

Designing LEAP UP (University Preparedness) – Transition Program for students from refugee and or asylum seeker backgrounds commencing HE

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Education is recognised as a right under many international conventions and a medium via which ontological security, hope and resilience can be fostered (Hannah, 1999). Education can enrich, broaden and transform an individual's experiences and world view; as well as raise self-esteem and confidence and lead to a sense of inclusion, belonging, and participation (Bajwa et al, 2017). Educational benefits extend to family and communities through improved well-being, increased life expectancy and living standards (Crea, 2016). Further to this, students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds can experience positive intercultural and academic transition via their engagement in education (Vickers, McCarthy, Zammit, 2017).

National Priority Pool (NPP)

Macquarie University's Widening Participation Unit was awarded a Commonwealth Grant under NPP to design a university-preparedness program for students from refugee and or asylum seeker backgrounds, as they transition into higher education.



Lived Experiences

The lived experiences of refugees and or asylum seekers often correlate with high individual aspirations and a determination to succeed (Crea, 2016). Lived experiences can also create cumulative and compounding challenges for students transitioning into higher education. These challenges can include:

Language proficiency - impact on social and academic engagement (Naidoo, 2015)	Pressure from and responsibility to family units and community networks	Accessing learning resources, materials, equipment and academic support
Accessing and sourcing credible information (Naidoo, 2015)	Financial hardship and tensions between earning commitments and study capacity	Physical, psychological and or emotional trauma
Acculturation stress related to cultural transition and identity shaping (Joyce, Earnest, De Mori, Silvagni, 2010)	Academic shock from prior and or interrupted educational experiences and expectations (Joyce et al)	Status anxiety from political and bureaucratic environments

“When I come here, will there be special help for me or will I be just mixed in with the rest?” - Student

Designing LEAP UP Involved:

Literature Review	Reference Group	Needs Assessment
To identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice Gaps 	Involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University academics and support staff University students with lived experience High school teachers NSW Department of Education 	Explored through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Focus groups Stakeholder analysis

“There are so many pressures that other people don't know about, like pressure to earn income for your family...that really impacts your identity as a student....and makes you think, ‘how can I fit in and how can I make friends if I'm not here?’ I think its important to feel included” - Student

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LEAP UP - ‘With you from the Start’

A balance of inclusive academic, social and wellbeing opportunities were designed into a two-phased scaffolded program for students beginning their higher education journey.

“Starting uni is very difficult – there are very many services, people send you here or they tell you to go to that, but you're not sure how to access them, or where to go. Its very daunting.” - Student

	Phase 1	Phase 2
What	Information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University pathways What to expect at university? Student support services Scholarship opportunities Academic learning options Study skills University Experience Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive academic learning Campus confidence 	Fostering a learning community by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building peer networks Engaging supportive family and community networks Introducing students to academics and professional services staff Campus confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the campus, its services and student engagement opportunities Academic confidence through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted academic skills workshops Digital resource use Research capacities
How	2 Day Program Information and University Experience	3 Day Pre-Orientation workshop
Who	Engaging final year school leavers (Yr 12) from refugee and or asylum seeker backgrounds, attending partner schools where LEAP Macquarie Mentoring (Refugee Mentoring) is delivered *	Engaging all commencing students, identified as refugee and or asylum seeker background, who are offered an undergraduate study placement at Macquarie University
When	First half of Year 12 academic year	Pre-Orientation beginning each university semester
Where	Information day at Partner School, On-campus University Experience	On-campus
Why	Empower students with information to guide post-school decision-making Build student confidence regarding university as a welcoming and flexible environment to explore, achieve and maximise one's individual potential	Nurture a sense of belonging for commencing students Build awareness among academics and professional staff of the needs of students from refugee and or asylum seeker backgrounds Promote collaboration across the institution for effective service and academic delivery to support student engagement and experience Foster academic and campus familiarity to build confidence and sense of belonging

LEAP UP was successfully piloted in 2018. Over 400 students have participated and engaged with LEAP UP since that time.

Transitioning into a learning pathway is a journey for all students. Students from refugee and or asylum seeker backgrounds benefit from targeted support through their journey by having access to:

- A dedicated Transition Support Officer
- Connection between students and academics via mentoring programs
- Student peer networks for enhanced social and academic support