



Learning Together

At the start of Term 2 in 2011, East Preston Islamic College began a weekly support program for its students. The program was to run every Tuesday afternoon, after school, in the library. Its focus was to help students who were struggling with literacy and numeracy. There was much planning, much anticipation, much hope.

On the first day of the program, there was just the one student. Only one. But the next week, there were three students. Week by week the numbers grew. By the end of 2011, 65 students, mainly primary school students, were coming along to the program. The numbers dropped a little during Ramadan, but soon bounced back.

The Out of School Hours Learning Support Program started slowly, but that didn't deter the program's Coordinator, Shanthi Antony. 'I knew there was a need to support families who were struggling financially, who couldn't afford to pay private tutors,' said Mrs Antony, who is also the school's Teaching and Learning Prep to Year 10 Coordinator.

The school has 24 different cultural groups, including many new migrants. 'The transition to a new country can be very confusing. When parents are struggling to read the school newsletter it's hard for them to help their children with schoolwork.'

Students attending the support program are tutored by teachers from the school and by student-teachers from Victoria University. 'There are mutual benefits from our partnership with the university,' said Mrs Antony. 'Our students – and sometimes parents – receive either one-to-one or small group tutoring and the Victoria University students – all planning to be teachers – gain extra experience beyond their teaching placements.'

The program emphasises literacy and numeracy but has also branched out to include science, cooking and sporting activities. One of the university students, who is also a staff member at the East Preston Islamic College, has run classes about science from an Islamic perspective. The most popular activity of the program is Quran readings, with 30 students learning to memorise parts of the holy book.

The program has helped parents to better understand their children's educational needs, and to better understand how the College works. This improved interaction is seen in the increase in numbers of parents coming along to other school functions.

East Preston Islamic College is a Prep to Year 12 coeducational school with 500 students.

Challenge: To provide more literacy and numeracy support.

Action: Establish an after-school support program.

Results: Sixty-five students regularly attend the support program; stronger links with parents and the broader community.

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– Mrs Shanti Antony, Out of School Hours Learning Support Program Coordinator



‘Sometimes we would be lucky to see a handful of parents at a parent information session,’ said Ms Antony. ‘On a good day, we might get 20 parents, from a school population of 550. But in September 2012, the school ran an information session about VCAL and VCE, and 130 people came along. The Out of School Hours Learning Support Program has played a small role in the improvement in these numbers.’

Another benefit of the program has been the increase in volunteers across the school. Initially, Mrs Antony put a call out for volunteers to help with the tutoring. ‘There was an overwhelming response and volunteers now help in the general classrooms, the science lab, the library, and with administration. Their assistance is very much appreciated. It’s been a benefit to all.’

The program was suggested to the College by Julie Christopoulos, an Independent Schools Victoria SSNP Advisor. ‘The program provides students with the opportunity to engage in support at the school level, where support may not be available at home due to language and cultural differences,’ said Ms Christopoulos.

‘Often, parents of the younger primary students stay and learn alongside their children. The program has come along in leaps and bounds. It is really buzzing. As well as the academic support, the program has provided a meeting place for social and emotional support. The cooking sessions and the winter soups, for example, are very popular.’

Ms Christopoulos also noted that the school’s teachers ‘gain from the exposure to the young and enthusiastic student teachers from Victoria University. There are also further opportunities for professional learning for the College’s teachers through the connections with the university.’

The program had initial guidance from Learning Beyond the Bell, a Victorian Government program that helps improve the schoolwork and study skills of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The College has an ongoing and fruitful relationship with Learning Beyond the Bell.

The after-school program has certainly grown from that slow start when just one student ventured into the library. Its impact has rippled across the College, like a pebble in a pond. ‘Even though the program is still in its developing stages, it has exceeded our expectations,’ said Mrs Antony.

A teacher at the College for a decade, Mrs Antony won’t rest on her laurels with the initial success of the program. ‘We are always looking for ways to keep improving the program, to keep helping the students.’

Other Successful Schools

Heritage College has also introduced an Out of School Hours Learning Support Program.

