



REFUGEE SETTLEMENT SNAPSHOT 2018: LOGAN, QLD



In 2017 the number of refugees arriving in Australia effectively doubled the intake of previous decades. This is because most of the special one-off intake of 12,000 Syrian Conflict refugees that was announced by Prime Minister Abbott in 2015 in fact arrived in 2017. In addition, the annual intake of humanitarian entrants was increased to 16,250 in 2017-18. Most of these newly-arrived refugee families settled in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

As part of a study on Settlement Outcomes of Refugee Families in Australia, funded by the Australian Research Council, and led by Professor Jock Collins (University of Sydney), Professor Carol Reid (Western Sydney University), and Associate Professor Dimitria Groutsis (University of Sydney), the first of three years of data collection has been completed. We interviewed and surveyed newly arrived refugee families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in three sites in Queensland: Logan, Brisbane and Toowoomba. Access Community Services, a partner in the research, identified Syrian and Iraqi participants in Logan, a regional location on the outskirts of Brisbane. In 2018, these 25 families were interviewed, mainly in their homes, providing valuable insights into the settlement experiences of refugees from this cohort. In these Logan families, 58 adults and 27 young people participated in interviews and completed online surveys. This snapshot lists some of their concerns and opinions.

Broad themes emerging from the interviews with the Logan family members included:

- English language skills
- Access to employment
- Settlement service delivery
- The local area / neighbourhood
- Bringing up children
- Social integration / belonging
- The family finances
- Outlook on the future in Australia

The importance of **English language skills** was clear, both in order to communicate and interact with others in their new neighbourhoods and to get an education or a job. **This is what some Logan family members said about English language ability and meeting people:**

Language is the barrier for meeting Australians.
(Syrian male, 2018)

It's important to mix with Aussie people to learn English, to learn everything about the country. (Iraqi male, 2018)

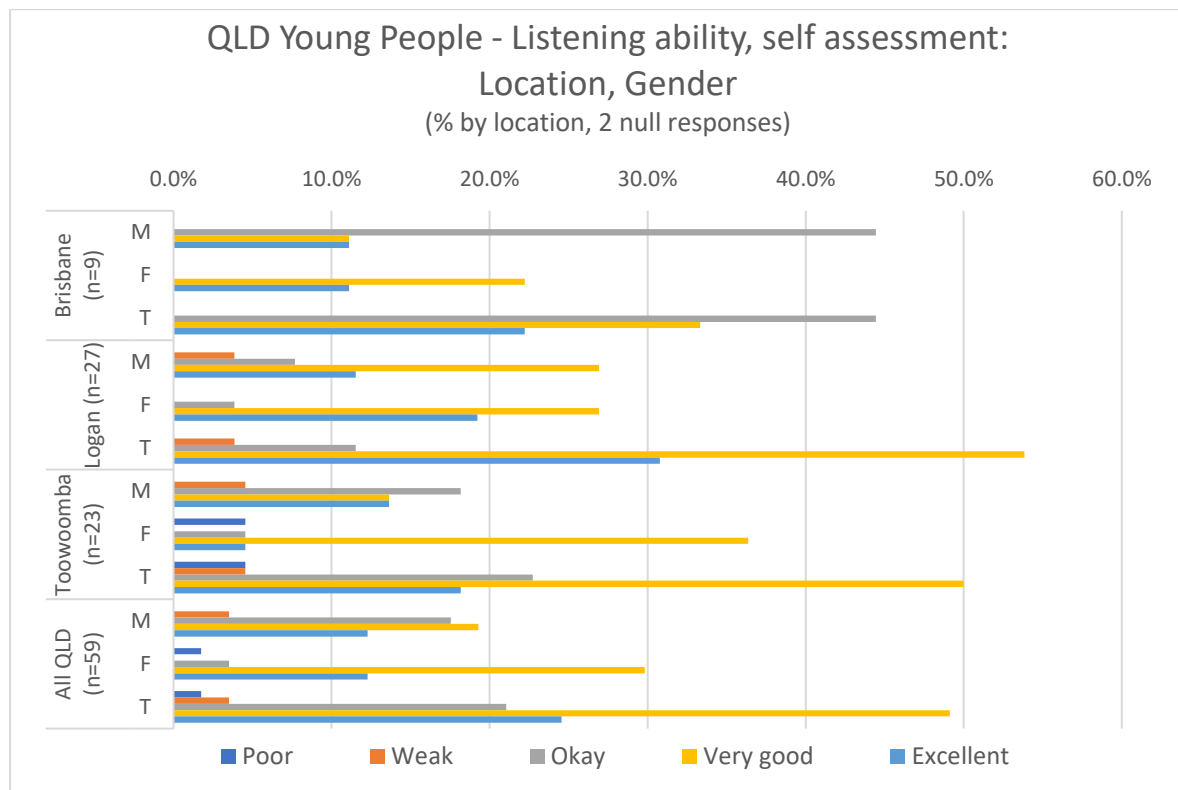
It was like I couldn't speak English and I didn't have friends. So I was by myself and then after two weeks, a month or something like this, I learnt English and I got new friends. (young Iraqi male, 2018)

When I go to volunteer in the school I learn from the school more than TAFE because I see the school, it is good place to learn. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I am very happy here in Australia but I have something very difficult for my age, what is the language, but I ... ask the manager if any ability to send someone in the house...to help me or teach me a little more about the English. (elderly Iraqi male, 2018)

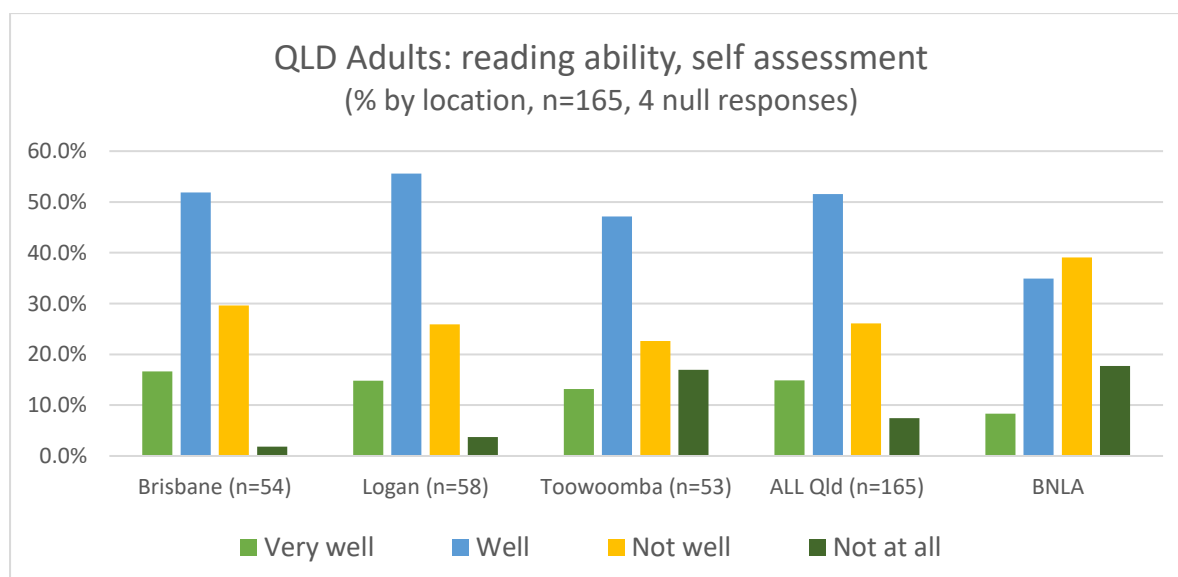
We asked the young people in the cohort of refugee families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in Logan, Brisbane and Toowoomba to rate their English-language listening ability as: poor, weak, okay, very good or excellent. **Young people in Logan were particularly skilled in understanding spoken English: 84.6% of the young people in the Logan cohort assessed their listening ability as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ (Figure 1).**

Figure 1: QLD young people: listening ability by location and gender



We also asked the adults in the QLD cohort of newly-arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees to rate their English reading ability. **More adults in the Logan cohort of families (70.4%) than in other locations in QLD (Brisbane, 68.6%; Toowoomba, 60.4%) were able to read English ‘well’ or ‘very well’ (Figure 2).**

Figure 2: QLD adults: reading ability by location



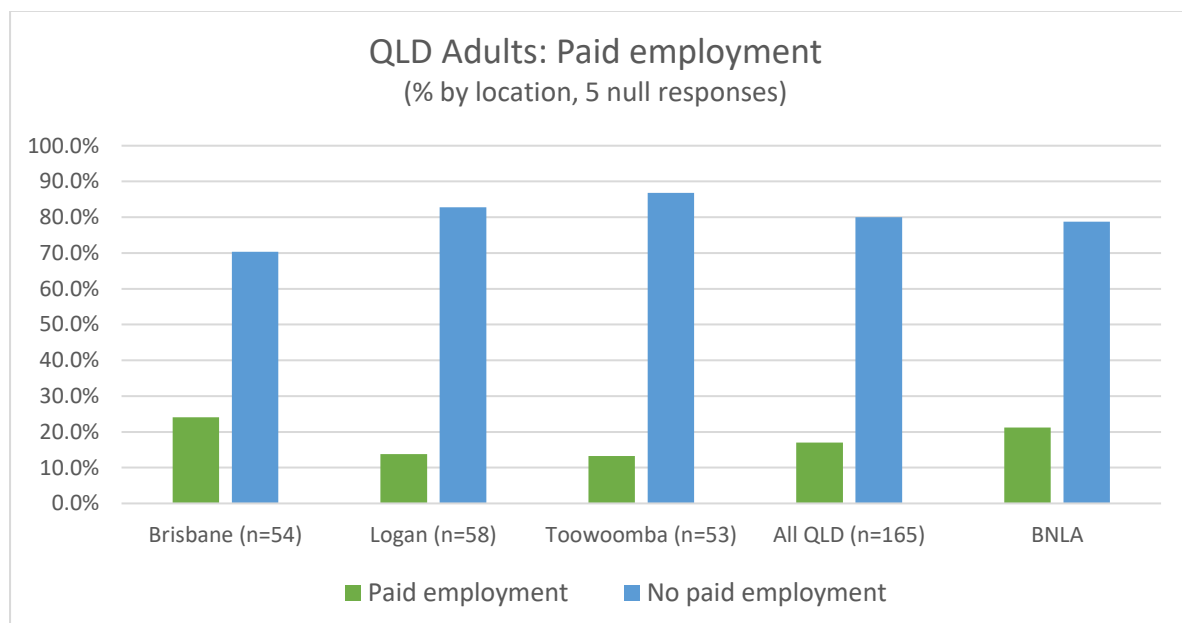
BNLA = Building a New Life in Australia (The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants)

Nevertheless, lack of English language skills was a frustrating barrier to employment, as one of the Logan adults explained:

They do a training for forklift driving, yeah, so I did the driving and I passed that, but then, they give me questions to answer, in English, so they didn't give me a certificate. Why do you let me go to this training, because you are not going to give me a certificate and you are going to ask me in English? (Syrian male, 2018)

For adult Syrian and Iraqi refugees generally and for the Logan cohort, getting a job in Australia is their highest priority. Since this was the first year of settlement in Australia for the QLD refugees surveyed, most of them had not yet found employment. This was because most were still learning English. We will follow them over the next two years and hope to see these employment results improve greatly. **Adults in Logan and Toowoomba were less likely to have a paid job than adults in Brisbane (Figure 3).**

Figure 3: QLD adults and employment



The lack of recognition of their prior employment qualifications was another reason for frustration for the Logan refugees interviewed:

The government of Australia selects people who have high qualifications. Now, I already have a high qualification and I live here in Australia, but no job, no work. (Iraqi male, 2018)

It is not right. There is more experience coming from Syria. (Syrian male, 2018)

To recognise qualification is a very long wait, and I have to pay a lot of money. So, it's not easy for me, as a dentist, from Syria, you have to pay a lot of money for each exam. It takes a long time, just to get the qualification recognised, and it costs a lot of money. (Syrian female, 2018)

When you have a job to rely on, that's a little bit more pushed towards settlement. (Syrian male, 2018)

Family members in Logan spoke about the importance of employment for settlement:

Maybe if I find job, it's heaven for me. (Syrian female, 2018)

Another thing, if anyone stay all day at home, it will be boring. When anyone have job, part time, fulltime, they feel happy and they learn more from the rule, from the language, from the people. (Iraqi female, 2018)

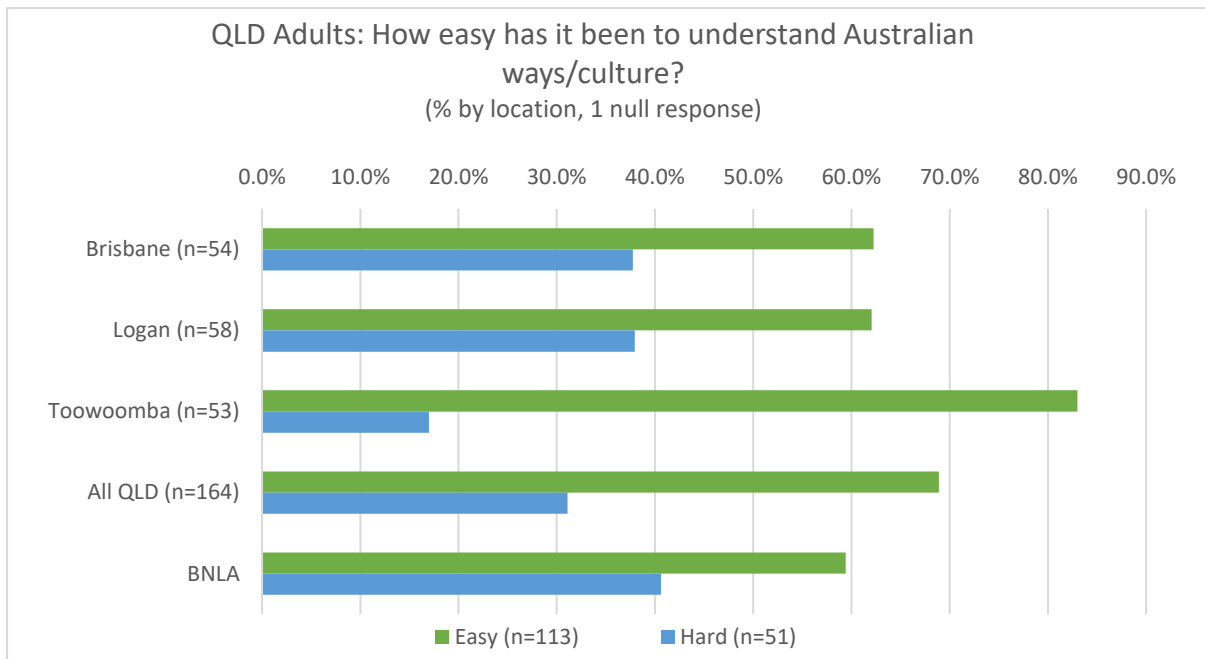
One of the key reasons that refugees come to Australia is to find a safe environment to bring up their families. **The adult family members interviewed in Logan generally felt safe in the area where they lived, compared to their country of origin, although neighbourhood safety was sometimes an issue as was a feeling of social isolation:**

Here I feel safe but like my mum said, after 5 o'clock in Syria we used to go out and walk but now no, but we stay in the complex because it's safe. There's a gate and cameras and with my friends with other houses it's safe in the complex but outside, no. (young Syrian female, 2018)

There is another factor, which is the social life. In Syria, we are very social people, so we used to have a lot of friends, a lot of families, and we have a lot of emotions to our family which stayed in Syria. So we feel that if we were together again, our families, maybe they would come here, and that would make us feel more settled. (Syrian male, 2018)

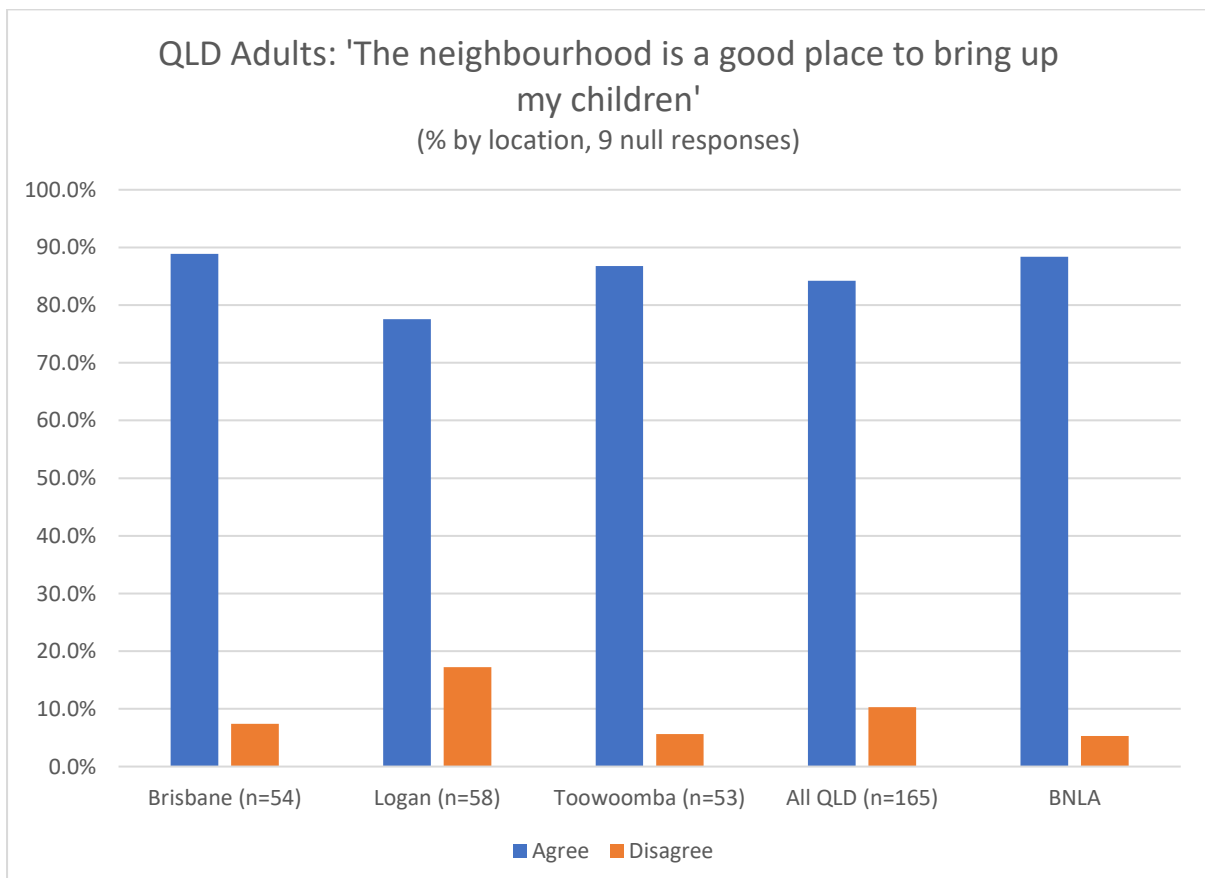
Nevertheless, many family members in the Logan cohort found it easy to understand the Australian way of life, although those in the Toowoomba cohort found it easiest (Figure 4).

Figure 4: QLD adults and understanding Australian ways



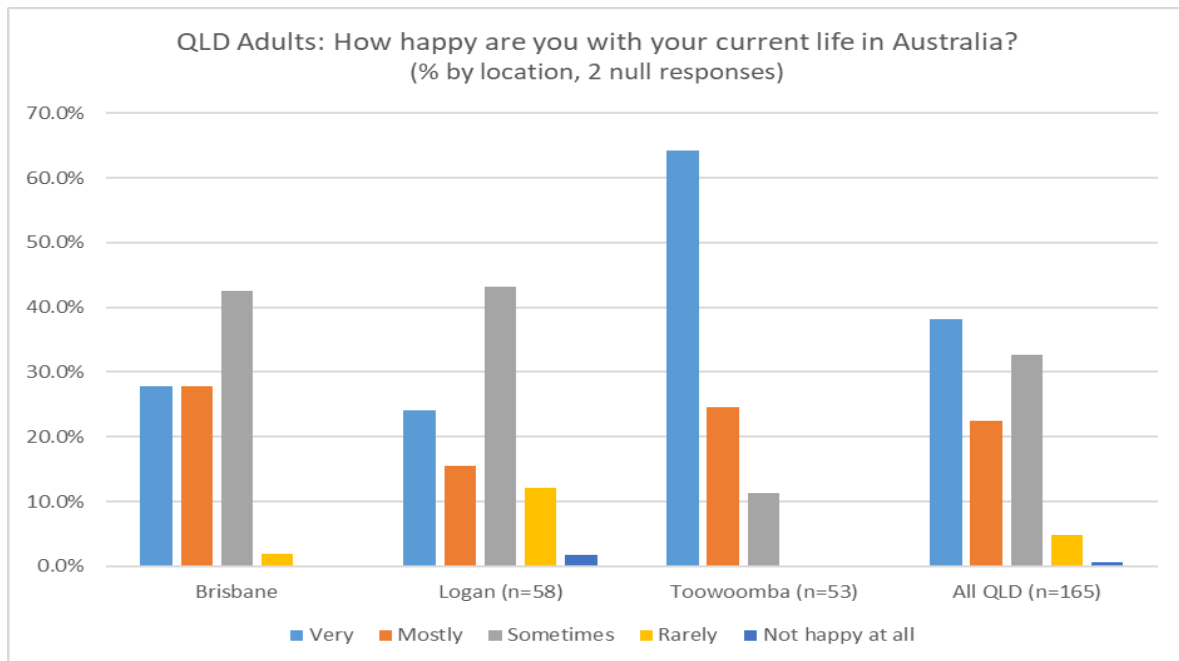
And almost 80% of the Logan adult cohort thought that their neighbourhood was a good place to bring up their children (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Bringing up children in Australia



The cohort of QLD adults were asked whether they were happy living in Australia. **Almost 40% of the Logan cohort were ‘very’ happy or ‘mostly’ happy with their life now (Figure 6).**

Figure 6: QLD adults and happiness with life in Australia



The feelings that Logan family members had about their future in Australia included optimism, resignation and caution:

You are born again. (Syrian female, 2018)

The future starts here, how will we get to go back? (Syrian male, 2018)

When I look at my children, happy, when memories, then sad. (Syrian female, 2018)

Feeling that there are some difficult things coming on the road still. (Syrian male, 2018)

When I arrived, I felt nervous and a little sad, but now I am very happy because the children here in Australia are safe and a very good education. (Iraqi female, 2018)

CONCLUSION

All of the newly-arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Logan were very thankful for the opportunity that Australia provided for them of a safe haven. They were very confident that Australia would provide a great future for them and their families.

All of the families interviewed in Logan were very satisfied with the on-arrival services provided to them and their families by Access Community Services. They were arriving in a strange land where most knew nobody. And yet these service providers found them accommodation, linked them to welfare and English language services and guided them through the difficult first months of settlement in Queensland. This was despite the fact that Access Community Services had more than double the normal number of refugee arrivals in 2017 when most of the families that we interviewed arrived.

Many of the newly-arrived refugees in Logan – particularly those from Syria – had worked as professionals or in highly-paid jobs prior to arrival. Irrespective of their jobs in Syria and Iraq, their greatest concern was to find a job in Australia. They were not content to rely on welfare payments and were frustrated that they could not work and contribute to their new society. One frustration was that they needed Australian work experience to get a job, but could not get the Australian work experience required.

Some refugees in the Logan cohort had a good command of English while others did not. Many attended the TAFE courses providing 500 hours of English Language tuition, though those with children or other caring responsibilities could not get to these classes. Attending TAFE provided them with an opportunity to make new friends in Australia. However there was a concern that the TAFE courses were not tailored to the different language needs of different refugee arrivals.

Most of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees who recently arrived in Logan were Christians. Local churches and schools provided strong support for them and were key places for them to meet other refugees and other locals.

We will revisit these families in 2019 and 2020 to trace their families' journey to settlement in Logan.

We thank them for opening their doors and their hearts to us. We also thank Access Community Services for all the help that they provided in this research project and for the bilingual refugees who assisted in this research project.