

# REFUGEE SETTLEMENT SNAPSHOT 2018: Liverpool, NSW



(Photo: Dimitria Groutsis, 2017)

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 New South Wales (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 Technology 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 four metropolitan and two regional sites in New South Wales: Liverpool, Parramatta, Auburn, and Fairfield in metropolitan Western Sydney; and Coffs Harbour and Wollongong in regional NSW.

This report provides a snapshot of the findings of our fieldwork in the area covered by our partner in Liverpool. We acknowledge the significant support of Settlement Services International (SSI) Ltd, a partner in the research, who guided us in approaching one of their partner organisations, and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre (WSMRC), for assistance in connecting with and engaging refugee families as participants. WSMRC made contact with **22 Iraqi families and 3 Syrian families** who became participants in the Liverpool-region interviews: a location identified as a settlement zone for refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi conflict. Twelve of these families were Mandaean. In 2018, these families were interviewed, mainly in their homes, and they provided valuable insights into their settlement experiences. In these Liverpool families, **43 adults and 8 young people** participated in interviews and completed an accompanying online survey. The survey is informed by the national Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) longitudinal survey of refugees in Australia, in order to ensure benchmarking with the survey instrument used for the purposes of this study. This snapshot identifies some of the respondent's hopes, opinions and concerns about their settlement.

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

- Coming to a new life in Australia
- English language skills
- Access to and participation in employment / business / welfare
- The local area / neighbourhood
- Bringing up children / education
- Social integration / belonging
- The experiences of women
- Hope for the future

Starting a new life in a new land is difficult. **Yet all of the Liverpool family members were happy and grateful to be in Australia.**

Australia is paradise, I want to show my appreciation to the Australian communities, society and to the Government for their support. Life is good in Australia. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Every single morning, I get up and I say, 'Thank God we are in Australia'. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Australia very good. Here in Australia, we can walk in the street, and we are proud about our background and about our religion, that we are Mandaean, and yes, we feel safe to pronounce and define ourselves. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Like Baghdad - life here in Australia for me and my family. It is metaphor to heaven because Baghdad used to be heaven to us because we used to be with family, there was a good income and we used to be very happy. I meant to say it's like home. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I am very happy because finally I met my parents after long time of separation, it was the greatest day in my life, the family reunion means a lot for me. Yes, here in Australia, we are happy and the Western Sydney MRC, I am really grateful for the settlement services and the support they gave us. (Syrian male, 2018)

**Like most refugees, the families interviewed in Liverpool had been driven from their homes in their country of origin by insecurity and conflict:**

Well ISIS had their push in 2014, they had over 65% of Iraq, so our suburb was, it's like a little hub for them, and there was an incursion, they pushed in. For all minorities, these people took off, and we were among the people who had been pushed out of our own home. (Iraqi male, 2018)

We missed the smiles in Iraq. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**The Mandaean in particular experienced threats in their home country of Iraq, due to their profession as jewellers:**

As we are jewellers, Mandaean jewellers, you know, we deal with expensive materials, so we were exposed to too many kidnaps and – kidnaps for money, and for something like that, yes. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I could not sleep in Iraq. The robbers and the thieves. In Iraq, I am a very rich man. Jewellery. They went to kidnap my wife, and she was pregnant at the time. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**Through the Mandaean community network it was known that Australia was a place that they might come to:**

Yeah, we heard about Australia ... So Australia wasn't new to me and my wife, because of that connection through our community. (Iraqi male, 2018)

We are a minority ... Information is spread very quickly. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I heard the Mandaean are big groups here so I started to prepare and friends told me to come here. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**The move to Australia for all of the Liverpool refugees interviewed was motivated by a wish to protect the next generation – not only their own children, but also the wider community:**

This life not for me, for my children. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I am not thinking about only myself and my family, I am responsible for the extended family. We are thinking about the new generation, the kids who live in fear. (Kurdish Iraqi male, 2018)

I always felt the sense of discrimination against myself, and against my community. But lately, because of the violent threat, and the lawless situation in Iraq, and the fall of the central authority, definitely that me and my family, and the rest of my community, were subjected to threat, intimidation, blackmail, you name it. At this moment, then the decision has been made, get out. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**Refugee families in Liverpool spoke of needing time to adjust in their new environment, and to overcome trauma:**

I didn't attend English classes, mentally I didn't feel settled and a little bit of confusion. (Iraqi male, 2018)

It's easy to find job, and easy to work with the people, but it's not easy to change your country. You need a few months to get used to it. (Syrian male, 2018)

One male explained more than once during his interview that all refugees are traumatised, and that people here in Australia need to take that into account. He hinted that service providers might not make adequate provisions for newly-arrived refugees with mental or physical disabilities:

But this is from my experience here in Australia. People they did not believe that we have a problem, we have a problem. (Iraqi male, 2018)

The need to learn English is one of the pressures which is part of adjusting to a new land, and can be difficult, particularly for adults. Yet, the importance of **English language skills** to refugee families was clear, both in order to feel part of their new neighbourhoods and to get an education or a job.

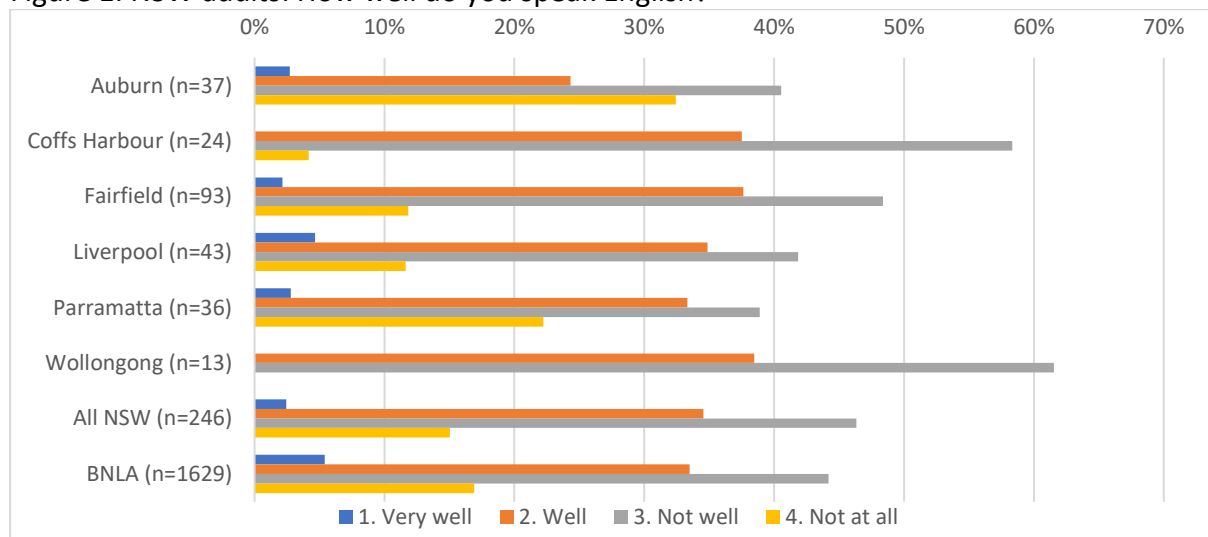
For me and my wife I would like us to learn good English and get a good job. We feel that we belong in Australia only the language is holding us back. Only language is holding us back. (Iraqi male, 2018)

The combination of inadequate skill in English, which has not gone ahead because of the health situation, so the language barrier and the health situation together become disadvantage for me to be able to gain work. (Syrian male, 2018)

My brother came five years earlier. My brother left Iraq early at the age of 18 and he had a rough experience but I envy him because he is very well established and part of that feeling of security for him, that he's speaking the language very fluently. I am looking forward to have his English skill to be able to have the same feeling of security. (Iraqi female, 2018)

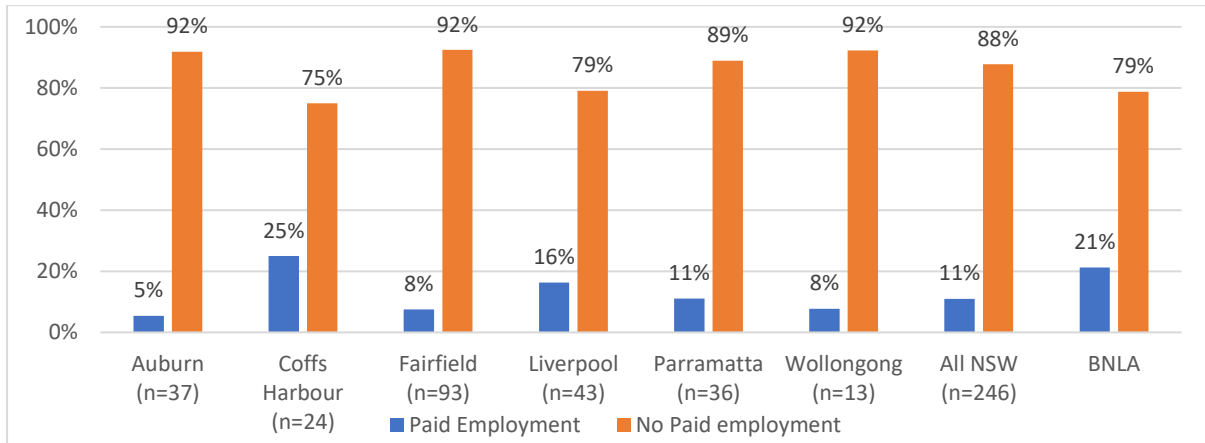
We asked the cohort of adults in NSW living in Liverpool, Parramatta, Auburn, Fairfield, Coffs Harbour and Wollongong who were refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan whether they could speak English 'very well', 'well', 'not well' or 'not at all'. We compare these results to the findings of the national longitudinal survey of refugees, the BNLA survey. **The proportion of adults in Liverpool who assessed themselves as being able to speak English 'very well' or 'well' (40%), was slightly higher than the proportion of refugees who responded in the national BNLA survey (39%), and the highest of the NSW locations (equalling Fairfield) (Figure 1).**

Figure 1: NSW adults: How well do you speak English?



For adult refugees generally - and for those in Liverpool more specifically - getting a job in Australia is an important priority. Since this was the first year of settlement in Australia for most of the NSW refugees interviewed/surveyed, most of them had not yet found employment because most were still learning English and settling into their life in Australia. We will follow these same families over the next two years and hope to see these employment results improve greatly. **Of the groups surveyed in NSW, the proportion of those in Liverpool (16%) who were in employment was the greatest of the NSW metropolitan locations (Figure 2).**

Figure 2: NSW adults and employment



**Many of the adults in the Liverpool refugee families interviewed were concerned about the difficulty in finding work and the pressures to do so.** Job agencies expect labour-market-active refugees to apply for 15-20 jobs per month and record those attempts on an app (MyGov). The system allows for demerit points to be issued and can result in Centrelink payments being revoked. The one-size-fits-all approach ignores factors affecting individuals, such as language level, disability, or age. It also ignores the family context:

I wanted to do full-time English learning and I was told many times as I was instructed; we don't want you to learn full-time, we want you to work. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I am now 61 years old and I am required to look for jobs and I actually have a pain in my joints, and I find a difficulty, a hardship to do my duties. And there is a threatening all the time. A threatening. I mean not threatening, but there is something like from the Job Active or – pressure. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I used to be an Admin Officer using pen and paper and I wasn't familiar with the computer. I was told, just sit in front of the computer, without knowing, without having a clue how to operate it, how to use it. I need support; I need assistance from somebody to tell me how to operate and make use of this one. I was left and all what I had to do is to record my start and my finishing time and this is it. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I don't have the basic skills, till now I don't know how to use the computer...From the 1st of the July the system is changed... There is a program, it is called MyGov, this is MyGov, you will have to apply for everything, and under MyGov that the job provider and the Centrelink can see this things. (Iraqi male, 2018)

At the same time, the refugees we talked to did not feel that they had support in applying for jobs, finding jobs or in making contacts with employers. This is problematic, because **local connections matter significantly in finding employment, and that is something that new arrivals don't have:**

How I can find job, I am here new, I don't know anyone here. (Iraqi male, 2018)

But everybody says to me; you're unlicensed and you need to find somebody who employs you as TA – Tradesperson Assistant. I have to find somebody, I only arrived to the country yesterday. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**Refugees in Liverpool who are keen to work are frustrated in their attempts to find a job due to administrative issues and lack of opportunity to just demonstrate their skills:**

No, Centrelink does not give a list of people to ask for work ... but the Job Active gave me this paper to fill. I am required to fill about 10... From 10 to 15 attempts, to find a job. Yes, per month. So I take this paper, and I visit shops and restaurants, and I ask to hire me. I ask them to have a job. They refuse, or they don't give me an answer. But I take reference from them, to prove that I am working on that. I try to have a job ... I tried to look for a job. For example, I visited a restaurant here, an Iraqi restaurant... The manager, I asked to have a job in kitchen, in that restaurant. The manager said that they don't hire mature age. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Today, I have appointment with my job provider, 2:30. He told me, 'you must work 30 hours a week, you work'. I told him, '30 hours a week, what's the problem?' He told me, 'you must work – if you find job, you must work 30 hours a week'. I told him, 'in Iraq I work from six o'clock to 12 o'clock midnight, every day. Find me job and I work 50 hours a week, no problem' ... In TAFE, I have my friends, they're working engineer and site engineer, but then he told me, 'why you not want other work?' I told him, 'what kind of work?' If you are like me, I am engineer from 1990, more than 20 years, engineer, working in hospital, housing, [unclear]. I told to him, 'if you are like me, you can work anywhere'. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**Transfer to Australia of overseas qualifications is desired, but it is problematic:**

I want to get my overseas qualification recognised in PE (Physical Education), continue my study, or to get a job within my speciality and interest. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Well, they ask my advice. But, you know, I'm not certified, recognised as a physiotherapist. So sometimes I say, 'I won't touch you because I'm going to hurt you. So, until I've done my certificate degree, I won't touch you.' (Iraqi female, 2018)

I hope to complete my English language tuition and become capable to have the language skill and I'm very hopeful that I get a job that is related to my skills, not a cleaner. This seems to be the only job available. (Iraqi female, 2018)

**Like refugees in other locations, those in Liverpool would much rather have a job than accept financial help such as Centrelink benefits:**

I didn't think I need help from anyone, because I can work. I'm coming here, not to stay and sit at home, I'm coming here to work, I just need a safe country. (Syrian male, 2018)

I wish I work, and I couldn't take the money from the government. I don't like the money from the government, yeah, because it's not enough, and I wish to work full-time, better for me. Yes, I would have thought that when I come here, I wouldn't get any money from anybody, finding a job hopefully would have been easier. At least I can feel very happy about myself. (Iraqi female, 2018)

**Most of the women (18 of 25) in Liverpool who were interviewed had not worked in their home countries.** This was especially the case with the Mandeans where the men were jewellers and the women generally had the role of caring for their large family and their home. Daughters too might look after their siblings, and sometimes their parents as well, before starting their own family. A few of these women, who were not yet in retirement age, did mention that they'd like to find employment in Australia now, but it was mostly the men who talked about employment and self-employment.

**Self-employment is a goal for many, but finding start-up capital is a barrier to opening a business in Australia:**

I will be pursuing my dream for me to establish my own jewellery business. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Here in Australia, in Sydney, if anyone need to open shop, jeweller, need a lot of money. (Iraqi male, 2018)

To open a jewellery shop again. My own business, not work with another one. I would like to build my new business. (Iraqi male, 2018)

My profession is about jewellery, and shaping jewellery, making jewellery, and it's very difficult to find a job in this business, here. Maybe it's hard to own a small business – yes, we were workers, so we don't have much money to open a business. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**The few Syrian women interviewed in Liverpool and a few Iraqi women from religious backgrounds other than Mandaean had ambitious plans to master English and open up their own businesses:**

Now, I'm not charging money, I'm putting my skill on display. It won't be long before I can make money. (Syrian female, 2018)

I would like a business as a hairdresser. I want to build my own business to open my salon as a hairdresser. (Iraqi female, 2018)

I'm very pleased that I am engaged in employment, working as a hairdresser. I want to develop my skills and I want to become a qualified hairdresser. My ambition in the future when I can, after graduating, is to have my own salon and to run my own business. (Syrian female, 2018)

**One family were able to hang onto savings from back home:**

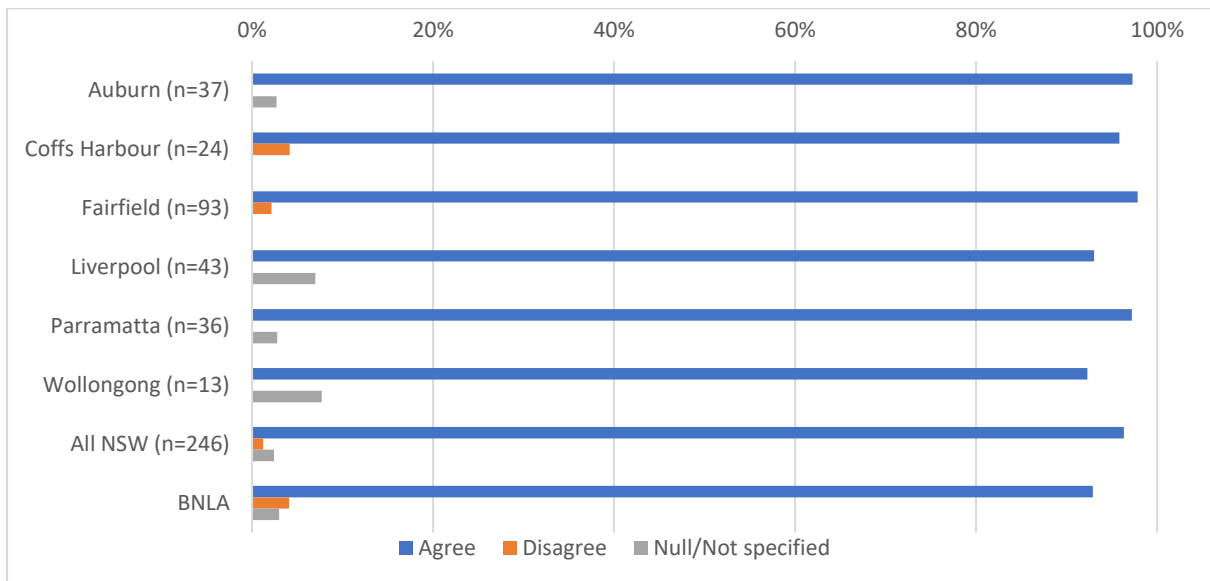
Because of the job I used to have in Iraq, so I converted all the money I had there, money to here. There are a lot of people in need, but we are fine here. We came to Australia not for a financial issue, but freedom. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**This family showed the same sentiment as others who just want to pay their way and be safe, prompting the interpreter for this Mandaean family to comment:**

That's why when you see many people coming here, they're not economic migrants. They come here for dignity and for safety.

One of the key reasons that refugees come to Australia is to find a safe environment to bring up their families. **Like refugees in most other NSW locations, every one of the young family members (100%) and every one of the adult family members in Liverpool who responded to the question said that they felt safe living there (93%) (Figure 3).**

Figure 3: NSW adults: I feel safe in my neighbourhood

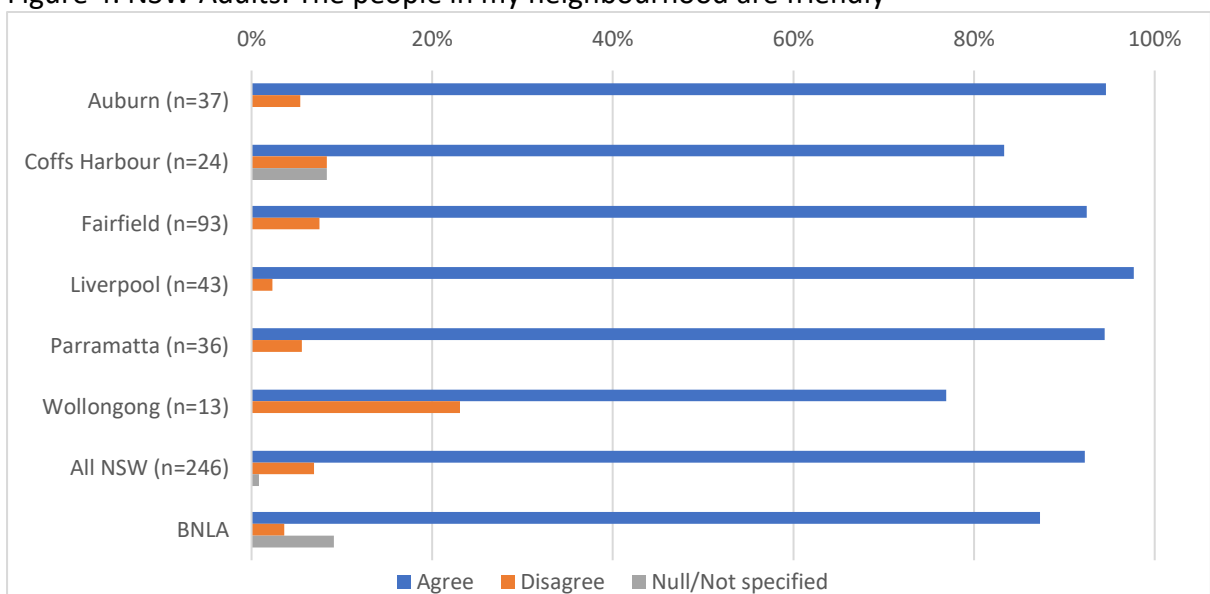


Feelings of safety encompass freedom from discrimination. Three sisters in one family all stated that they could not work in Iraq because of gender and religious discrimination. Another female who was single explained:

I was working in hairdressing [in Iraq], but then I get threatened...because the collision between Sunni and Shia. I am Sunni. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Once here in Australia, **almost all (98%) of the adults interviewed in Liverpool thought that their neighbours were friendly** (Figure 4), the highest proportion of the NSW locations.

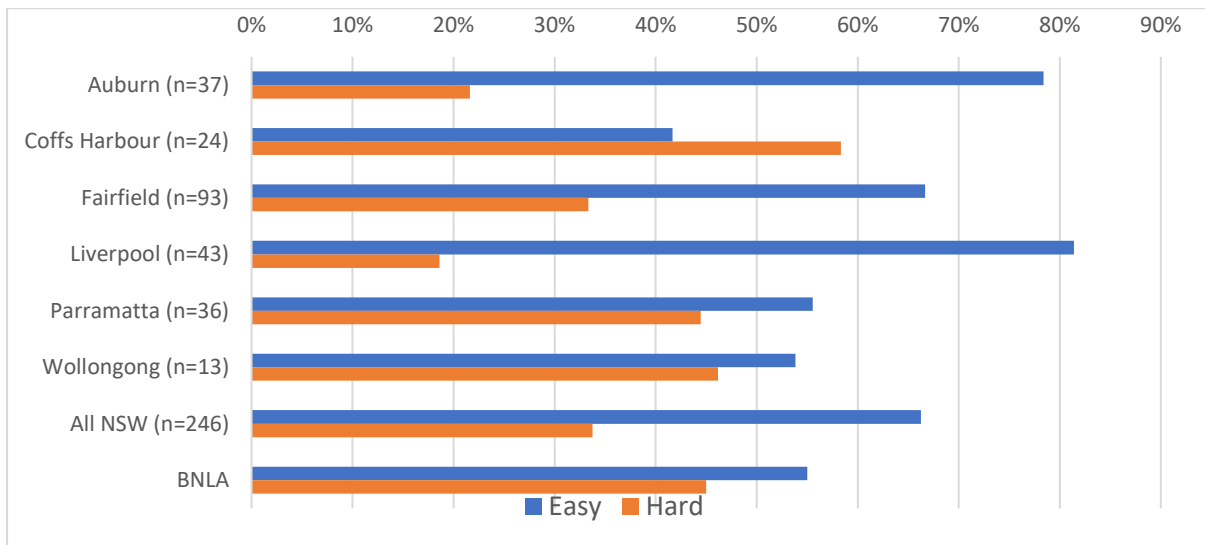
Figure 4: NSW Adults: The people in my neighbourhood are friendly





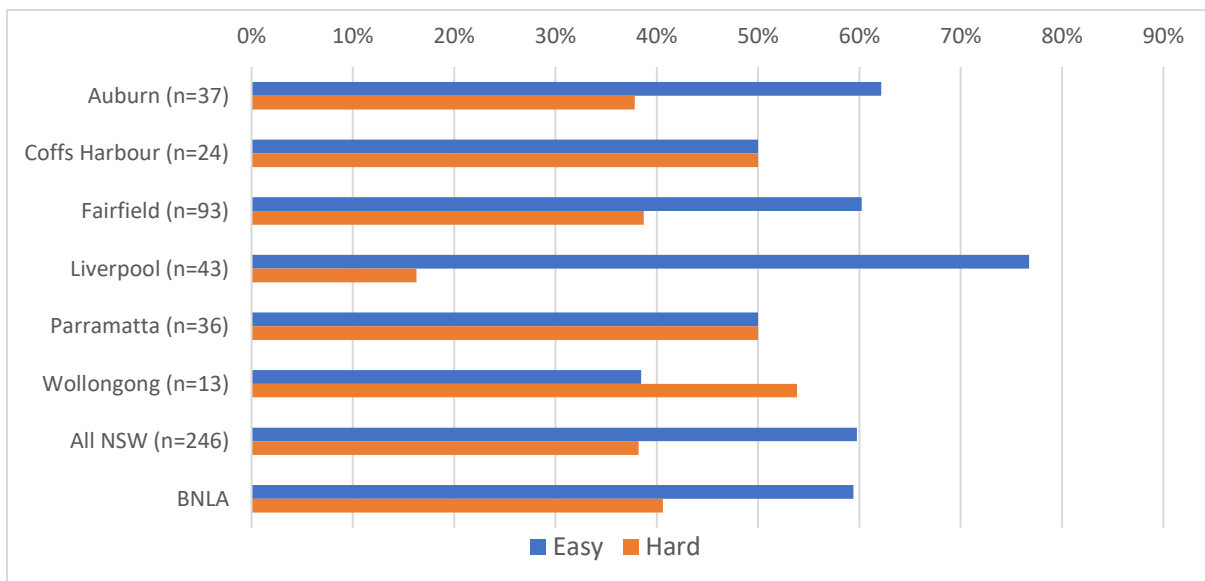
Moreover, after one to two years of settlement, four out of five of the adults (81%) surveyed in Liverpool said that they found it easy to make friends (Figure 5), again the highest proportion of NSW locations.

Figure 5: NSW adults: how easy have you found it to make friends in Australia?



Furthermore, almost the same proportion (77%) said that they found it easy to understand the Australian way of life (Figure 6) again the highest proportion of NSW locations.

Figure 6: NSW adults and understanding Australian ways



**Females in particular have embraced the different culture in Australia, which treats genders equally:**

Especially for girls and women because they are persecuted in Iraq especially. I used to wear a hijab to cover my hair when I wanted to buy something from a shop in Iraq. Here I am free. (Iraqi female, 2018)

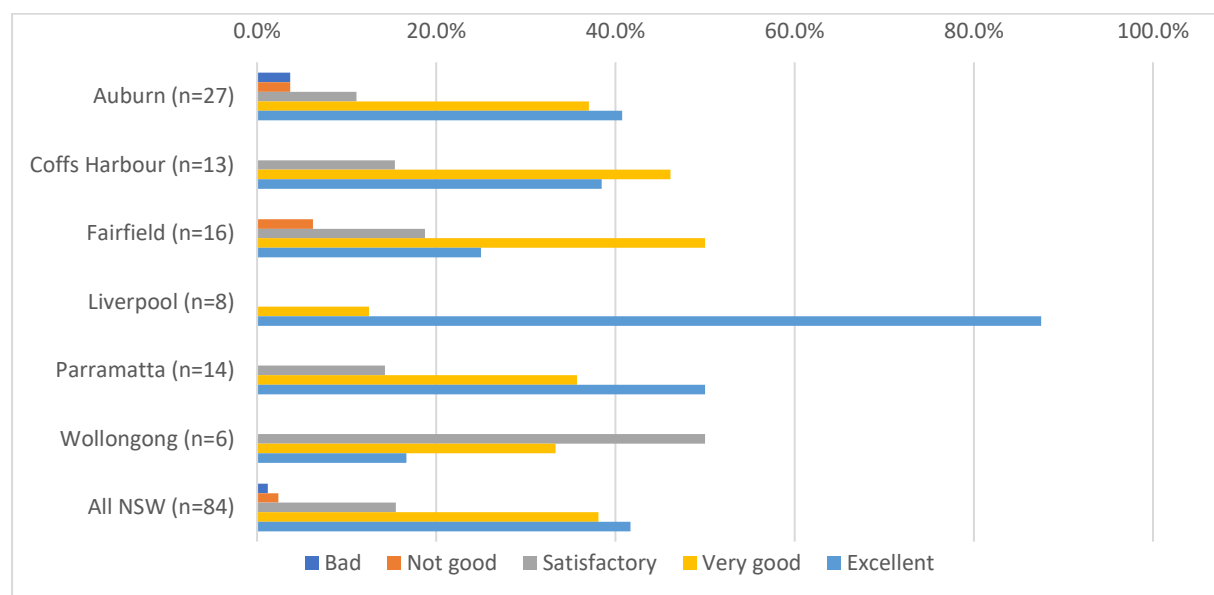
It's a big consolation to me, everything that I have been deprived of in my country and here, I'm very pleased to see that my daughter is having it and I'm giving it to my daughter. If I could not fulfil my dream, I put my dream in my daughter. (Iraqi female, 2018)

**All refugees want their children to have a good future in Australia. Of the small number of young people in Liverpool who took part in the survey almost 90% thought that school or TAFE was ‘excellent’ and the remainder thought it was ‘very good’ (Figure 7). Some of the young people talked about the difference between Australian schools and those back home:**

Yeah, it’s a bit different than Iraq. It’s not easier or harder, but it’s different, like the way they teach is different, teachers different, resources, everything is different. Different culture, yeah, we have to adapt. (Young Iraqi male, 2018)

The school in Iraq is not the same at all. In Iraq the teachers scream a lot and they hit you with a ruler like if you did bad things and for punishment they make you stand on one leg with one leg up; they hit you with a ruler - but not us. We were good so we didn't get in trouble. (Young Iraqi male and female, 2018)

Figure 7: NSW young people: How is school/TAFE?



**Some of the parents interviewed in Liverpool chose to send their children to Arabic (Assyrian) private schools in Australia:**

We choose this school because there is many students speak Arabic. When you came to Australia, our accent is not clear. Now, everyone can understand what we say. Yeah, now, is easy, but when we came, it was too hard. (Syrian male, 2018)

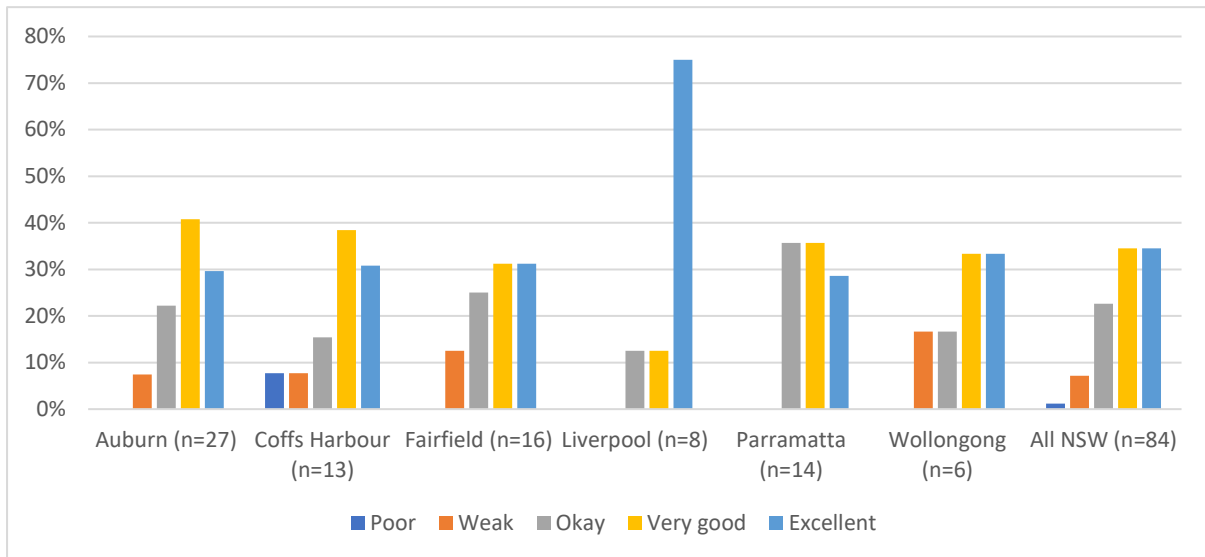
Our daughter is in Grade 11. It’s supposed to be more but right now it’s fair enough to start studying again. She is doing her HSC, Year 11, in a private Assyrian school. Yeah, she is liking the school. She is very happy and she is doing well. (Iraqi female, 2018)

**Other parents were equally happy that their children enjoyed attending schools with diverse cultures.**

I am very pleased watching my daughter thriving and learning within diversity of culture. There is a great deal of harmony that everybody is related, and she’s treated like everybody else. That gives me a feeling of security. (Iraqi female, 2018)

**No young person in Liverpool mentioned having difficulties with English, indeed 88% of them assessed their listening ability as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ (Figure 8).**

Figure 8: NSW young people: ability to understand spoken English



**While the young people were comfortable using the English language, those a bit older who may have had limited schooling in their country of origin, found learning a new language difficult:**

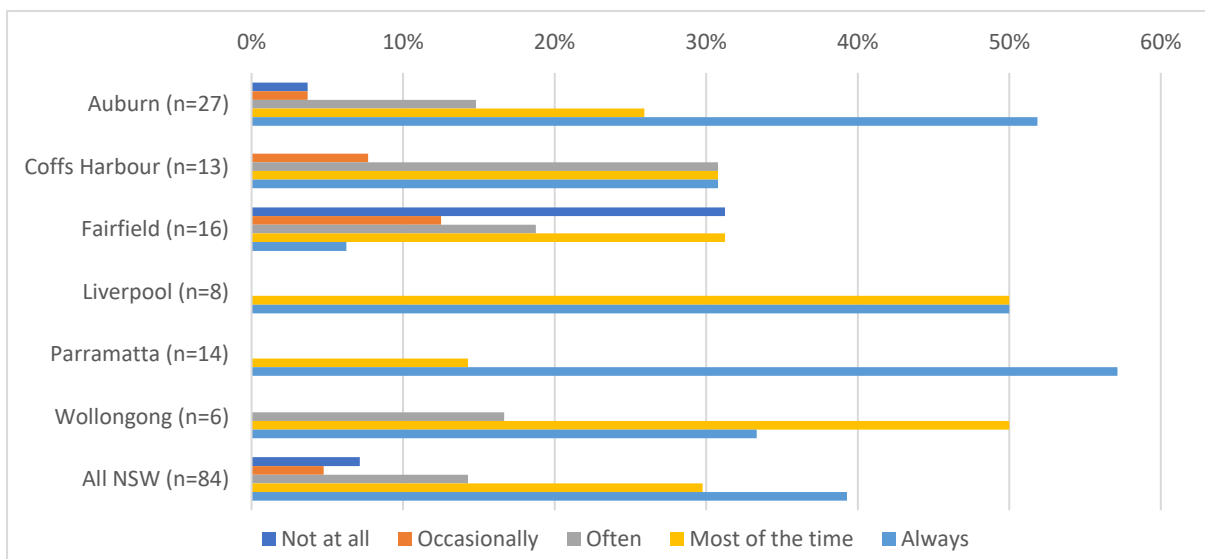
As we left school early, then we find a little bit difficulty with studying here.  
(Iraqi male, 32 years of age, 2018)

I only read English books, nothing in Arabic.  
I came second in the school in English.  
(Young Iraqi male, 12 years of age, 2018)

One father explained that it will be hard to get a job but he said as he pointed to his son's head *‘they will learn the language so quickly’*, but he said, *‘old people's heads’*, pointing to his own, *‘have minds like stone’*. (Iraqi male, 2018)

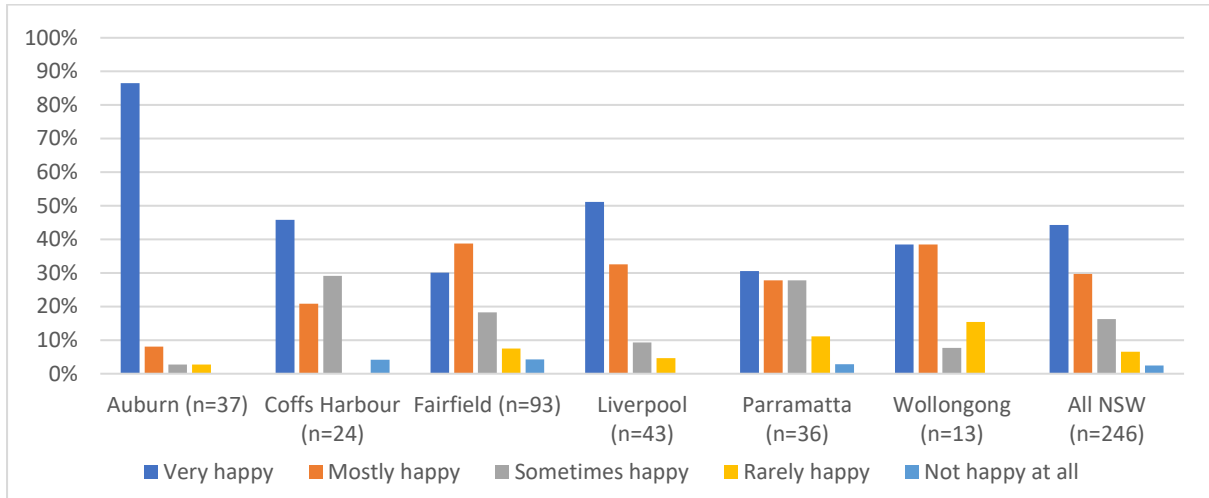
**As well as being comfortable with the language in Australia, all of the young people in Liverpool felt they belonged to the local community ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ (Figure 9).**

Figure 9: NSW young people: Do you feel you belong to the local community?



**Moving your family to a new country is difficult, particularly when you are escaping war and conflict. Nevertheless, four out of five adults surveyed in Liverpool (84%) were ‘very’ or ‘mostly’ happy with their life now (Figure 10).**

Figure 10: NSW adults: how happy are you with your current life in Australia?



**All of the hopes of parents for the future reside with their children:**

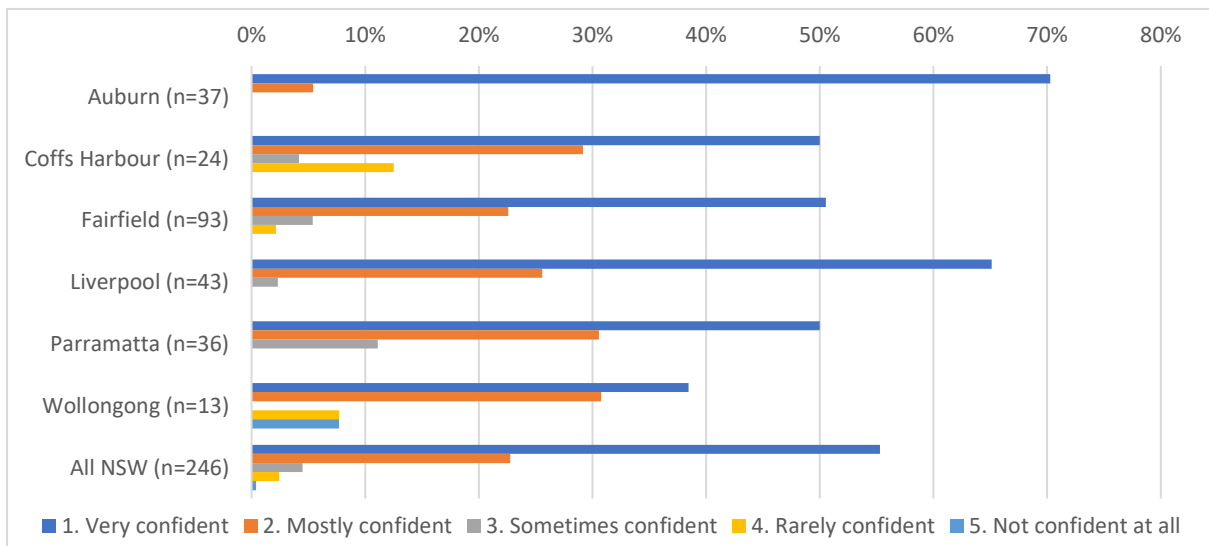
Happiness is my children’s success and proper settlement, and good future, this is what makes me happy, and this is what I’m looking forward to. (Syrian male, 2018)

We wish to see our children grow peacefully, and live peacefully. We wish to see them study and successful. (Iraqi female, 2018)

The most important thing is for our kids to be comfortable and confident here. So as long as they’re confident and happy, that’s what we want. (Iraqi male, 2018)

**All of the adults in Liverpool who answered the survey question were confident about their children’s future in Australia; and almost all of these (91%) were ‘very’ or ‘mostly’ confident (Figure 11).**

Figure 11: NSW adults: How confident are you about your children’s future in Australia?



## CONCLUSION

All of the newly arrived Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Liverpool 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 their families, though they were worried about finding a job.

All of the families interviewed in Liverpool were very satisfied with the on-arrival services provided to them and their families by the Settlement Services International and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre. They were found accommodation, linked to welfare services and guided through the difficult first months of settlement in NSW. This was even though settlement 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 Liverpool had jobs in Iraq and Syria before the conflict; many owned their own business, particular the Mandaean, many of whom are jewellers. **Their greatest concern is to find a job in Australia.** None of the adult refugees interviewed was content to rely on welfare payments. They were very frustrated that they could not work and contribute to their new society. One frustration was that they needed Australian work experience and networks to get a job, but could not get the Australian work experience required, creating a cycle of exclusion and frustration. Another frustration was the pressure to get work before their individual needs could be met; those who wanted to set up their own business needed start-up capital.

Some adult refugees in Liverpool had a good command of English while others did not. Most have attended the English language courses providing 510 hours of tuition, though those with children or other caring responsibilities could not always get to these classes. Attending English language classes provided them with an opportunity to make new friends in Australia. However, there was a concern that the courses were not tailored to the different language needs of different refugee arrivals and provided little flexibility.

**We will visit these families again in 2019 and 2020 to trace their settlement journey in NSW.**

**We thank them for opening their doors and their hearts to us. We also thank SSI and WSMRC for all the help that they provided in this research project and for the bilingual refugees who assisted in this research project as bilingual research assistants.**