.; AMES 2014). While migrant men often work in low-paid jobs that are incommensurate with their level of skill and experience, this is even more likely to be the case for migrant women (Ressia, 2010, 66). This suggests that gender plays a significant role in determining workplace access and employment outcomes for migrants (ibid.). Ressia (2010) explains that the reason for this is that “historically, skill based migration programs were developed from the perspective of ‘the migrant as male,’ a gendered view embedded within the assumption that the male migrant is the primary worker/breadwinner” (ibid.).

A significant barrier identified in the literature and in reports by peak bodies, such as the Settlement Council of Australia, that has impact on accessibility to services and successful settlement, is English language proficiency (Kabir 2015; Settlement Council of Australia 2016). While many local councils offer a multitude of services, such as community language service programmes, community transport services, community based volunteer programmes, migrants may be unaware of the services that might appear readily available to them (ibid.). This is identified as another factor contributing to the unsuccessful settlement of migrants in regional areas which can further contribute to out-migration.

In summary, research on migrant settlement in regional areas in Australia is rapidly increasing. This shifting focus forms a response to policy changes at the federal, state and local government levels to attract migrants to regional areas due to labour skill shortages. Many studies and policy submissions from advocacy/peak bodies which informed the development of the *National Settlement Framework* identified here discuss the viability and efficacy of the regional migration settlement framework. They identify the enablers and barriers. In the proceeding section, we turn to discussion in the literature that highlights the economic and social impacts of settlement.

2. Regional Migration and Economic, Social and Cultural Capital

There is an abundance of literature focused on the economic impacts of migrant settlement, especially in regional areas where migration has the potential to tremendously boost local economies, industry growth and the long-term sustainability of regional and rural areas. This literature is aligned with the concept of economic capital (AMES, 2014; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Bansel et al. 2016; Boese 2015; Boese and Phillips 2017; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010 and 2014; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Kilpatrick et al. 2015; Massey and Parr 2012; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; QCOSS 2014). 'Economic capital' relates to the economy of towns as well as an individual's accrual of material assets and income. Black and Hughes (2001) further distinguish between 'economic capital' and 'produced economic capital' by defining the latter as "all products that are harvested or manufactured, the built environment, physical infrastructure that has been constructed, and financial resources such as money" (50). The authors also include cultural and intellectual property in their definition of produced economic capital (ibid.).

As a nation, Australia has benefited enormously from the economic capital of migrants (Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009) which has contributed to "expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment and filling empty employment niches" (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010, 3). Although there are short-term costs associated with resettling migrants, these costs are far outweighed by the economic capital that migrants are able to bring after their successful resettlement (ibid.). Given the emphasis placed on economic growth, both nationally and abroad, it is not surprising that most of the literature on migration in Australia is focused on the impact of migration on economic capital. Nonetheless, more recent studies are expanding their focus to include how social capital accompanies regional migration.

Accompanying the central concern with the impact of migration on economic capital, a review of the literature also reveals a strong focus on examining migration in regard to social capital (Bansel et al. 2016; Kabir 2014; Kilpatrick et al. 2015; Pardy and Lee 2011; Radford 2016; Woolcock 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Wulf and Dharmalingam 2008). Indeed many of the studies centred on economic capital also consider issues of social capital as contributing to diverse range of community benefits, such as increased safety, health and education (AMES 2014; Boese 2014; Boese and Phillips 2017; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Correa-Velez et al. 2012; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Kilpatrick et al. 2013; McDonald et al. 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford 2009; Massey and Parr 2012; Penman and Goel 2017; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003; Woolcock 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Wulf and Dharmalingam 2008).

Social capital is defined as the forging of "effective social relations" (Kilpatrick et al. 2015, 209). While there are ongoing debates regarding the precise nature of social capital, it is generally identified as being essential to the successful integration of migrants, as well as informing the social cohesion of communities (Boese and Phillips 2017, 388), and community sustainability (Kilpatrick et al. 2015, 209). Social capital can hence also be understood in terms of "the patterns and qualities of relationships in a community" (ABS 2002). Robert Putman, a leading social capital theorist, explains that social capital refers to "features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (1993, 35; 1995, 66). The World Health Organisation (1998) further outlines social capital as representing "the degree of social cohesion which exists in communities. It refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust, and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (19).

Interestingly, much of the discussion in the policy context relates to combining the economic benefits with enhancing partnerships and networks that build social cohesion. For instance, FECCA and the Settlement Council of Australia in various reports, suggest that fostering social cohesion and positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and community harmony is dependent on providing adequate support networks. These, it is outlined, would need to involve settlement services, such as housing, English language support, and employment, and mitigating the challenges of settlement through promoting and supporting engagement between mainstream and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

In a similar vein Kilpatrick et al. (2015) argue that “the social capacity of regional cities to facilitate the social inclusion of migrants by assisting them to make social connections is very important to the retention of migrants and the success of regional migration policies” (208). Schech (2014) adds that “[w]hile openness to cultural diversity plays an important role in regional towns’ ability to retain ... migrants, this alone cannot compensate for a lack of opportunities for socio-economic advancement” (601).

Pardy and Lee (2011) insist that social capital and social cohesion exist on the same continuum in that they espouse “common aims, shared social objectives and a sense of community solidarity” (ibid., 299), but also warn against the dangers of overemphasising social capital as the answer to successful settlement. They argue that, historically, multiculturalism has been equated with reduced social capital and, along with it, “diminished social trust and reciprocity” (299), and that this has led to assimilationist tactics that call “upon immigrants to adjust and conform to ‘core Australian values’ rather than urging institutions to reflect on and accommodate the cultural diversity that is Australia” (ibid.). Ironically, much of the discussion in the literature we discussed previously and in policy documents is awash with identifying the benefits of social capital. Pardy and Lee (2011) suggest it is a “buzzword” or “strategy of belonging” for both migrants and community development organisations alike (300). The authors explain “[s]ocial capital is a powerful discursive tool ... due to the legitimacy and currency the term has in government bureaucracies” (ibid.).

However, the focus on the concept of social capital in relation to cultural and ethnic diversity has been criticised. Kilpatrick et al. (2015), as well as Woolcock and Narayan (2000), critique social capital for placing too much emphasis on social ties and, in so doing, carrying with it the potential to be restrictive and separatist. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) explain that one of the “down-sides” of social capital is that

[g]roup loyalties may be so strong that they isolate members from information about employment opportunities, foster a climate of ridicule toward efforts to study and work hard, or siphon off hard-won assets (say, to support recent immigrants from the home country) (231).

Social capital has also been criticised for disregarding gender and class related power structures (Anthias 2007; Erel 2010; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003). For instance, the limitations of social capital are recognised by Silvey and Elmhirst (2003), who argue that this concept precludes an examination of power and inequality. The authors argue that these limitations are even more explicit when gender is factored into the equation (ibid., 867). Given the limitations of social capital, some theorists have shifted their focus to the phenomenon of cultural capital to better explain the lived experiences of migrants as existing on a continuum of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Meissner & Vertovec 2015).

The criticisms of overemphasising social capital to the detriment of other forms of capital which people accrue during the settlement process has led some theorists to turn to the notion of cultural capital in order to provide a more nuanced account of the lived experiences of migrants (Blunt 2007; Erel 2010; Silva 2005). Where social capital predominately pertains to the socio-economic impacts of migrant settlement, cultural capital is seen as providing a deeper understanding of embodiment² (Blunt 2007; Erel 2010; Ryan et al. 2008; Silva 2005). Thus, research focused on issues to do with cultural capital tends to be particularly concerned with issues of social exclusion, identity, and belonging. As such, Erel (2010) suggests that “a migrant group does not hold homogeneous cultural capital; instead, cultural capital is both the product of and productive of differentiations of gender, ethnicity, and class within the migrant group” (ibid.). Manalansan IV (2006) adds a further dynamic by introducing sexuality as a significant factor that intersects with cultural capital.

Some literature has suggested that migrants can possess diminished cultural capital due to cultural tensions between the behaviours valued in the home and those valued in a host community (Markose and Hellstén 2009, 61). Markose and Hellstén (2009), for instance, demonstrate this in relation to the experiences of school-aged children from migrant backgrounds underachieving in the field of literacy (ibid.). Others, however, have contended that migrants possess an abundance of cultural capital (Trueba 2002), including the capacities to master different languages, traverse ethnic boundaries, overcome obstacles and endure hardships, and take on and manage new identities “so they can co-exist and function without conflicts in different contexts simultaneously” (ibid.). In a similar vein, Erel (2010) coins the term ‘migration-specific cultural capital’ to examine the means through which migrant women “transform existing classificatory systems of cultural validation” (647). While most of the literature on the lived experiences of migrants tends to look at either economic and social capital or cultural capital alone, Erel is one of the very few writers to explore how cultural capital is “recognized, circulated and interlinked with social and economic capital” (ibid.).

To summarise, there are a number of existing studies focused on social and economic capital, with some of this research facilitating a dialogue between social and economic understandings of capital. Much of the policy literature and reports argue that economic opportunities and successful settlement is built on social networks and access to services, including housing, education, health and English language services. Nonetheless, researchers have critiqued these concepts for being too narrowly focused and disregarding the heterogeneous experiences of migrants’ constructions of identity and belonging. They believe an effort needs to be made to provide a more nuanced account of the lived experiences of migrants that moves beyond the social and economic, any pay more attention to the concept of cultural capital. Scholars interrogating this phenomenon have examined the intersection between race, ethnicity, gender, and class to account for the dynamic variables that influence migrants’ experiences in the world and their concrete sense of embodiment.

1. Embodiment according to Bourdieu (cited in Stych 2010, 4) refers to a habitus, meaning the “way the body exists and is used in society.”

Gaps Identified in Current Practice

It is evident that there is abundant and burgeoning literature examining the efficacy and viability of regional migration and the social and economic impacts of regional migration. What, however, is mostly neglected is the nuanced approach of cultural capital and the way migrants are able to develop a sense of belonging and identity.

Another feature of the debates around regional migration concerns the development of the *National Settlement Framework*. The nine priority areas at first glance appear to primarily cater to the development of social and economic capital, neglecting to explore how migrants might map their lived experiences of living, and how accessing these services might create identity and belonging. It has also been noted that while there is an abundance of literature that draws on the concepts of social and economic capital to examine the settlement outcomes of migrants in regional Australia, there is a paucity of literature responding to the *National Settlement Framework*. This supports research aims of:

1. Using the nine priority areas of the *National Settlement Framework* to map the lived experiences of migrants at the sites under study, namely, Ballarat, Nhill and Horsham.
2. Developing a nuanced approach using cultural capital as a concept to map the lived experiences of migrants.

Although multidimensional aspects of migrant settlement are considered in existing studies, there is no study that combines an analysis of social and economic capital with cultural capital. This project therefore responds to the current gaps in the literature by engaging the interstices between the economic, social, and cultural. This will be achieved by mapping the lived experiences of migrants living and/or working across regional Victoria in the specific areas of Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill between 2009 and 2018.

This research will thus contribute to the knowledge of how cultural, social and economic capital, when taken together, shape the lived experiences of migrants in regional areas of Victoria—namely, Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill.

Research Methods

Methodology

This study utilises phenomenology as its methodology (Hammond et al. 1991). Phenomenology is described as the search for phenomena under study, as perceived by individuals participating in the research (Williams 2010). This supports research into the everyday experiences of people who are interconnected with the world around them (Darbyshire et al. 1999), thus assisting the researchers in analysing migrants' experiences of living and/or working in the towns of Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill from 2009 to 2018.

Interpretative phenomenology acknowledges embodiment but goes further to locate the perceived experience of embodiment in the broader historical and spatial contexts of their everyday world(s) (Mackey 2004). Using an interpretative phenomenological approach has enabled the research team to explore participants' everyday experiences (Darbyshire et al. 1999) in addition to the conceptualisation of meanings participants' attribute to their lived experiences as migrants in regional Victoria. The advantage of conducting an interpretative analysis is that it allows us to locate the meanings participants apply to the broader social contexts in which they situate themselves.

As a qualitative methodology, interpretive phenomenology draws upon in depth and multi-layered descriptions (Geertz 1973) of participants. This enables the research team to establish the phenomena participants perceive as part of their day-to-day experience. Voice as an expression of their experience is a critical component to understanding the nature and extent of the phenomena under study.

Sample Composition

The target population for this project is migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, skilled and unskilled migrants, international students and migrants through the family reunification programme living and/or working in Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill from 2009 to 2018.

Justification of Sample Size

Given the depth and extent of conversations with participants held for an interpretative phenomenological analysis, Connelly (2010) suggests sample sizes are usually small and purposeful. The phenomena are explored with fewer participants; however, the approach relies on more detail. The advantage lies in the potential for elaboration, reflection and "reflexivity [through] shared human competencies of communication" (Kelly 2010, 11). The number of participants is not as important as the richness of the data collected (Schneider, Whitehead and Elliot 2008). Instead of drawing on large numbers of participants, as can be seen in quantitative studies, this methodology and coinciding methods rely on data saturation, which is the repetition of information provided by participants (Kelly 2010). As a rule of thumb, and depending on the nature of the study, approximately fifteen to twenty-four participants is considered to be the number necessary for saturation. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) further argue that an optimum size for a focus group is six to eight participants but that focus groups with as few as three participants can work successfully.

Recruitment of Participants

In Ballarat, we conducted nine individual interviews, one focus group with women with eight participants, and another focus group with men. The focus group with men had five confirmed participants but on the day of the interviews only two participants attended. In Horsham, we conducted four individual interviews and one focus group of seven participants which only involved women. A male participant had confirmed initially but on the day of the focus group interviews he did not attend. In Nhill, we conducted four individual interviews and one focus group which involved twelve participants.

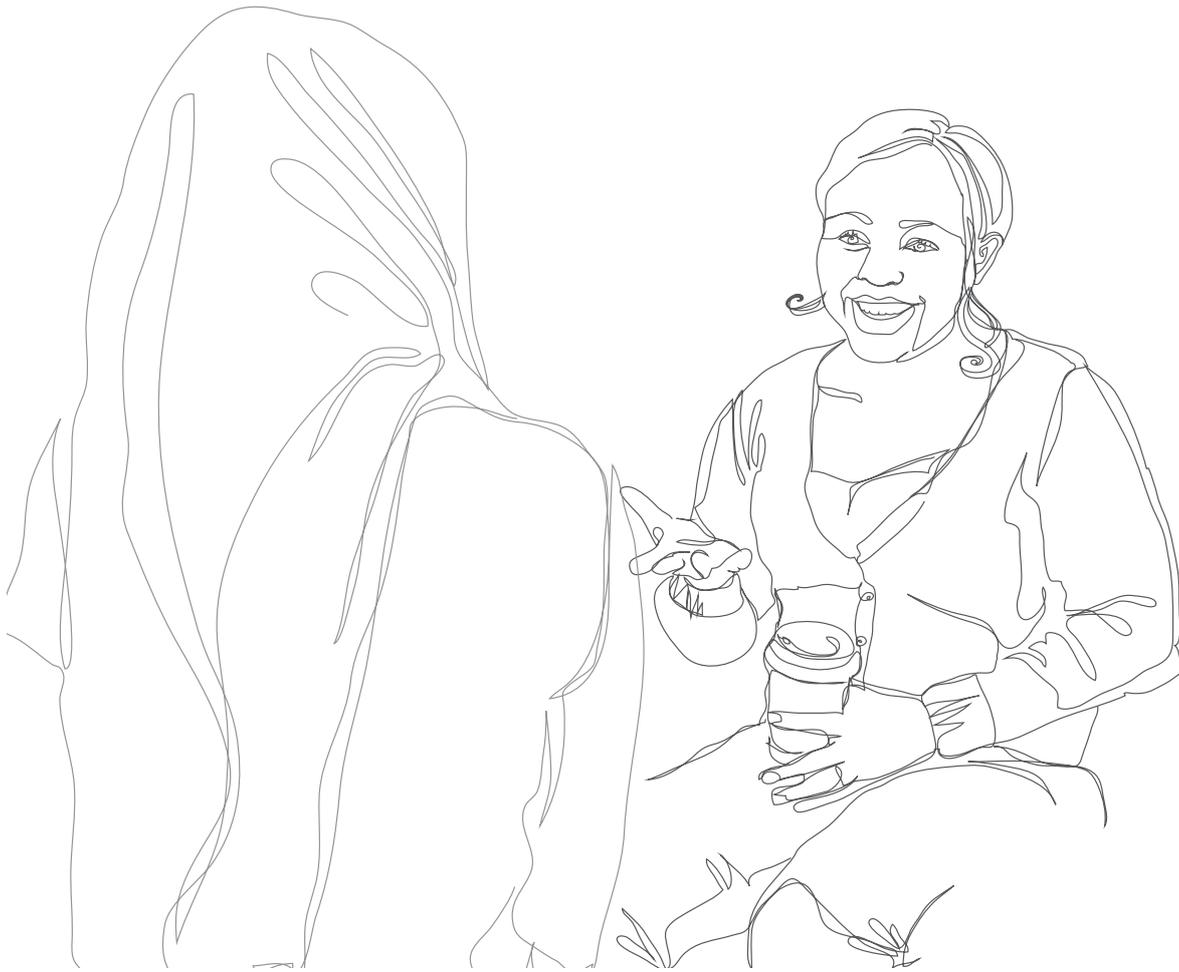
Research Limitations

The researchers acknowledge that there are some limitations to this study in terms of the sample of participants. The most notable limitation is the disproportionate ratio of women to men involved in the research across Ballarat and Horsham. Another limitation relates to the diversity of the participants in the focus group. The participants in the focus group at Nhill were mainly from the Karen community.

BALLARAT		HORSHAM		NHILL	
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	SEX	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	SEX	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	SEX
Ethiopia	M	Thailand	F	India	F
Mauritius	M	Philippines	F	India	F
Mexico	F	Philippines	F	New Zealand	M
Pakistan	M	Lithuania	F	Philippines	F
South Sudan	M	Vietnam	F	Myanmar	M
Sudan	M	India	F	Myanmar	F
Togo	M	New Zealand	F	Myanmar	F
Uganda	F	Thailand	F	Myanmar	F
Serbia	F	Vietnam	F	Myanmar	F
Vietnam	F	South Korea	F	Myanmar	F
Vietnam	F	India	F	Myanmar	M
Kenya	F	Thailand	F	Myanmar	M
Sri Lanka	F	Combined demographics of participants in individual and focus groups in Horsham.		Myanmar	M
Kenya	F		Myanmar	M	
South Sudan	F		Myanmar	M	
Benin	F		Myanmar	M	
Philippines	M		Myanmar	M	
Combined demographics of participants in individual and focus groups in Ballarat.				Combined demographics of participants in individual and focus groups in Nhill.	

Combined demographics of participants in individual and focus groups in Ballarat.

Note: two female participants did not disclose their country of origin.



Interview Questions

Participants across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill were presented with a range of open-ended questions concerning their experiences of settling in these locations. The questions addressed to participants during the interview process consisted of the following:

- **Can you tell us about your experience settling in a regional area?**
 - › Are there any benefits and/or barriers you have experienced in terms of living in a regional area?
- **Can you tell us about whether you feel connected to the community? If so, can you:**
 - › Tell us what it is that makes you feel connected? For example, are you involved in community groups?
 - › If you do not feel connected, can you tell us about what has made it difficult to feel part of the community?
- **Tell us about your experience accessing services, such as employment, education, family and social supports, hospital and other health services, and training and language services.**
 - › Have you experienced any benefits and/or barriers in terms of access to services in the region?

Findings

Participants across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill engaged in individual and focus group interviews. They provided in-depth responses to a range of questions posed by the research team. The responses across all participant groups (Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill) into four main themes:

1. *Identity and belonging: Imagining a 'regional area' as 'home'*
2. *Connectedness through engagement with community based and/or multicultural organisations*
3. *Service engagement with government services*
4. *Barriers to settlement*

In Nhill, an additional theme was identified specifically related to a strong desire of the Karen community members to continue communal living and integration between younger and older members of the community. The main themes will be discussed below, presenting findings from each of the three locations in turn. In some instances, to aid with clarity, these four themes have been further divided into sub-themes.

Narratives from Ballarat

The researchers conducted eight individual interviews and two focus groups in Ballarat. Participants in the individual interviews consisted of a mixture of women and men. The two focus groups consisted of a group of eight women and a smaller than anticipated group of two men.

Theme 1: Identity and Belonging: Imagining a 'Regional Area' as 'Home'

When participants reflected on their experiences of settling in Ballarat with regards to issues of belonging, the following sub-themes emerged:

1. **Benefits of Regional Living**
2. **Shifting Demographics, Shifting Attitudes**

Each is considered in turn below.

1.1 BENEFITS OF REGIONAL LIVING

Participants noted numerous benefits of living in Ballarat. Phrases such as “I love my town,” “it’s nice and quiet,” “not overcrowded,” “easier to get around,” “better quality of life,” “fresh air,” and “more affordable” were commonly used to describe these benefits. The advantages of living in Ballarat expressed by participants included the clean and unpolluted air, the easy and relaxed lifestyle, the accessibility of the city, and the affordability of housing.

The warm and welcoming attitudes of the Ballarat community were attributed to assisting participants feel connected to the community and enhancing their sense of belonging. Participants largely agreed that people are friendlier in Ballarat than they are in larger metropolitan areas. To illustrate:

“In terms of rural areas, I’ve noticed people have more time to give you. If you are going to look for employment, people try to talk to you a bit more, so you’re not black and white and to the point, but usually they make you a bit more comfortable—ask you from where you are, a bit of your culture.”

“There’s more friendly people in a regional town than you get in the city. Literally, people will actually say hi to you on the streets of a regional town.”

.....
“Yeah, the benefits, as I said, in the regional area is the time that they have to offer, that they can offer you. Usually they take the time and if you don’t understand anything they are usually very patient in repeating and trying to make sure that you understand.”
.....

Participants noted that living in Ballarat brought with it a range of benefits linked to the smaller population of the city in comparison to larger cities such as Melbourne. One participant noted that, “I came from Shanghai. Air has been polluted and I often got cold when I lived over there.” Others, enjoyed the relaxed and slow-paced lifestyle they were offered in Ballarat. For example, two participants remarked:

“I’ve always been a town girl. I’m never a city girl. I swear to God, I’d rather live in the bush like far away from the city as possible. Because I love my town. It’s nice and quiet.”

“What I also like was a slower pace that life was going. The people were, as I said earlier, were not in a hurry, and tended to take time as well.”

Others nominated affordability as an important factor in terms of living in Ballarat. To illustrate, participants expressed the following:

“I think the benefits, one of the benefits is the pricing of things. I find that it’s more affordable to live in Ballarat than if you went to Melbourne. Quality of life feels—appears to be better. At least from my perspective. Like housing and all of that is easier to—like you’re able to afford it here, and you wouldn’t be able to afford it in Melbourne, and have a good area, like live in a nice area, or have a good size house. Not saying, oh I want to have a mansion, but just a house where you can have a backyard and just have those trees and have a good quality of life. I think pricing has got its benefits. Like Ballarat is cheaper, it’s easier to live here.”

A further benefit of living in Ballarat identified by participants is the heightened prospects of success in terms of settlement outcomes and personal achievements. The following excerpts are illustrative of this:

“I love the country and I succeed for myself which I wouldn’t be able to succeed in my own country.”

“...I encourage migrants to come, to forget the city life, go in the countryside, and succeed there, because that’s the only way I’ve known that anyone can succeed who’s a migrant, is from a countryside, you could do that.”

“I never thought that I was going to have certain things and accomplish in my life. So that’s what I can say about Ballarat and the services that we have here is just something incredible.”

.....
“I think coming to Ballarat has been one of the best choice ... the people behind the scenes have made, because without coming to Ballarat, I reckon my success journey would have been different.”
.....

Overall, participants reflected on numerous benefits of living in regional locales in general and Ballarat in particular. Benefits included the clean and unpolluted air, the relaxed and slow-paced lifestyle, the ease of navigating the city, the affordability of housing, and heightened prospects of successful settlement and personal flourishing.

1.2 SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS, SHIFTING ATTITUDES

Another of the sub-themes that emerged from participants' considerations of their sense of belonging referred to the significant changes that Ballarat has undergone in the past ten years with regards to community attitudes towards individuals from CALD backgrounds. Participants used such phrases as "things have changed in a positive way," "Ballarat has improved over time," and "massive shift" to juxtapose their initial and past experiences in, and of, Ballarat with their more recent ones.

Reflecting on their experience several years ago, one participant noted that it was difficult to settle in Ballarat because the community was "still adjusting to multiculturalism." However, the participant continued: "Now it's fantastic. I walk around, I give people thumbs up and they give me thumbs up, so there's a massive shift, and Ballarat has played a massive role in educating people here."

Other participants noted the changing face of multicultural communities and shifts in community attitudes towards migrants:

"Things have changed so much. It is so African here, or other people from that area, we have a community that has been part of multicultural community in the city."

"Over the last 10 years it was a lot of that back then, 10 years ago it was a lot of all those racism words, all those pushings, like you know. But over the years, like now, there's less of them. There's more people that understand African cultures, Sudanese cultures. There's more people that just understands our culture therefore they accepted us into the community."

Overall, there was a broad consensus amongst participants that local attitudes towards multiculturalism in Ballarat have shifted from being initially exclusionary to more recently inclusive. An increased presence of people with CALD backgrounds, in addition to educating the broader community about multiculturalism, has made—in the words of one participant—"the Ballarat community realise that these people are not so much different to us."

Theme 2: Connectedness through Engagement with Community-based and/or Multicultural Organisations

Participants couched a sense of belonging and connectedness through the relationships they made in the community. One participant remarked, "The other benefits I've noticed living in a rural area, is there's more things that are organised ... Small initiatives which unite us and makes us feel a bit more at home." Others used terms, such as "more commitment," "being involved in multicultural activities," "making new friends" as ways in which they felt connected. The following excerpts illustrate the ways in which people engaged with community based organisations or other community based voluntary work.

"The city of Ballarat also, produce so many activity for the multicultural community, where our voice has been heard in different forums and that's—they knew that a flyer that the picture everywhere for the people that actually look different. So I think that those activities send a clear message to the community that we are one in the city and we have one in the regional areas, and that become more—being a part of the society—and for me, I feel more connected because I could call anyone."

"I feel like the regional teens, like regional youth, they tend to be more committed to their

community. Whereas you go to metropolitan areas and you look at their youth, they're just more committed to their own life. They don't think about—they don't think outside their bubble."

Participants attributed their strong sense of community belonging to involvement with community organisations such as multicultural agencies, sporting clubs, and churches. The following excerpts are illustrative of this:

"Well, I feel connected, because I've been involving with most multicultural... She is the Ballarat Central multicultural consult. She's involved with us [and] letting us know any events, any—like, we went to gala dinner, premier gala dinner down in Melbourne, which was fairly big and huge amount of people, like, 5000 people all over Victoria, they came."

"I see new friends here, new stories, make new friends. It really makes me connected, catch up with friends, really multicultural friends. A bit of African, a bit of Asian, a bit of Australia. So pretty—I'd say I'm pretty connected, yeah."

"I got in touch with a couple of organisations like CMY, BRMC, then it was pretty easy for—I got help from them if I needed anything, and a neighbourhood centre as well helping me with getting resumes, getting—I guess getting into the Australian culture, I guess, something like that. Yeah."

"Neighbourhood Centre had the English classes and organised them...[and they were -] very helpful."

"The one [thing] we feel belong in Ballarat is first of all the friendship I made through the church."

In a similar vein, others were able to forge community ties and develop friendships by attending events and volunteering for local community groups.

"Well, I think for my wife, it was a bit, a different experience, where she could join some of the friends she made ... So, she made migrant friends very easily, like Filipinos, there were some Chinese and African friends, so she mingled a bit more and could do more social things. When our son was born they were doing more of the, what's it called, mother's group."

"Actually, it has been a blessing because I've found friends, I'm connected to the community through church and through BRMC and then, like, individual friends that I've got here and there."

"Yeah. Sport was a really good one, as I said. I think this unites lots of migrants."

A number of participants—especially men—noted that involvement in sporting teams had served an important role in helping them develop friendships and connect with the local community:

"I've also been managing multicultural sports like soccer teams, where people from different nationalities will come together and play. Its objective was to show people, because many people at that time were very prejudiced against refugees and migrants, so we wanted to show that—we wanted to be closer to the communities, to put ourselves out and to show people that we can be good people, we can practice a sport really well and yeah, you can talk to us, we are just like other people, like normal human beings."

In summary, a majority of the participants emphasised the importance of community-based organisations, sporting clubs and friendships and other networks in developing their senses of belonging and identity in a regional area. Some of the participants, as noted previously, connected with such organisations as BRMC, Ballarat Community Health (BCH), CMY and the City of Ballarat to expand their horizons, build networks and make friends, whereas a few joined sporting and reading clubs to forge deeper connections in the community.

Theme 3: Service Engagement

Participants provided nuanced responses regarding their experiences of accessing education, health, employment, and multicultural services in Ballarat. Participants used phrases such as “we are very looked after,” “professional,” and “supportive” to describe their general experiences of service engagement. For instance, participants remarked:

“So I went through everything very easy and I still have—get a lot of help, so this is what I found in Ballarat. I don’t know if it’s a small town or what it is, but here, we are very well looked after in I would say.”

“Yeah, and all the services is really professional and very supportive as well, compared to what I’ve seen in other countries.”

Participants further expressed positive interactions with the education system. They reflected

“Education in Ballarat I think is amazing. With me, I find yeah really good the way they teach people. Even now, we’re learning about family violence and in this class then we know about what is your right as a woman in family violence and what can you prevent that in—how can you prevent it in the country and that make you contribute to be—like to learn about you know your right and you can protect to—like how can you stop that, you know contribute in the country.”

on their experiences of courses and workshops, English language classes, and secondary and tertiary education in the following extracts:

“Yeah, school system here good. I have very good experience when I was [SMB campus]. When I come here the teacher is very knowledgeable, very supportive, helpful. I get very good score. Everyone say how you do so well, I say—I always say because of my teacher. They so generous to me. Another teacher no to it. If you don’t deserve it nobody can [change it] to you at all. If you marginal fail they can make you pass, but if you can’t get [unclear] they will never put you there. Yes, I learn that and I say I very happy here. The teacher and the education system is fantastic.”

Participants expressed gratitude towards their eligibility for free education. In instances when there were various fees associated with education, some participants noted that local multicultural organisations and tertiary institutions were able to assist them:

“Then once I finished year 12—because I haven’t got—I haven’t got the permanent residence yet. I’m considered as international. So the fees are international fees, which is—I think it

was about 30K a year or something like that. So there was no way I was going to—I was able to pay that, the ability, so I was pretty in a box. There's only a couple of universities I could try. But, like I said, through connections—we spoke to—I spoke to CMY about it and they spoke to other people on [networks], I guess, and Federation came through. They were happy to just take me on board and see how I go for the first year and they—then they were happy to give me another shot for second year. So hopefully it's—it gets till the end of the year—the end of the degree. So, yeah.”

“BRMC has helped me a lot because when I was training to go to uni for my nursing course there were \$400 amenities of which I didn't have. But they said: “don't mind about that, tell us how we can help.” I thought I was just telling her and I was feeling sceptical because I was thinking “am I becoming too much of a burden?.” But then, through her, the \$400 was paid. They even paid for my text books, the ones I needed first. There were 3 textbooks I needed first and she told me that when you reach that moment when you need books, you contact us and we are going to buy them. And they were not like \$20 books, they are really expensive, but they paid for it. Some of the blessing I've got are like those. Something I think it would be so hard for me, they've really made it so easy. And they used to drive me around, like to ACU. Yes, I'm confident but some places you say I want to go to this, but where can I start? She was there as my buddy to push me on: “yeah, let's go to this one, let's go to this one.” She knew every name I didn't know and I didn't know where to start from, maybe it would take me time to reach those people, but we just went. So, it really made my life so easy and I'm so happy that I'm in something that I've loved since childhood.”

In terms of employment services, participants reported receiving assistance from BRMC, CMY, and the Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre (BNC). Participants reported attending careers workshops, receiving assistance writing cover letters, resumes, addressing key selection criteria, and preparing for job interviews. They also noted receiving assistance applying for specific jobs, which they described as useful. The following excerpts are illustrative of the assistance participants were provided with in regard to employment:

“Yeah. So I've—with employment, I've had—like I said—lots of workshops I did through CMY, a neighbourhood centre and, I think, once at BRMC as well. So I'm pretty sure—so I've tried those. They helped me with the soft skills I need to do class writing or resume. I thought it was easy but it's difficult. So—and writing of cover letter when I applied for a couple of jobs I just called in and asked if they could help me and they're always happy to help anyone. So pretty nice of them.”

Although participants found employment services beneficial, they still experienced obstacles to securing employment, as demonstrated in the following:

“Ballarat Neighbourhood and BRMC. My case worker there, she would help me with making cover letters. Because of course the system here is a little different to back home. So, I saw that everything was new. Cover letters and selection criteria ... I had never seen it. It was very detailed and everything and you don't know what language to use. So, it was really good. She would say “no, this is not right, change it like this.” And for me, I couldn't tell the difference, as if it is the same. But then later I came to understand why things are like that. So, really ... yeah, I've been supported. It's just actually finding a job that is difficult.”

“And then, making applications, they are uploading things. Ballarat Neighbourhood House really supported me a lot. Because I was going there all the time. Sometimes I would make appointments, but other things were so urgent that I’d go in there and they’d say: “no problem, no problem, come in.” So, it has really been so good.”

Participants also expressed a range of benefits to the health services available in Ballarat. They reflected on their experiences at BCH, Ballarat Base Hospital, and Eureka Medical Centre, and noted the advantages of having a Medicare card. Broadly speaking, participants described health services as being high in quality, professional, and easy to access, as is demonstrated in the following extracts:

“In terms of hospitals and health services, I found that it was good. I’ve been very surprised about the health services and quality of.”

“I still got surprised about the good quality of the system ... I’ve been to the hospital just for a minor cut that I had on one of my fingers. I was also treated right. It was—yeah, did have a waiting period and all of that, but still, was something that they treat you well. They don’t leave you there to die or anything. So it was—yeah. So overall it’s been a good experience with the health system.”

“I guess the service is more professional here. Yeah, if it is emergency, you’ve got lots of medical equipment. It’s more sophisticated and you get, yeah, they really know what your problem is and you don’t have to wait for a month or years to see a specialist. You can be fast tracked if you’ve got a problem, I think.”

“I’ve had a lot of positive vibe from hospitals. Like when we came to Australia every family is given a GP to go to. But then also along the way my family will go to Ballarat Health Community Health for education for medication advice and all that stuff. Because my mum has a back problem also. We go there a lot. So, we had access to that which was great, and we have access to Base Hospital also and other medical centres like Eureka. It’s good because you have people there to look after you when you’re sick.”

“Going to the GP just to get a check-up in terms of if I’m injured from soccer—so I felt that there’s a care that was taking place for me to—I can go at any time, book in, and just feel welcome—not line in Africa, that you need to pay money for it, or just line up for hours, so there’s a massive change in terms of services. For us it was all new, but at the same time, we always try to think, when are we going to get charged for these services?”

Whilst participants reported a number of benefits to accessing health services, some experienced barriers in terms of navigating the health sector. One participant noted that some migrants find it difficult to understand the system and suggested that further information would help to empower migrants:

“So if they—from the beginning, if they came and knew this is what happens if you get pregnant or this happens if you have a child and this is what happens if you have to have immunisations. I’m sure that it will not be lost and they will [unclear]. I shall go there and still ask them about this and they’ll show me the way. But you find sometimes when you go to a place, people will say you can sign there and they’re scared too whether they’ll understand you and I know, I understand that.”

One participant narrated a distressing occurrence when they were refused emergency dental treatment due to not having a Medicare card, despite being in an enormous amount of pain:

“They give an appointment for my teeth. When I ring the appointment, they say oh, we can’t see you, you don’t have a Medicare card. That’s when I call my—I am crying, crying. Oh, I’m very, very [unclear] ... I had one [unclear] teeth problem where they take out—take off that teeth—one teeth, but I had other teeth and [unclear] but they didn’t see me because you don’t have any Medicare card ... I just that time put the Panadol and [unclear]. Just do that. So it’s a very—I had experienced that—bad experience.”

Another participant reported barriers they had experienced with a GP:

“I am with a doctor, I think an Indian one. She would assume I can’t communicate in English. I went I don’t have any problem. When she want to talk to me she say is anyone with you? I say that make me worried. I assume that anything really serious. When you come to see your doctor and they say is your family with you? I thought, assumed that I have something or serious new to inform me. I say is there any problem or anything? I say I can take it. I say no, I come here, I got a lift from my neighbour. It very such a way and later when I look back, I didn’t see any racism or anything, but somehow I can see give the new migrant a hard time.”

Another participant was concerned that BCH is the only health service available for migrants, despite the increasing migrant population in Ballarat:

“In Ballarat we’ve got only one health services for migrant, which is by community health, and one good thing about African population, we’ve got 642 African background. What about those of Phillipine—what about those of Indian—when it comes to multicultural communities? I think in the regional area, we don’t have more services that actually looking into those micro communities, so Ballarat community ourselves has been the only recognise in that focus in terms of have from those multicultural community. I think that would be a barrier too, in terms of—look, if people want to access the services –and I know someone who it would be hard for me to go, simple because I know that person. I think having more health service in that—addressing the refugee or migrant health here in the regional in the city that would be more beneficial.”

To summarise, the barriers expressed by participants in terms of accessing health services included a lack of understanding the system, a lack of migrant-specific services, communication issues, and being denied treatment due to not having a Medicare card. Nonetheless, the majority of participants reflected on numerous benefits to accessing services in Ballarat, including education, health, employment, and multicultural services. Participants expressed gratitude towards organisations such as BRMC, CMY, and BNC for the range of supports they have in place for migrants, including social and cultural services, and assistance with education and employment. Participants had positive experiences with the education sector and described health services such as Ballarat Community Health as being high quality, caring, and professional.

Theme 4: Barriers to Settlement in Ballarat

Participants noted a number of barriers to settling in Ballarat. The barriers were from the standpoint of community connectedness, identity, and belonging. Phrases such as “difficult to find friends,” “didn’t know how to connect with people,” “questioning of my identity,” and “difficult to communicate” were used to describe barriers to identity and feelings of belonging. Others, highlighted the language and cultural barriers in ways such as, “not enough jobs,” “everything’s different,” “I experienced racism,” and it was “hard to communicate.”

Some participants found it difficult to adapt to a new way of living and felt torn between “two languages, two cultures.” Others found it challenging to relate to people and to forge new connections. To illustrate:

“After I have been here for more than 13 years, I still do not feel that I can think like Aussie. I learn two ways, two languages, and two cultures at the same time.”

“I didn’t know how to connect with people ... I think my ethnic belonging itself and being given that I’m a dark African, even if I look like Asian, was one of the biggest things, but it was more, not from the communities but it was more my own—the questioning of my identity I think, which made me feel as if—yeah, made me feel less confident in exploring those options. So, I’d go, for example, if there was a soccer club, I’d wait for my sister to get to his Australian friend and she or he would refer me to a club, rather than me going to a club and saying that I want to play soccer for them. So, it was trying to get help from maybe a white Australian, to get connected initially.”

“It was so difficult to find a job to start with, coming from ... I guess I didn’t struggle to have a job before I came here.”

“It was difficult I guess to find friends and to feel part of them. I did have my in-laws and just the family and some friends around my partner. But it’s difficult. Even though I don’t think that I’ve got the worst level of English, I still feel like it’s difficult to communicate. Just like get used to [this line] and get used to the jokes, and just interacting with them. Yeah, just the different bits and what people do in Ballarat, or what they do around Victoria, that I wasn’t used to. Like when you go and visit someone, how you should act, and what is acceptable and not acceptable.”

Additionally, participants in focus group and one-on-one interviews spoke of multiple reasons for lack of suitable and relevant employment opportunities. A few listed not having appropriate networks, and a few others talked of being offered low-skilled positions despite their possession of tertiary qualifications. The following excerpts illustrate these findings:

“I think it was tricky to find a job. I think self-confidence was a big thing, a big barrier for me as well. So, irrespective of wherever I went, it was more the new place which was challenging and so different, so I was questioning my own abilities—whether I was good enough to do all this. Especially when you apply for a job and you don’t get it.”

“I think the other barrier would be job opportunities. I remember applying for jobs like picking tomatoes and cleaning jobs. Even with my degree I was all prepared to do all this but there were so many people wanting the same job, even very ground-level jobs and it was very hard to get anything.”

Two participants referenced the importance of networking and “making the right connections.” They noted:

“I felt like it was really hard for me to get a job ... like, being from a different background, because I didn’t have my uncles, my aunties, working in that sector that I want to go in.”

“So it does end up being about who you know, and networking and making sure that people get to know you ... The more you know people, the more chances you have of finding a job and finding new opportunities.”

Another participant reflected on an experience of discrimination in the employment sector. They recounted an incident of entering a store to submit their resume and seeing the sales assistant immediately discard of it in the rubbish bin. Following this, the participant observed another person, who was not from a CALD background, enter the store to submit their resume and receive a very different response. Rather than throwing this person’s resume away, the sales assistant “looked at it, and read over it, and walked into the office and put it on the table.”

In a similar vein, participants described lack of employment opportunities having flow-on effects on their finances and overall settlement experiences. In the words of one participant, “I think if you can’t find a job, finance will definitely kick in, so it kind of affects your whole other activities that you can be involved in. It can be further education, it can be sporting activities, it can be accessing work, it can be meeting with friends. It has a whole big effect.”

Another barrier that participants experienced was related to speaking and understanding English. “Language can be a big problem,” one participant remarked. Regarding this challenge, participants had the following to say:

“When you come here, you think you know English and then you sit in among a group and that’s where I got lost in translation ... I’d sit in the office and it’s different English and half the time I’m trying [unclear]—I can only hear the name Mrs so and so and then that’s it; the rest of it is gone. I’ve got to sit and ask again, what did you say? So it’s just—you think you know the language until you come to Australia; it’s a different language.”

“But like not speaking English, not having the knowledge of English at all, people would talk to me on the bus, like they’ll probably say hi or something and I just shake my head, just like nod my head ... It was that barrier that you don’t have the communication skills to be able to communicate with the next person that’s sitting next to you on the bus. Then also speaking about the communication, you don’t have the knowledge to understand what the other person may be saying about you, if it’s bad or good. Like you don’t know. So you can interpret whatever it is in any type of wrong way.”

Other participants, who were comfortable speaking English, found it difficult to understand Australian discourse in general and the region-specific slang of Ballarat in particular. They also experienced cultural barriers in terms of the use of etiquette. The following excerpts are illustrative of the challenges expressed by participants:

“I think being given that I was multilingual and language was one of my strengths, it wasn’t that big an issue. Of course, Australians speak a bit different. The English that was spoken in my country, it was trying to learn and understand them. It didn’t take long, but initially it was a bit of a barrier for me to really comprehend everything; the way people were talking. There was lots of slang words which I had never heard before, but then I was too embarrassed to ask what they were saying. One, the first thing I remember, when I came to Australia, I went to the fish and chip shop and the person was asking, how are you going? I said, I was going by car and I’m going to Shepparton.”

“Sometimes I used to say, like the translations came out wrong and said—like I used to say excuse me. That came across as rude, rather than saying pardon or sorry, what was that? I don’t know, people used to think that I was being rude because I said excuse me. Like thought I was being sarcastic or I don’t know.”

To summarise, a significant barrier that participants encountered in relation to their settlement in Ballarat was their sense of a lack of suitable employment opportunities, which had flow-on effects on their finances, self-esteem, and perceived ability to contribute back to the community. Language and cultural barriers, and covert and overt discrimination, were noted as other obstacles. Whilst participants highlighted cultural differences and discriminatory attitudes as barriers to successful settlement, they also acknowledged the development of more inclusive attitudes and values in the broader community of Ballarat towards migrants in the last ten years.

Narratives from Horsham

The researchers conducted one focus group made up of eight participants and four in depth individual interviews with participants in Horsham. The results of the findings can be divided into four themes:

1. **Identity and belonging: Imagining a 'regional/rural area' as 'home'**
2. **Connectedness through engagement with community-based and/or multicultural organisations**
3. **Service engagement**
4. **Barriers to settlement**

Theme 1: Identity and Belonging: Imagining a 'Regional Area' as 'Home'

In Horsham, the researchers conducted one focus group which involved seven women and four individual interviews. Participants reflected on numerous benefits and a few barriers to their experiences settling in a rural area. They described their experiences using terms such as "kind," "slow-paced," "affordable" and "low cost." When reflecting on the barriers to regional settlement, participants used phrases such as "not connected," "lonely," and "different." These latter feelings will be discussed further in theme 4.

Participants remarked on a number of benefits of living in Horsham, including the people, the weather, the slow-paced lifestyle, the affordability of housing, and the services available to them. The majority of the participants in both the focus group and individual interviews made references to the weather, the different lifestyles, and welcoming nature of Horsham residents. The following excerpts are illustrative of participants' positive perceptions of Horsham:

"I like here because the weather is not like in the Philippines—it's not cold so I like here because this is new for me. The weather and the people is very lovely—all of the people yeah."

"It's been really, really lovely. They make you feel so welcome."

"I think Australia—easy life, not busy. Thailand, many things too busy—many cars, many people and something—shop not good for salary yeah but I work in Thai Basil—they're very good for me."

"[E]veryone will say hello, how are you especially when you're in the groceries supermarket. You are welcome there. People say how are you today—like that. Even in school, the teachers, they are very welcome for different races."

Other benefits highlighted by participants were affordability and low cost of living. To illustrate:

"Low living cost and people tend to be more friendly and more clean environment in Horsham and less noisy. Because I couldn't see cockroach when I walk outside, so it's really good to us."

"When I live here, it's a—I love this—I love Horsham because it's not—it's quiet, calm and people are very good. When the country I was in before, it's just busy. So here it's not busy, just everything is good."

“Yes, I do I believe. When I was new, I don’t know much about it but now a little bit. Obviously, when you go outside, taking participation of lot of thing, you’re getting connected with people. So little bit more connection I have, but still, you need to take the initiative [unclear].”

Additionally, others described the benefits of connecting with playgroups, English language services and other groups in the following ways:

“It’s good because I got a job and I got family, my husband, we together. So here it’s not— at the country as Thailand, because Thailand, we have to work more hours as a servant or eight hours a day and got more money to spend. But here, I just work one, two, three hours, like that and we have—we have got a lot of money.”

“Yeah, because in English class we got some more activity in there, for example we can go to Kurrajong Lodge, is nursing home and we meet some old people and we can talk to them. It’s very nice.”

A few participants described the transition from feeling isolated and lonely to becoming more connected. The following excerpts illustrate some of these points:

“When I first moved here I obviously don’t know, other than a couple of families. I had a young child and I started to know about a playgroup that they run for migrants through the midwife. Then I started going there and I saw many people there which if I didn’t have a baby I wouldn’t know that.”

“Then I came to know about the [unclear] because they are the one who obviously run the playgroup so I came to know about the settlement group and I came to meet the settlement worker. Then I was aware that there is a migrant support group which is run by migrants again but I didn’t know until for the first year—so it took me a year to find that information.”

In summary, the majority of the participants highlighted the benefits of living in terms of weather, accessibility and affordability. A few described connecting with playgroups, and voluntary services as assisting in developing their sense of connectedness and wellbeing.

Theme 2: Connectedness through Engagement with Community-based and/or Multicultural Organisations

While some of the participants in Horsham described feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, the majority of the participants in the focus group and interviewed individually described the positive experiences they had gained through connections with settlement services and attending English language classes. Participants used terms including “good” and “feeling more connected” to describe their experiences. To illustrate, one participant noted, “the value of connecting up with settlement services and meeting people... helped us very much.”

“To meet other people I joined the gym originally, I haven’t come back and joined it just yet – but it’s mainly through work that I found out about the Women’s Circus. I found out about craft type get-togethers that happen down here in a local craft shop and stuff – so that’s how I made the social connect...”

Another participant noted, when they moved to Horsham they had a three month old child. The liaison person from the settlement services encouraged her to “join with someone else in my playgroup or walking group in the morning, Tuesday morning at that time, you can join and you have fun with them. So that’s nice and at that time I couldn’t drive, yeah, I don’t know how to drive and she arranged car for pickups to the playgroup and I learned to drive a car too.” Others described additional benefits through attending English language classes and joining voluntary groups. To illustrate:

“They have a lot of courses, a lot of lessons in the Centre of Participation. If I can—if I do the course, I think I’ll get more friends. I’ve got opportunity to get the job, because I just work in Thai Basil, just two days. Restaurant, just two days in the kitchen hand. So I need more jobs. I think the Centre helped me a lot about it.”

In a similar vein, a few participants described the transition from feeling isolated and lonely to becoming more connected. The following excerpts illustrate some of these points:

“When I first moved here I obviously don’t know, other than a couple of families. I had a young child and I started to know about a playgroup that they run for migrants through the midwife. Then I started going there and I saw many people there which if I didn’t have a baby I wouldn’t know that.”

“From English class—I have some friends [that] come from Thailand. Yeah we can share something about Thailand, about here—yeah information.”

Furthermore, other participants described other examples that made them feel connected to the community:

“Horsham is quite different for me because it’s a very small community. I’m so fortunate to have a couple of friends already here, before I moved here, and by them I got connected to a bigger group too. So you feel the difference between where you were before and Horsham is because of the size of the town—that makes a difference for you. Yeah, which was a starting point which enabled me to connect to see other new faces.”

“When my partner—I met my partner’s best friend from [Bulla] and then his wife said to me—you know when I’m speaking to—from other countries like me—she really speaks slow because she understands that. Even I can understand, I can comprehend but when they said the Australian slang, [it’s mean].”

In summary, the majority of the participants found connecting with playgroups, voluntary services, working and connecting with settlement services beneficial and successful in easing their anxieties of transitioning to a regional area.

Theme 3: Service Engagement

Participants had varied experiences with service engagement. Phrases such as “very useful,” “very good service,” “fantastic to deal with,” were used to express the benefits, whereas phrases such as “have to improve my language skills,” and “not knowing” were used to describe some of the barriers experienced in service engagement.

Participants reflected on the positive experiences they had with education at the Centre for Participation. Participants described the English language classes available at the Centre for Participation as useful for not only their English skills, but also with helping them feel connected to the community. The other classes and courses offered at the Centre for Participation were also touted as beneficial:

"It's very useful. The Participation Centre... It's really good for us. We can study English class and some art class and some hospitality class. I will apply the hospital class on July and even this one is all free. So really thank you—feel thank you for get educate. It's really nice. Great."

"First one, I'm going to English class on Thursday, every Thursday. That is very [unclear] help for me."

"Help for me and teacher is very professional and passionate in teaching. I really—I feel very thanks for about that. When I came here, I afraid about oh my God, I have to speak English all day when I go somewhere, because here is not Korean community. It was a very worry about me, but now when I go to English class, I can meet some friends, other country's friends and also teacher is a very—a really good teacher. I feel very comfortable when I go there."

"Yeah, I think people willing to know and to understand because in our English class there's lots of students from other many countries come there and we try to learn about the cultural and they learned about our culture too and my teacher, she helped us very much for understanding English and understanding Australian cultural. That's great, yeah."

Additionally, linked attending English classes to becoming more connected to the community. The excerpts below illustrate their experiences:

"They have a lot of courses, a lot of lessons in the Centre of Participation. If I can—if I do the course, I think I'll get more friends. I've got opportunity to get the job, because I just work in Thai Basil, just two days. Restaurant, just two days in the kitchen hand. So I need more jobs. I think the Centre helped me a lot about it."

"I just not—have no job for six months. Don't do anything, just volunteer and learn English. Yes, not do anything. So that's why it's important for us to learn the language first."

One of the barriers to service engagement included difficulties with the English language and a lack of interpreting services:

"But even Centrelink, here is only a regional area, so it won't help about Korean language. I need to—I have to improve my English skills. So actually, it is a good thing on me. But now, a little bit harder to stay and make—doing something. But I think it's good for me. Yeah, in my future."

"When I go to Centrelink, I'm not speaking English very well, so my husband, I bring my husband all the time. But one day he can't come with me, so I went there by myself. But a little bit understand, but not 100 per cent sure. That's why one thing was mistake. Our processing is very—takes a long time. We are still waiting for something, our benefit."

An additional barrier that participants encountered was a lack of knowledge and information about local services. One participant remarked that when they first moved to Horsham, they were unaware of the various support services that were available. Another noted that they found a migrant support group to offer them support, but that they were unaware that this group existed until a year after they had arrived in Horsham:

"I don't know; I think not knowing, we were almost the first Africans to settle in Horsham. Not knowing, there were other families who were just—one lady had just had a baby. She just got married and she was there before we, but she also was—knew just the church community to support her."

Overall, participants expressed a range of benefits and barriers to service engagement. Some found the local services in Horsham to be useful and described their experiences in positive

terms. Numerous participants found the classes available at the Centre for Participation extraordinarily useful in terms of developing English language skills, attending classes and courses, and forming friendships with other migrants. In terms of the barriers to service engagement, participants encountered challenges with communicating in English and some participants noted a lack of information regarding the services available to them, which made the early phases of settlement more difficult.

Theme 4: Barriers to Regional Settlement

Participants in individual and group interviews reflected on their early experiences of settling in a regional area such as Horsham using terms such as, “not connected,” “lonely,” “different,” “kind,” “low cost.” Most of the participants spoke about feeling different, not knowing anybody, and having difficulties with language when they first arrived. Many participants, particularly during the early phases of settlement, expressed a number of cultural and social challenges. The following excerpts illustrate a diversity of experiences spanning from language and cultural challenges to feelings of isolation during the early phases of settlement:

“Honestly speaking, when I came to Horsham, like a few months I was very new because obviously, the accent was very different here. Although I speak English, but in here the accent and some of the words are very different, so it took me time to understand them. But slowly, slowly, I have seen that—not all because always you get some good or bad people, so some of the groups, they were—they are so much closed, they don’t want outsider will come into that group. They don’t want to mingle with me.”

“The first time I came, I just got a problem with my English, when I go—I went to see my husband’s friend. I can’t understand at all what they talk, what they say. I just sit there and I just smile and I don’t know what they say, because the language is very quick and they combine the words together.”

“Yes, and when I came here it feel a bit lonely because I haven’t got any friends in here.”

“So when I came here, it’s a little bit embarrassing and nervous when I talk to someone. Even when I say some English they couldn’t understand.”

Cultural and language barriers was a recurring theme. For instance, one participant remarked that while they were in a big city they were able to find services in their own language but moving to a regional area meant they had to, “do more complicate[d] thing[s], even Centrelink, like document problem or go to hospital, so GP. Because when my child—my son, when he something—not healthy.”

In referring to their lived experiences, participants explained belonging in interesting ways. Many of the participants linked their capacity to speak and understand English well to feeling more connected. The following excerpts illustrate how participants explained connectedness and belonging:

“Yeah, I think people willing to know and to understand because in our English class there’s lots of students from other many countries come there and we try to learn about the cultural and they learned about our culture too and my teacher, she helped us very much for understanding English and understanding Australian cultural. That’s great, yeah.”

“Our country is—can I say—I’m not sure because I couldn’t have a close relationship of some Australian or some other countries before. So when I came here, it’s a little bit embarrassing and nervous when I talk to someone. Even when I say some English they couldn’t understand.”

“I go to prayer group one day on Wednesday and also we are going to church on Sunday every week. I always like to talk with other people and I really want to make a friend. But they just try to say something, but I couldn’t understand and I couldn’t reply some English words, so that’s why we couldn’t keep conversation.”

On a similar theme, other participants narrated experiences that acted as barriers to feeling connected within a community. One participant captured this sentiment when they noted:

“Even though we have a migrant support group and I am in the community too—even before I get into the community and all those things, I was a keen participant in all of the programs. They usually do at least one outing every two months—either it should be or going out and playing—or doing something as a group, but still I don’t feel—now, they were doing a good job but I still feel like I wasn’t integrated into the local community.”

Additionally, some participants mentioned the superficiality or transient nature of their engagements with others. To illustrate:

“I don’t know my neighbours, I couldn’t talk to my neighbours and even if I get to see them, it’s very rare. The talk is very formal so there is no connection developing there.”

“Personally, I think that if I don’t know anyone, how would I be able to trust and share my thoughts because you never know how the community works and how would you put yourself out there. You wouldn’t know whether you are saying the right thing or not so I won’t get the confidence to say, even to express myself until I understand how things work here.”

“Yeah, it is. It’s good to have a smile—when you walk past someone, it’s good to have a smile and say hello but there’s nothing more than that.”

While many participants felt disconnected because of cultural and language barriers, the majority of them felt that going to English classes offered as part of settlement services, joining playgroups and other voluntary services was important to making connections and feeling part of the community. In summary, many participants expressed barriers to community connectedness, identity, and belonging. Participants attributed a lack of community connectedness to language and cultural barriers. Nonetheless, participants felt that attending English language classes, playgrounds, and other local groups and services did assist them in forging community ties.

Narratives from Nhill

The researchers conducted four individual interviews and one focus group in Nhill. Participants in individual interviews consisted of both women and men and the focus group consisted of a combined total of twelve women and men from the Karen community. Discussions gave rise to the following five themes:

1. **Identity and belonging: Imagining a 'regional area' as 'home'**
2. **Connectedness through engagement with community based and/or multicultural organisations**
3. **Keeping the community together: Reflections from members of the Karen community**
4. **Service engagement**
5. **Barriers to settlement**

Theme 1: Identity and Belonging: Imagining a 'Regional Area' as 'Home'

Participants provided rich and nuanced responses regarding their settlement experiences in Nhill. Reflecting on their experiences of settling in Nhill, participants used phrases such as “supportive,” “welcoming,” “nice and quiet,” “laid-back,” “more safe,” and “you can save more money.” The benefits of settling in Nhill expressed by participants include the ease of accessing the town, the friendly attitudes of local members of the community, and the relaxed and slow-paced lifestyle.

The following excerpts demonstrate a range of benefits to living in Nhill as expressed by participants:

“I like living here because it’s quiet, there’s no traffic, and it’s very peaceful in here.”

“When I compare my life—working experience here and in Burma, it’s totally different. In here, you got pay on time, you’re treated you very nicely and very fair. In Burma, you work hard—even though you work hard, people might pay you small wage and maybe they might not pay you well as well.”

“So it’s good to go there when you just want to visit, but staying or, like, finding a place or a home, I would prefer the regional area. It’s more quiet. Yeah, I would like more privacy, something like that, yeah. I think regional is more safe.”

Participants had a unique view on accessibility and affordability. One participant noted that while “not all basic requirements [were] ... on doorstep,” they learnt “how to cope in different environment. I think it’s good. I have found it very really interesting and I loved living here because it actually taught me different things.” Another participant liked Nhill because “the school and my house is not far away and then if I wish to go to somewhere I can walk to places. I can walk to supermarket and school, I don’t need to drive. I personally cannot drive but because everything is so close in here I can walk and get access to those kind of services.”

A few of the participants extolled the benefits of rural living when compared to metropolitan living.

“The thing is it's because it's laid-back, and comparing to Melbourne it's too, yeah, it's too busy. Even with the transportation like when you go—if you want to go more places like, oh, too many people inside the train, and they don't say hi to each other, and it's just too busy.”

One participant had a unique perspective on the benefit of moving to Nhill and more broadly to Australia. The participant noted, “We came from a country where there is no freedom, no right to—nothing is free. So and then when we arrive in this country, it's like everyone's have their rights. You can say whatever you want, you can do whatever you want as long as you're not hurting others.”

Participants consistently described local members of the community as kind, welcoming, and friendly. The warm attitudes of the local community towards newly-arrived migrants were noted as a benefit of living in Nhill. The following excerpts illustrate some participants' reflections on the positive attitudes of people from the Nhill community:

.....
“I like it here because when I walk on the street like I walk out and then people will say hello to me, say smile toward me and they say hello. It's really nice, feel so connected.”

“But it's very friendly, a very friendly town, that's what I like here in Nhill. The communities are very nice and friendly, so it makes it a little bit easier.”

“People in here are really nice. They welcome us with an open arm.”

.....
“The local people here are really nice.”

To summarise, participants were overwhelmed by the friendly and welcoming attitudes of the local community, and found the town to be relaxed, accessible, and safer than bigger cities. Such benefits were reported as enhancing participants' overall quality of life as well as aiding their successful settlement outcomes.

Theme 2: Connectedness through Engagement with Community-based and/or Multicultural Organisations

.....

The majority of participants interviewed in Nhill reported feeling connected to the community, which enhanced their sense of identity and belonging. Participants agreed that joining community groups was the most effective way to establish community ties. A few participants described some barriers to engagement because of lack of information regarding how to join local community groups and language and cultural differences.

.....
“I do feel connected to the community actually, especially my work and [unclear] getting out of the office all the time and—yeah, everyone pretty much know me here from my role. I think people know me after my role as well because I'm involved in a volunteers work as well with the Community Centre, so I do volunteers for movies every Friday and make some popcorns for the community.”
.....

Several participants noted that the key to community connectedness was a willingness to be actively involved in local community groups and events. To illustrate, one participant explained that when they first arrived in Nhill, they were advised by a local member of the community that “if you’re going to survive in this small town, you’re going to have to join a community group.” Other participants agreed that involvement in groups and events assisted in forging community ties and enhancing feelings of belonging:

“Although like we are connected, we basically people in here know their neighbour. They go to church, we all go to church and then we go to the neighbourhood centre. We involved with the Friday Fiesta here at the Nhill lake, it’s a local event. Then we march at the Anzac Day through the street and then we also involved with the Nhill Show as well. We also march through there—we been invited to go along with that. So, we are connected in a way.”

“I’ve been invited, on different occasions people tell me too—they actually write me saying oh, would you like to join Lions Club or do you want to join the netball?”

“I notice with some people that move here and they’re just not—I don’t know—just stay at home and watch Netflix. Yeah, these community groups might get them out doing different things. Yeah, that’s what I think.”

“Yes, I do actually, especially my work and [unclear] getting out of the office all the time and—yeah, everyone pretty much know me here from my role. I think people know me after my role as well because I’m involved in a volunteers work as well with the Community Centre, so I do volunteers for movies every Friday and make some popcorns for the community.”

However, a few participants described lack of communication and personal circumstances as one of the barriers in terms of being involved actively with community organisations.

“we don’t have like a community meeting, like all this stuff, or we don’t know where the community meeting is going on. We don’t know how the community is going forward or what’s going on. Like we don’t have any type of knowledge of what’s going on in the community until and unless we start talking to some of the one who belongs to the same club or something.”

“I’m not a very [social] person... I’m not that sort of person who would love to play netball. I’m happy watching them play but, yeah, it’s just because I’m not really a socialised—don’t like —”

In summary, most participants felt a strong sense of community connectedness and this was attributed to their involvement with local community groups, organisations, and events. A few participants reported that they did not feel connected to the community and that this affected their feelings of identity and belonging due to lack of communication or personal attributes.

Theme 3: Keeping the Community Together: Reflections from Members of the Karen Community

The Karen settlement in Nhill has been recognised for its success and excerpts from Karen participants, featured in section 1.1 Benefits of Regional Living of the Findings, are testimony to this. There are, nonetheless, specific considerations that need to be addressed which uniquely pertain to the Karen. Unlike other migrants who settled in Nhill as individuals and families, the Karen settled as a group and by far constitute the largest demographic of Nhill's migrant population, with 3.8% of Nhill's total population being born in Myanmar (ABS, 2016). There are also specific cultural considerations such as communal living and sharing between and among older and younger generations that need to be addressed when reflecting on the experiences of the Karen community.

During the focus group interview, the Karen described communal living an integral aspect of their culture. The Karen were grateful to have had the opportunity to settle in Nhill as a community, but they expressed concerns about individuals from younger generations leaving town to pursue opportunities that are unavailable to them in Nhill. One participant expressed this as follows:

"With the—in current culture, we like to—as a family, we like to stay together so if there's more services come in Nhill and then kids don't need to go away or anything like that, that will be much better. That will be more beneficial if after Year 12, they can stay in here ... Education [pathway]—aged care, continue further study. So if those services available here, if I wish to go to aged care, I can go to a training centre in Nhill and then employed in Nhill instead of not going to Melbourne or to do those kind of study."

Another related concern expressed by the Karen relates to the generational gap between older and younger members of the community, which is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"It's not only me, it's also other people like elder and older generation like my age. Since that our kids is more—it's the culture. Maybe the culture is changing. The way of kids' behaviour is totally different to where we came from. I personally see that there's a gap between the older generation and the younger generation. There's a big gap between the two generations."

"It's like my—I'm old and my children are young and if they fluent in English. So, it seems as if smarter than me. So when I say something and if they say like no they disagree with me. Especially my grandchildren. So like children—my grandchildren it's like back where they came from, they pay more respect to us their elder but this one in here it's like I don't care. They say the words like that."

"We—our children are here, they learned—they go to school and they learn stuff and then they know how the society is structured. So the best way is like me, I have to take myself to understand how these kids are behaving like this. It's not young generation fault, it's us because we are born in a different world. We were born in a different world and then we are in here."

To summarise, the specific issues faced by the Karen community pertain to the cultural importance of community and communal living. The Karen community revealed that they are concerned about fractures in their community in regard to 1) younger members of the Karen leaving Nhill to pursue other opportunities and 2) the generational gap between the younger and the older members of the community.

Theme 4: Service Engagement

Overall, participants had positive experiences with service engagement. Phrases such as “good services,” “there’s an interpreter in the hospital,” “good education,” “willing to help and support,” were used to describe the benefits of the services available in Nhill. Conversely, phrases such as “not enough doctors,” “no specialists,” and “we want improvements in childcare” were used to express the barriers. Participants reflected on their positive experiences engaging services as follows:

“In here, there’s a lot of services supporting people, especially women. In here, women have more right and more independence. So for example, if the family situation is not going well they can ask for divorce.”

“Australia is a good country and there’s a lot of service there are willing to support us and help us.”

“There’s an interpreter for the hospital. There’s also services in here, women to help us. Then we also have a learning centre that teach us English. I have a very good friendship in here where we go to school together, come back for lunch, eat it together. Then as an older woman, like me, I cannot work hard as another like teenager or young age so we have a pop-up shop where she—where I go and do—learn hospitality, customer services like sewing and stuff like that so I got something—a purpose to look forward to.”

“I like living here because the government are looking after us very well. If I live in Burma it’s like I will struggle. So, I like living here, it’s a very peaceful place and I be well look after.”

“So, in here it’s a really good place because there’s organisation like Neighbourhood House. We can also have that organisation as well. So if I need to go to the hospital there’s a interpreter there. If I need to go to Centrelink, there’s someone that will take me to go to Centrelink.”

“In here, there’s a regulation that we have to obey like Centrelink and Job Network and stuff like that, when you have to go and report. The staff are really friendly. They greet us—they just interview us in—they’re not mean or anything, including Job Network as well. They come to Nhill and they interview us, they have a chat to us like see how we going. So, those services are really nice and good to connect to.”

“If I compare my life here to Burma it will be like oil and water. In here, we’ve got a good health care, good education. My children receive a good education. They go to school and the teachers over there looking after them very well. I also have a new teacher in here they’re looking after adult English [and adult] stuff. Teachers looking after us and I feel connected to the services here.”

In terms of health services, participants remarked that Nhill has “a good hospital” that has an interpreting service and a refugee nurse:

“There’s good services around here such as there’s an interpreter in the hospital—based in hospital which is good. We also have a refugee nurse that—who—they give—she give us a card. So before we go see our GP, if we want to go and have a chat to her, we can.”

A barrier to engagement with health services included a lack of GPs and specialised medical personnel:

“One thing I experience is there's not enough doctor in here. No general practitioner, like you call that you're sick and you call them and you have to wait for a week to go see them. So it's like—or another way is you have to go to Horsham to get to see GP. So, those services are limited in here.”

“Sometimes we're just short doctors here. Nowadays we don't have lots of doctors. I don't know the current—what the current situation is, but a couple of months back we had shortage of doctors. Hopefully we'll get some doctors here. They come and go. They stay here—I think they stay here and then they go. I think it's the same story everywhere. People come here, stay for a couple of years and then flow to bigger cities. Hospital is the issue when I look back. Maybe just not for me, maybe for the—I don't ever use hospital here, I've never used it before ... I have heard from many that they had an appointment and couldn't get the doctor, blah, blah, blah. It's a bit tricky here.”

“Like we have less doctors also, like the medical facilities is also less. We've got just two doctors right now. It's so hard to get an appointment. If I'm not feeling well today, I have to get—go to the emergency or wait till tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, to get an appointment.”

“We don't have any specialists here. We have to go to Horsham for a minimum gynaecologist or something. Or if we have to go for Melbourne for any other specialist or something. Yeah, and with kids it's very hard to take them every time for the Horsham or the Melbourne. It's too hard for us.”

A further barrier to service engagement in Nhill was childcare services not having extended opening hours. One participant remarked that childcare services are closed over the school holidays, which is a time when the services are required the most:

“I don't have anyone to look after, and we don't have the childcare in December till January. Like if they have the holiday from 20 December or something. They open in 20 January. For the one month, I can't work or my hubby has to take the leave, or we have to get my mum, or his mother-in-law, from India to here to just look after the kid, because everyone goes for the holidays. We don't have any family day-care source available here. So it's pretty hard here for the childcare if you are having kids. If we have more than one kid, it's hard.”

Another participant felt that the services available in Nhill were mainly tailored to the Karen community, which left migrants from other cultural backgrounds feeling unsupported. In the words of the participant:

“Like the Karen people also and all the other people has to go through that training and all the thing, when they meet with different types of people and they have so much opportunities ... They say like you are pretty much good in your language so there is no need for you in this organisation.”

Although participants expressed gratitude towards the interpreting service available at the hospital and the English language classes that are provided to them, some participants expressed they found learning English in a traditional learning environment very difficult because they have no previous experience of systematic learning:

“They give us like English lesson and stuff like that but because I have no experience in education environment, my brain is not working like a young person. So, I struggle to—even though I'm learning hard but I struggle to maintain the words that I'm learning.”

Overall, participants expressed positive experiences with service engagement. The barriers faced by participants related to a lack of childcare services, GPs, and medical specialists.

Theme 5: Barriers to Regional Living

Although the majority of participants described their settlement in Nhill as successful and described a range of advantages to rural living, a range of barriers were addressed. Participants noted a lack of public transport and other community facilities including supermarkets, shopping centres, an absence of job opportunities, and a lack of recreational facilities for children. Furthermore, participants faced cultural and language barriers.

A majority of the participants highlighted issues related to community based facilities, such as super markets and public transport as a major barrier. To demonstrate:

“For grocery shopping and things like that we just have got IGA here and nothing else, but I think for me—yeah, especially... I have to cook home all the time because we don't have lots of options here. I think for me it's okay. I can—I'm happy with whatever we have because I'm the only one who has to look after.”

“We've got a swimming pool with cold water. It can't be accessed every day, like if it's only on summer and only on sunny days they can access that one. For the kids also, the only entertainment here for the kids is the swimming pool and we've got the cold water over there.”

.....
“IGA a bit expensive, so I go to Aldis Horsham. We do our shopping fortnightly. But I suppose some of the elderly wouldn't be able to do that, they have to go to IGA, which is okay.”
.....

A few described challenges because of the lack of regular public transport in Nhill. One participant noted, “We don't have regular transport. I think it's Wednesday or Thursday? Once or twice in a week from here to Horsham and every day from—two buses every day from here to Melbourne. We don't have regular bus service.”

Another participant described the challenge of not having services to take the citizenship test. They noted:

“One barrier that we face is the services such as when we go for citizenship test. It's a very long way. It's in Mildura, Swan Hill over there so if the test is start at 9:30 am we have to leave here around 5:30 am and then when we go for test and then you fail and then you come back. Those services it's a very long distance so if those services come closer to us that would be very beneficial. That would be very good. It's a long way to travel.”

Furthermore, many of the participants in the individual interviews highlighted the lack of suitable and relevant employment opportunities as a major barrier. This can be demonstrated in the following excerpts:

“We don't have much employment here. Like we've got either the council jobs or the hospital jobs or the Luv-a-Duck. Like those are only the biggest places where we can get a job. All the other ones requires a specification, like the fire department is a specification, for the ambulance service we need some specific certificates and all this stuff. So there is not much employment available for me here. Like I can work in IGA, but I can't apply in hospital or here, because we have to travel from here and there, here and there. It becomes difficult for us.”

.....
“There's no—nothing here. They have to go—kids have to go away and find employment or go to uni.”
.....

"Yeah. It's overqualified. I can't get a job in the hospital. I can't get a job in like the council because I'm not a citizen. For some of the jobs, I need a citizenship. Because I just have two years of living here, so I don't have any citizenship here. So that's the reason I don't have any job opportunities more here ... If I don't have the citizenship, I can't apply for some of the jobs, which are basically given to only the citizens of Australia."

"All the friends of the same community of mine work in IGA [laughs]. That's the only place we can get a job without any experience or without any certificates or anything, because that's the only place here we can get a job."

Other participants experienced cultural barriers, in addition to challenges with speaking and understanding the English language:

"One thing—there's a lot of regulations out there that we have to obey as well. So, to understand those things and to understand those services, it's the first step to speak to—to know how to speak English to reach those services. So, with the regulations and understanding the rules, it can create barriers as well to [unclear] family as well. If one person knows this and know the certain rule and then behave that way and then with the other one doesn't know and then doesn't understand what's the—what the other one is behave in such a way so it's create—can create a barrier in the family, as well. The communication—miscommunicating. Yes."

"So before we go see our GP, if we want to go and have a chat to her, we can but that person is speak English but you have to go and identify your illness, the symptoms so I struggle to say my legs is hurt or my back is painful. I struggle to say the words to express myself."

"English language very hard. [Then not] in the country, they use slang word that I have to—trying to fit in, it's really hard."

"... not many barriers. The only barriers is language. It's way to communicate and to talk to people."

In summary, the most prominent barriers that participants encountered pertained to local facilities and resources, a lack of suitable employment opportunities, and language and cultural barriers. Although participants expressed experiencing a range of barriers to their rural settlement, their experiences in, and of, Nhill were by and large positive.

Discussion

The discussion section will contextualise the emerging themes from the findings within the context of the priority areas listed in the *National Settlement Framework* and pre-existing literature on migrant settlement in regional areas. The four areas for discussion are:

- **Identity and belonging: Setting the context for developing cultural capital**
- **Community connectedness and social capital**
- **Barriers to identity and belonging: Connecting economic, social and cultural capital**
- **The Karen resettlement in Nhill**

Identity and Belonging: Setting the Context for Developing Cultural Capital

As discussed previously in the section on the literature review and the *National Settlement Framework* (2016), understanding migrants' experience as an "embodiment" (Bourdieu cited in Stych, 2010, 4) allows us to explore how individuals move through economic, social and other networks to develop a sense of belonging to a place. Embodiment encompasses economic, social and cultural capital. These three concepts are intricately interrelated and difficult to disentangle, and, further, are reciprocal in nature. In this context, with regards to regional settlement, these concepts draw attention to the impact of migration on the economic, social, and cultural capital of a region, as well as migrants' own personal possession of these phenomena. Insofar as this report is focused on the lived experiences of migrants in Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill, the dominant focus of this section of the Discussion will be on the economic, social, and cultural capital of the participants in this study, rather than on the areas in which they have settled.

Three quarters of the participants living in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill characterised their locales as "be-tter than city," "my country," and "home." For them it was 'home' because it was affordable, accessible, "friendly," "welcoming," had a "low cost of living," "good schools" and was "family friendly." Certainly this 'home' possessed some challenges, as will be discussed later, but it is a characterisation that draws attention to some of Erel's (2010) insights regarding cultural capital.

Erel (2010) suggests that migrant groups are not passive and that they work actively to construct their own identity or capital. In the instance of the afore mentioned responses regarding belonging and feeling at home, participants in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill are actively working towards connecting, engaging and relating within a social context. The *National Settlement Framework* (2016) argues that such work can improve migrant experiences across "social, economic and cultural" aspects. Other policy documents, informing this research, including the Intercultural Cities and Welcoming Cities, are committed to supporting migrants across these three areas.

As noted above, although the responses of participants in constructing the sites under study as 'home' were positive, it didn't mean that they did not had challenges/barriers. Truebea (2002) argues that in their quest for survival and success, people define identity in "different ways in order to function effectively in different setting[s]" (8). For instance, similar to Piper's (2009) evaluation of the Togolese settlement in Ballarat, participants in Ballarat in this research study confirmed that while there were a number of benefits in their settlement, there were also barriers with regards to seeking and finding employment commiserate to qualifications, and concerning a lack of access to culturally information for migrants. In Horsham, too, employment was an issue, and at least one third of the participants interviewed also felt that their interactions with the local community were, ultimately,

superficial and transient. This is demonstrated by the following remarks: “when you walk past someone, it’s good to have a smile and say hello but there’s nothing more than that,” and “everyone is friendly but it’s all just hello and bye-bye.”

With regards to responding to these barriers, one participant in Nhill—regarding the lack of accessibility to local shops, supermarket and other services—remarked that, “though shops were away [she] decided to travel [and] to use this as an example of coping in a different environment and use it as learning experience.” Another participant in Nhill suggested that being proactive, attending community workshops, and volunteering was the way they made friends. Another participant in Horsham suggested that in the early phases of their settlement they felt “isolated” but that they realised that if they organise and take the lead in building their own mothers’ group then they develop a network. These examples point to the “intimate relation between people’s capacity to endure hardships, challenges, and difficult situations in life (that is what we call resilience), and their ability to redefine themselves in order to function effectively in new social, cultural, linguistic, and economic contexts,” as well as exemplifying “a function of psychological and cultural flexibility to define oneself in multiple ways and fashions” (Trueba 2002:9). In line with Trueba’s (2002) and Erel’s (2010) insights, then, we can argue that migrants are not passive agents and that they define identity differently in order to function effectively in a place. As attested through the experiences, this process is simultaneously enabling and a product of the challenges people face in developing identity and belonging.

In summary, a review of the participants’ lived experiences within the context of the broader literature on cultural capital, the *National Settlement Framework* and other policy positions, what is overwhelmingly clear is that the sites under study are constructed as ‘home’ and people feel a sense of belonging. It also suggests that identity is an iterative process with enablers and barriers that operate simultaneously, further pointing to the need for settlement policies to be strengthened using the indicators outlined in the *National Settlement Framework*. Next, we turn to how participants construct community connectedness through engagement with migrant specific services.

Community Connectedness and Social Capital

As has been discussed earlier, there is a strong focus on social capital in the migration settlement literature, as well as in policy frameworks (AMES 2014; Boese 2014; Boese and Phillips 2017; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Correa-Velez et al. 2012; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Kilpatrick et al. 2013; McDonald et al. 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford 2009; Massey and Parr 2012; Penman and Goel 2017; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003; Woolcock 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Wulf and Dharmalingam 2008). In particular, the priority areas outlined in the *National Settlement Framework* (2016) focus heavily on the activities that local, state and federal governments can undertake to build social capital.

The *National Settlement Framework* (2016) focuses on the development of activities, events and programs that assist migrants in connecting, building networks and partnerships. Such a focus is highlighted by some participants in Ballarat, especially with regards to the role of the local councils in developing civic participation. For example, at least one third of the participants reported being connected with community festivals, events and other volunteer activities catered to facilitating smooth transition for migrants. They not only reported the benefits of associating themselves in community based activities but reported accessing information to connect up with other community based organisations that engage directly with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Boese and Philips (2017) have noted the push by local councils in Victoria to becoming more proactive in addressing issues of diversity and belonging.

In academic and policy literature (Boese 2015, Carrington et al. 2007), social capital also seems to have become the predominant paradigm for analysing “connectedness and trust relationships.” Two thirds of the participants in Ballarat, 90% in Horsham and three-quarters in Nhill were complimentary of community based organisations. In particular they talked of the benefits they accrued through the networks, specifically mentioning the trust relationships they built by participating in these programs. For instance, some participants described the assistance they received from the BRMC, and from BCH, that allowed them to access higher education, housing, and health services. Others described the assistance provided to them by the BNC with regards to developing resumes and seeking employment. In Horsham, participants described the benefits they accrued from attending English language and other training classes organised by the Centre for Participation. Participants noted through attending these classes they were able to meet, share and develop friendship networks. In particular, they were pleased to find other migrants who shared the same food and culture with them.

In Nhill, participants had a different take on community connectedness. They felt connected in terms of building trust, relationships and bonds through their active involvement in local community groups and other events. Some reported being connected through the network they established through their workplace, others through their neighbours, and a few through mailed newsletters about Rotary events.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (cited in Carrington et al. 2007) constructs migration (and settlement) with reference to human capital (knowledge, skills health status and lifestyle), social capital (attachment to social groups, trust in government and business), financial capital and national capital. Such construction is also present in other policy documents developed by SCoA. The *National Settlement Framework* (2016) goes further and notes that successful settlement depends on collaboration and coordination among government, non-government and other service providers so that high-quality, culturally appropriate and inclusive services can be delivered. What was interesting was that participants in Ballarat and Horsham rather constructed their own ‘connectedness’ through the engagement, networks and relationships they personally built.

Returning to the literature, while the definition of social capital is debated, it has been defined as the forging of “effective social relations” (Kilpatrick et al. 2015, 209) and as being essential to the successful integration of migrants, the social cohesion of communities (Boese and Phillips 2017, 388), and community sustainability (Kilpatrick et al. 2015, 209). Cultural capital, as discussed in the preceding section, also relates to the construction of identity and belonging. In fact, the descriptions of the participants in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill allow us to develop a deeper insight into how migrants interact with different spaces when moving through their social contexts. A positive version of cultural capital and of how migrants as active agents are moving through different social fields is instructive in two ways. These are that migrants’ identity is iterative and always interlinked with different types of capital, and that different types of capital are used by migrants in active and strategic ways to develop belonging and connectedness.

In summary, the rich descriptions of migrants’ interactions with community-based services suggest that identity and belonging is multilayered. It also suggests that policy frameworks which advocate for strong collaboration between government and non-government sector, and close collaboration in developing activities that enhance civic participation, language services, and assistance with employment, are part of the positive story of developing capital. What this section suggests is that continuing collaboration and involvement between government and non-government agencies is important. However, there is the other side of the coin concerning social, cultural and economic capital. This is turned to next.

Barriers to Identity and Belonging: Connecting Economic, Social and Cultural Capital

Having considered participants' experiences settling across Ballarat, Horsham, and Nhill in accordance with the *National Settlement Framework* (2016), the discussion will now examine the relation between migrants and economic, social, and cultural capital across the three sites under consideration. The benefits of regional migration in relation to economic capital have been discussed extensively by the literature, with this literature stressing the revitalisation of regional areas, addressing job and skill shortages, boosting local economies, and off-setting population decline (AMES 2014; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010; QCOSS 2014). While the benefits of migrant settlement in regional areas are indisputable, participants in the present study arguably largely possessed diminished levels of economic capital.

Participants in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill highlighted barriers they faced in terms of finding suitable employment. In Ballarat, two thirds of the participants while expressing satisfaction with the assistance provided by community-based organisations, described different types of barriers they faced. Four participants reported applying for a number of jobs but not receiving either job offers or adequate feedback on why they were unsuitable for the job. Others found it difficult to secure suitable and relevant employment and their various skills and qualifications were often not recognised in an Australian context. Participants noted that “[e]ven with my degree I was all prepared to do all this but there were so many people wanting the same job, even very ground-level jobs and it was very hard to get anything” and “I had my bachelor degree and so I was hoping to get something that suited my skills a bit better. I couldn't find it.”

Interestingly, participants' diminished levels of economic capital coincided with their diminished levels of social capital, insofar as they found themselves lacking suitable social networks to help them secure work. This is illustrated by the following remarks:

“Ballarat is still such a small place, even though it's considered a big city in the regional areas, it's still such a small place. So it does end up being about who you know, and networking and making sure that people get to know you ... The more you know people, the more chances you have of finding a job and finding new opportunities.”

“In Ballarat, what I figured out was that in order to get a job, you need to know someone, and most businesses are family-owned businesses.”

“I felt like it was really hard for me to get a job ... like, being from a different background, because I didn't have my uncles, my aunties, working in that sector that I want to go in.”

Furthermore, one participant asserted that “[i]t was hard to get a job as a young multicultural person” and described an experience where their resume was discarded in front of them. However, when a local Australian-born member of the community submitted their resume, the participant witnessed the sales assistant file it away.

Participants in Horsham noted different kinds of challenges in relation to employment. Three quarters of the participants expressed barriers to seeking employment because of English proficiency. They were proactive and attended English language classes or other hospitality related courses run by the Centre for Participation but reported difficulty in getting jobs. In Nhill, limited infrastructure meant limits in job opportunities. One participant remarked that the tertiary degree they had gained in the country of origin was not useful because they were limited services, and the job opportunities available to them in Australia were not relevant

to their previous education. A few members of the Karen community were also concerned about the future prospects and wellbeing of their children due to limited job opportunities.

From the findings, what we notice is three sets of challenges that act as barriers and diminish economic and social capital. They are: first, the impact of discrimination in seeking suitable employment, second the absence of social networks and hence the capacity to adequately seek access to suitable employment, and third English language proficiency as impacting on employability. This experience demonstrates the interrelation between economic, social, and cultural capital insofar as the participant felt that they were discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. There is strong emphasis in the *National Settlement Framework* (2016) to develop community based volunteer programmes as well as state-funded employment and training programmes but the reality is that our research suggests that challenges remain. This is consistent with the commentary in existing literature. For instance, Schech (2014), Colic-Peisker and Tibury (2007), and Reiner (2010) argue that visible difference, English language proficiency and difficulties understanding the cultural context all impact on reducing the capacity of migrants to accrue economic capital. Whilst employment is critical to increasing economic capital, other factors such as discrimination based on ethnicity and difference, and a lack of cultural understanding from employers speak to the broader framework of connections of how migrants move their social context. Inequalities existing in social contexts can thus impact on the cultural capital migrants develop. This finding is consistent with the views of Bourdieu (cited in Erel 2010) who notes that as people gain cultural capital, they simultaneously experience the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in economic and social structures.

While two thirds of all participants were satisfied with access to health services, some participants in Ballarat, Nhill and Horsham had different points of view. In Ballarat, three quarters were satisfied with accessibility to general practitioners (GPs), Medicare supported services but some participants also mentioned two types of barriers to access they had experienced. One was around health education and understanding their rights as patients within the health system, and another was the need for greater education and training of GPs to deliver culturally appropriate services. In Horsham, some of the participants had difficulty accessing state funded health care because of their visa sub classes. In Nhill, participants reported the need to have access to more specialists and other medical services. The findings of the research are consistent with literature. Scholars (Correa-Velez 2005; Reiner 2010; State of Victoria 2015) have argued that accessibility of health care includes a number of issues related to health education, accessibility to interpreting services, cultural differences and the lack of culturally appropriate care among health professionals.

As has been previously noted, existing studies on the phenomenon of economic capital display an equally dominant focus on social capital (AMES 2014; Boese 2014; Boese and Phillips 2017; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009; Correa-Velez et al. 2012; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2010; Hugo 2008a and 2008b; Kilpatrick et al. 2013; McDonald et al. 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford 2009; Massey and Parr 2012; Penman and Goel 2017; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003; Woolcock 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Wulf and Dharmalingam 2008). In this study, participants' remarks on their relation to social capital were varied. Numerous participants possessed high levels of social capital which they attributed to the services of multicultural organisations, volunteer work, and their involvement in community groups and events. Other participants, especially those located in Horsham, expressed a profound sense of loneliness and a lack of community belonging. This was largely attributed to language and cultural barriers, thus intersecting with a diminished sense of cultural capital.

Another significant barrier that participants reported in two of the three sites under study concerned the impacts of English language proficiency on their ability to access economic and social capital. Two thirds of the participants in Ballarat emphasised the importance of English language proficiency for their ability to access gainful employment and access social networks, noting that low levels of proficiency led to social isolation and difficulty in understanding mainstream cultural norms, expectations and values. For instance, participants in Ballarat felt that, despite attending English language classes, they remained unable to understand social clues and norms. In particular, they noted difficulties in understanding culturally specific meanings, such as 'mate,' and 'greetings in supermarkets.' They reported struggling to understand the flow of the conversation and Australian 'slangs.' This created a sense of isolation and distance.

In Horsham, 90% of the participants reported 'feeling socially isolated' and also attributed this to English language proficiency. While most of them found English language classes most useful in developing their knowledge, it was the application that was the most challenging. As noted in the findings, and similar to experiences of people in Ballarat, participants described challenges with regards to understanding cultural meanings: for instance, what does a greeting such as Hello mean? Participants reported that in the country of birth, usually people only use 'mate,' 'please,' 'how are you' to people they know as friends, not strangers or service assistants in supermarkets. Others were surprised by the transient nature of such conversations and the lack of depth in terms of the interactions they had with people from mainstream cultures. Similar to participants in Ballarat, they found conversations with people from mainstream communities difficult to understand and follow. In Nhill, most of the participants attended English language classes but noted barriers related to difficulties in understanding rules/regulations, policy documents and navigating such complex systems as Centrelink and Health services.

What we have learnt from the findings, then, is that despite a strong focus on language services in the National Settlement Outcomes (2016), significant barriers remain. A large number of participants faced challenges deciphering area-specific slang and adhering to the norms of social etiquette. However, many were able to overcome social and cultural barriers and displayed resilience and adaptability. The responses of the participants thus pose two types of challenges to current policy frameworks: one, how do organisations who are offering services bridge gaps in cultural knowledge required for meaningful everyday conversations, and two, how should English language services be developed to better meet migrant needs. Interestingly, with regards to the participants in this study, although 90% of them accessed existing English language classes, many still expressed feeling socially isolated, unable to understand the rhythms and flows of everyday conversation, and by extension having difficulty in building social networks. This raises an interesting problem for academic research and policy makers. How can the delivery of English language services increase the economic and social capital for migrants and, by extension, assist with mitigating feelings of social isolation and enhance belonging and connectedness to place?

The findings in some ways speak to the challenges articulated in the model of cultural capital. While the work of researchers (Trueba 2002, 7; Erel 2002) suggests that the capacity of migrants to navigate between multiple identities and face challenging situations means that they possess a new kind of cultural capital that is crucial for success in modern diversified societies (Trueba 2002, 7), we ignore at our peril the need to find innovative programs that can bring together migrant and mainstream communities as part of bridging the gap and differences among people. In this instance, the work undertaken by the Council of Europe in their Intercultural Cities programme in promoting the idea of an inter-cultural city is relevant. This work assumes diversity is a resource and accepts that cultural changes emerge

as different groups encounter each other in the space. Through this framing they encourage stakeholders, from state, federal and local governments and civil society organisations, to develop initiatives that might speak to bridging the gaps between mainstream and migrant populations.

In summary, the results as benchmarked against the *National Settlement Framework* (2016) suggest that we need to address barriers in order to enhance social, economic and cultural capital among migrants. The areas that most need attention are: employment, language services, civic participation, health, education and training, child and family supports and addressing attitudes of discrimination. Interestingly, what we learn from our analysis of the other side of the coin —barriers—is that while there are systemic barriers which need to be addressed through the collaboration between state, federal and local government and non-governmental organisations, it is also important not to overlook other research insights (as highlighted in the previous section) that suggest that migrants demonstrate resilience and adaptability, and find innovative and resourceful ways to enhance their feelings of belonging and connectedness.

Re-evaluating the Karen Resettlement in Nhill

As indicated by AMES and Deloitte Access Economics (2015), the Karen participants in this study remarked that their quality of life had been significantly improved as a result of their resettlement in Nhill. Nonetheless, the present study discovered unique challenges faced by the Karen community which pre-existing studies have left unexplored. In relation to their successful settlement, several participants directly compared Myanmar with regional Australia. Some participants noted that in their country of origin, they were denied basic human rights and were not supported by the government. In Australia, however, they found that their rights were ensured and that they received government assistance.

While the AMES and Deloitte Access Economics (2015) report emphasises the ease in which the Karen community were able to integrate into the local community, the present study discovered that the language barriers experienced by some of the Karen made it difficult for them to feel a strong sense of community belongingness. Whist, participants in this study reported that they were treated kindly by the residents of Nhill, they felt that they were unable to reciprocate this kindness through their lack of proficiency in the English language.

AMES (2015) report notes that while Karen settlement in Nhill is described as good practice, the challenges related to communal living, connections between older and younger generations was an interesting finding. While there is research (Bear and Kean, 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 2015; Eacott and Sonn, 2006) that discusses in and out migration and the sustainability of rural and remote communities, there is a qualitative difference to the experiences of the Karen community. This relates to Karen community which settled as a group instead of individual families and the associated implications on understanding of 'belonging,' 'connectedness' and 'communal living.' As indicated in the Findings, these challenges include anxieties concerning younger members of the Karen community leaving Nhill to pursue opportunities that are unavailable to them in the area, the associated loss of cultural bonds and the generational gap between older and younger members of the Karen community. Despite the mutual benefits of the Karen resettlement in Nhill for both the local community and the Karen alike, it is important that the Karen's concerns are not diminished in considering their experience settling in the region.

Suggestions for Policy and Practice

The suggestions for policy and practice outlined below speak directly to the discussion in the literature review and participant experiences described in the findings section. In particular these suggestions speak to the operationalising—current and potential—of both the broad ideals and policies of migrant regional settlement.

1. The ideals and policies of migrant regional settlement, in the sites under study, need to be strengthened and promoted by federal, state and local governments.

RATIONALE: Participants endorsed the idea of ‘regional place’ as a place of belonging and home.

2. Funding and other supports from federal, state and local government and community-based organisations need to continue and potentially increase in order to support migrant settlement services in regional areas.

RATIONALE: Participants endorsed the ways in which settlement focussed services for migrant settlement in regional areas, from both government and community-based organisations, provided support and assistance in areas such as English language development, seeking employment, housing, health, schooling, and the building of community networks through voluntary work.

3. Programs that encourage promotion of the benefits of migration and of the settlement of migrants in regional areas need to be further strengthened at federal, state and local government levels.

RATIONALE: Participants mentioned that although community attitudes towards migrants are changing, there is still need for greater community understanding of the benefits of migration.

4. Community-based programs and practices to enhance participation between migrants and mainstream Australians and support the development of robust cross-cultural understanding need to be significantly increased.

RATIONALE: A majority of participants expressed an experience of social isolation and discrimination due to cultural differences and a lack of fluency in English language. Participants also expressed a desire for deeper and meaningful community engagement, for both themselves and their children. Participants also noted the importance of developing their own understandings of the cultural context of their settlement area, including the need to better understand Australian laws, organisational policies/procedures, and service provision in such fields as health and housing.

5. Policies and programs to deliver suitable and relevant employment to migrants, and also to encourage regionally-based employers in the employment of migrants need to be strengthened and increased.

RATIONALE: A majority of the participants expressed concern over their employment prospects, and about their perception of the willingness of employers to offer them employment opportunities. Participants also noted that they saw their employment prospects as hindered by their lack of cultural understanding and fluency in English language.

6. That local agencies, with support and input from local, state and federal government agencies, develop and implement a coordinated 'settlement type program,' which is offered in rotation at regular intervals. The program or discrete modules would be available to migrants within the first two years of arriving in the region, as distinct from their arrival into Australia. The program could include a series of modules designed to address particular needs, identified by participants. These are:
- d. practical assistance with completing forms such as Centrelink, applying for a Medicare card and understanding the application process;
 - e. information about the health services including GP services, Community Health Centres and hospitals;
 - f. Employment specific module which includes developing a CV, strategies to find work and attending an interview;

RATIONALE: Participants in all three locations identified that information and assistance was required in one or more of the listed areas. Offering the modules in rotation would allow migrants to participate in one or more of these modules when the need for such information is most critical.



Area Specific Suggestions

The following have been developed from the dominant sentiments expressed by participants in each of the sites:

BALLARAT SPECIFIC:

1. Increase programs that allow migrants to access employment opportunities that recognise their previous qualifications and other relevant experience gained prior to settling in Australia.
2. Develop employer education and training on diversity and cultural competence. Develop programs that tailor English language services specifically to increase cultural knowledge that can be used in everyday interactions.
3. Develop programs that emphasise and facilitate cultural partnerships between mainstream and migrant communities.
4. Develop and disseminate resources to improve health literacy in migrant communities and improve knowledge of health providers in areas, including cultural competency, refugee health needs and local and regional services and supports.
5. Develop programs that target changing community attitudes towards migrants.

HORSHAM SPECIFIC:

1. Develop programs that facilitate cross-cultural participation of mainstream and migrant communities.
2. Advocate for greater funding and access to the training opportunities for migrants to assist with pathways into employment in fields such as hospitality and childcare.
3. Access to interpreting services, particularly to walk migrants through the filling of forms and other documentation required at for example, Centrelink, Transport Victoria.
4. Develop programs that tailor English language services specifically to developing cultural knowledge that can be used in everyday interactions.
5. Develop programs that promote volunteerism and provide diverse opportunities that involve migrants and mainstream communities to facilitate deeper engagement.
6. Increase access to child and family services with specific emphasis on providing childcare to support families better.

NHILL SPECIFIC:

1. Increase funding for programs, such as English language support services and health, ensure services are available for migrants from a range of CALD backgrounds.
2. Increase access to interpreting services for migrants from a range of linguistic backgrounds.
3. Increase access to child and family services, including child care.

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Appendix 1: List of Organisations

STAKEHOLDER NAME (organisation/ network etc)	REGION	STAKEHOLDER NAME (organisation/ network etc)	REGION
Government		Community Groups	
Local		Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children	Ballarat
City of Ballarat – Diversity Team	Ballarat	Ballarat African Association	Ballarat
City of Ballarat – Youth Team	Ballarat	Rural Australians for Refugees	Ballarat
City of Ballarat – Intercultural Information Place	Ballarat	House of Welcome	Ballarat
Settlement		Ballarat Interfaith Network and Baha'i Community of Ballarat	Ballarat
Ballarat Community Health	Ballarat / Wimmera	Sisters of Mercy	Ballarat
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council	Ballarat	Horsham Uniting Church	Horsham
Wimmera Development Association	Horsham	Walking Group, Wimmera River	Nhill
Nhill Learning Centre	Nhill	Nhill Karen Group	Nhill
English Language		Hindmarsh Landcare Network	
Federation University	Ballarat	Oasis Wimmera	
Djerriwarrh	Ballarat /	Wimmera Filipino-Australian Club	
Sunshine	Ballarat	Horsham Islamic Welfare Association	
Neighbourhood Centre	Ballarat	Ballarat East Timor Association	Ballarat
BRMC – Migrant English Program (Tutoring)	Ballarat	Ballarat Indian Association Inc. (BIA)	Ballarat
Training and Employment		Ballarat Italian Association	Ballarat
Jobs Victoria Employment Network / Jobs VIC		Ballarat Polish Seniors Club	Ballarat
Work and Learning Centre	Ballarat	Ballarat Sri Lankan Association	Ballarat
Learn Locals and Neighbourhood Houses		Ballarat Sudanese Association	Ballarat
Ballarat North Neighbourhood House	Ballarat	Central Highlands Asian-Australian Association of Victoria Inc. (CHAAAVI)	
Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre	Ballarat	China Community Committee (CCC) Ballarat	Ballarat
Wendouree Neighbourhood Centre	Ballarat	Chinese Australian Cultural Society of Ballarat Inc (CACSB)	Ballarat
Centre for Participation	Horsham	Filipino Australian Association of Ballarat Inc.	Ballarat
Nhill Learning Centre	Nhill	Intercultural Women's Network Ballarat Inc. (IWNB)	Ballarat
Youth		Iranian Association of Ballarat	Ballarat
CMY	Ballarat	H.O.L.A – Latin Community of Ballarat (Latin Association) Inc.	Ballarat
byou – City of Ballarat	Ballarat	Hellenic Orthodox Community of Ballarat (Greek Association)	Ballarat
Nexus Youth Centre	Horsham	Islamic Society of Ballarat Inc	Ballarat
Young G	Horsham	Migrant Women's Support Group	Ballarat
Health		Togolese Association of Ballarat	Ballarat
Ballarat Community Health	Ballarat	Ballarat Catholic Bishops Social Justice Commission	Ballarat
Women's Health Grampians	Ballarat & Wimmera	Ballarat City Football Club	Ballarat
Ballarat Health Services	Ballarat	Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria	Melbourne, Victoria
Foundation House	Ballarat	Rotary	Ballarat
Legal and Advocacy			
Central Highlands Community Legal Centre	Ballarat		
Victoria Legal Aid	Melbourne, Victoria		
Westjustice Legal	Melbourne, Victoria		



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