

# REFUGEE SETTLEMENT SNAPSHOT 2018: Coffs Harbour, 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: Coffs Harbour and Wollongong in regional NSW; and Fairfield, Liverpool, Parramatta, and Auburn in metropolitan Western Sydney.

This report provides a snapshot of the findings of our fieldwork in the area covered by our partner in Coffs Harbour. We acknowledge the significant support of Settlement Services International (SSI) Ltd, a partner in the research, whose Coffs Harbour branch gave valuable assistance in connecting with and engaging refugee families as participants. SSI made contact with **6 Syrian, 3 Iraqi and 4 Afghan families** who became participants in the Coffs Harbour region interviews: a location identified as a settlement zone for refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi conflict. Most of these participants, the Syrians and Iraqis, were Ezidi (17), the Afghans Muslim (7). In 2018, these families were interviewed, mainly in their homes, and they provided valuable insights into their settlement experiences. In these Coffs Harbour families, **24 adults (10 males, 14 females; 11 Syrians, 6 Iraqis, 7 Afghans) and 13 young people (aged 5 to 17)** 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 respondents' hopes, opinions and concerns about their settlement.

Broad themes emerging from the interviews with the Coffs Harbour family members included:

- Coming to a new life in Australia
- English language skills
- Access to and participation in employment
- Finances
- The local neighbourhood / housing
- Social integration
- Bringing up children / education
- Hope for the future / family reunion

***Starting a new life in a new land is difficult.*** However, almost all of the adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour said that they had prior knowledge of Australia, having attended short courses before leaving their transit country on how things work in Australia. With a large cohort of people coming to a relatively small town, services were well co-ordinated and the refugees **well prepared on arrival:**

We used to watch the internet... and before coming here I arranged an orientation session for five days and ... they told us about everything in Australia, the laws and the regulations and the rent and everything... and Centrelink card and making the Medicare cards and everything, and how to go to shopping centres... (Afghan female, 2018)

**All of the Coffs Harbour adult family members were grateful to be in Australia and most were happy.**

I was happy because I was safe here but sad and worried sometimes because of the distance and being far away from relatives and family. But now this is my hometown. This is my country. I'm happy now.  
(Afghan female, 2018)

**The families had been happy back home, but were forced to flee religious persecution.** The Syrian conflict and the emergence of ISIS were the main reasons for Syrians and Iraqis leaving, but wide-spread discrimination against ethnic groups was felt by Afghans as well:

We never have a chance to choose moving to Australia we just... No choice, you know? We just run away... I didn't move until 2014. I just keep trying, thinking now something good will happen, my country will be okay, but after that I see it actually in my sons – it's not safe enough, my life, my husband, so we just run away. (Syrian female, 2018)

When my father died, then my mother was still working in houses, and the money we get from that was not sufficient for us to eat, and to have a life; and we wanted to study. Like, me and my brothers. But in the schools, they asked refugees to pay money for their education... and they behaved rudely with the refugees, especially with the Afghans. (Young Afghan female, 2018)

You know, our life in Syria, it's normal. Not very good, not very bad. Because we are Kurdish people. Yeah. We're not allowed to say our language, learn how to write... And also we are Ezidi, we can't do our religion. No, no, no... It's okay, because all your family are around you, and this is your land. Yeah. It's a place where your grandparents grow up, and your parents... And we miss everything, but when we remember... (Syrian female, 2018)

Before the ISIS came, we were like, mentally like, good... But even though there wasn't war, but there was no rights for Ezidis... You don't get a job. Yes. You are not free to talk. Yes, difficult. You must all follow him. (Iraqi male, 2018)

The adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour had **mixed feelings** about coming to Australia and leaving family behind. Quite often they feared not knowing anyone, and not being able to speak the language:

We feel sad and stressed when we arrived, because we didn't know the language, we didn't know how people would react, and we didn't know anything about the community. (Iraqi male, 2018)

When I arrived... afraid a lot, because when we came, we didn't know anyone. That first week, we didn't went out, because we thought we would get lost, and we don't have any English, and everything is new. We don't know about people here, how we can communicate with them. (Syrian female, 2018)

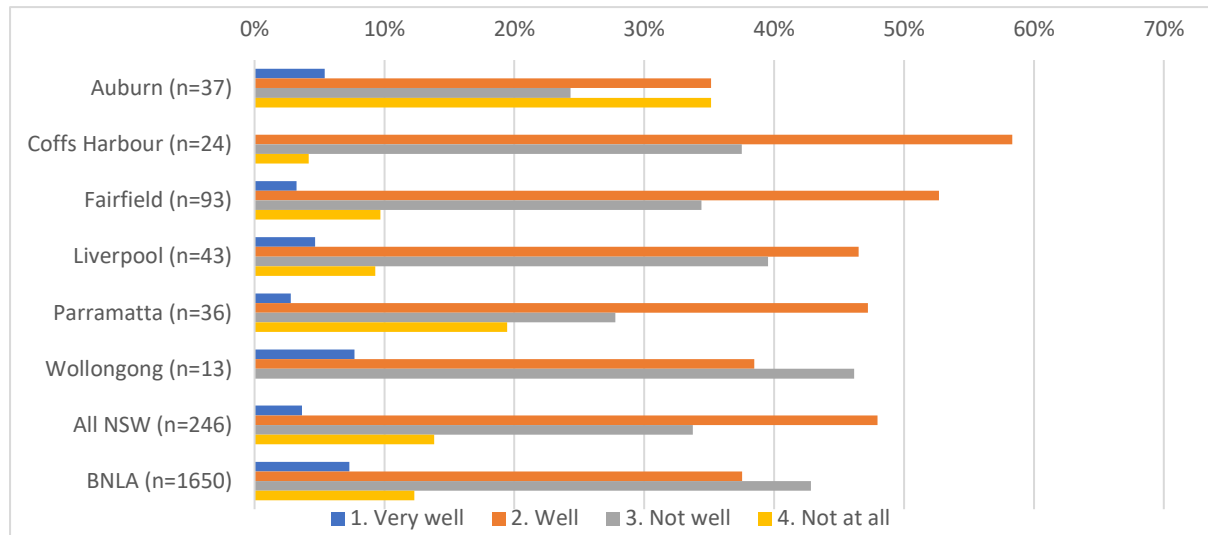
We were very happy because we left all our worries and troubles and hardships behind us back in Pakistan. We were happy to start a new life but we left everything in Pakistan ... When we came here, I was not fine at the start. I was missing my family, my parents. I used to go to the doctor and I used to have psychological problems, I went to doctor, they gave me some medicine. (Afghan female, 2018)

It was a big change. I was feeling a bit nervous and worried and everything, like different feelings. (Afghan female, 2018)

When someone travel to another country it's like a different world, a strange world. When questions come up to your mind whether you're going to have a future for your kids, what's going to happen with your relatives, your other family members, and whether there's somebody who's going to speak our language, especially when we first arrived there was only two of us who could speak our language. You feel stressed. (Syrian male, 2018)

Since English language acquisition is essential, we asked the cohort of adults in NSW living in Coffs Harbour, Liverpool, Parramatta, Auburn, Fairfield and Wollongong, who were refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, whether they could understand 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 Coffs Harbour who assessed themselves as being able to understand English ‘well’ or ‘very well’ (58%), was much higher than the proportion of refugees who responded in the national BNLA survey (45%), and the highest of the NSW locations (Figure 1).**

Figure 1: NSW adults: How well do you understand spoken English?



**While English classes were useful for some, others made suggestions for improvements, such as the need for opportunities to practice, bilingual teachers for beginners, and separation of students into age groups:**

Yeah, I got much benefit from their classes. You get like the rules, like grammar rules from TAFE, but when talking with the people in the street you get more. (Syrian male, 2018)

It would be better if TAFE have classes for each and every age, different classes. The people who are under 25, they must have a separate class, and the old have a separate class. Because when you sit with the different ages, like the different people and the old age people, that affects your thinking and everything. (Young Afghan female, 2018)

They're not learning it properly because they have no clue and the teacher is trying to teach them ... even though they don't know what the teacher is saying... I think the lower level ... they need a teacher who is speaking the language to tell them what's going wrong. A bilingual teacher, yeah... They mightn't understand because some of them, if they are illiterate in their own language, there's an even bigger problem... (Young Afghan male, 2018)

**English skills were acknowledged as being essential to find the kinds of jobs refugees wanted.** The majority of refugees interviewed in Coffs Harbour said that their lack of English skills is what holds them back from working:

Because the Australian are really good to us, I want to work sometimes for them as a volunteer; but because my English level is low, so they don't want me to work with them [laughing]. (Iraqi male, 2018)

It just need a bit more time, maybe one or two years, then we get... improve our English; and then after that, we may get a job, and life will be better. (Iraqi female, 2018)

For adult refugees generally - and for those in Coffs Harbour 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. Notably, employment outcomes for the recently arrived refugees in NSW were generally less positive than for those refugees surveyed in the national BNLA survey. We will follow these same families over the next two years and hope to see these employment results improve greatly. However, of the groups interviewed in NSW, those in Coffs Harbour, were the most likely to have some kind of paid employment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: NSW adults and employment



A closer look at the employment situation in Coffs Harbour reveals that many of the refugees interviewed are **working in seasonal jobs only**, so do not have permanent employment. Several mentioned having done some **blueberry picking and packing** for a few weeks or months in the season:

My husband has a job. Since four months he is working in a factory in the packing of blueberries. He's working there, but that's a seasonal job. After two months that will be it completely. (Afghan female, 2018)

After five months we started all to pick blueberry... It's really hard but I don't know about the people but for me I like to be independent, you know? (Syrian female, 2018)

Picking blueberries. It's a seasonal job. It's for a few months. It's for five months. After two months, it will come to an end and I will be jobless again. At the start, they were not giving us the job because I didn't know the language, English, but the boss of the factory for the blueberry packing was Indian. He was speaking in Urdu. I told him, "If I don't know English, I can speak Urdu and whatever job you tell me, I can do that." That's why he gave me the job there. (Afghan male, 2018)

Some of those interviewed in Coffs Harbour have gained **employment with families who had come as refugees themselves**, previously. However many refugees had already **gone to Sydney for work**, and this is likely to happen in the future too, as the region does not have enough job opportunities:

If we find a job, if we pick up the language, we will stay here; but if there is no job and things didn't get well, we may move. (Iraqi male, 2018)

I went to Sydney for two times, for three to four days, just working in construction. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Around 20 families... they move to Sydney for job, they look for work. It's hard for us. Like my husband, maybe you heard that many, many times, they all say that, just 'we need a job'. We like Coffs Harbour, we like to stay here, but if anyone move that is because they find a job. (Syrian female, 2018)



A major source of frustration felt by the refugee respondents was the **need to have Australian qualifications** to be given access to the labour market:

My husband wants to be in construction site. He says that when he completes his course, like his diploma or certificate... He needs a certificate. My husband studied management and business laws but he cannot work – he has studied in Afghanistan and he cannot work here, that is why he would love to do that in construction site. (Afghan female, 2018)

Companies, like the one that I want to work with them, they think because you are a migrant they think that you don't have the qualifications to work in this area. Because I've learned, worked for 15 years in electricians in Iraq but because I don't have a certificate from here they don't accept me, they think that I don't know anything about it. (Syrian male, 2018)

Also I work with a shop, African shop. She give me apprenticeship. Yeah, African hairdresser. Yeah, it's very hard, but we lucky, because she... When we arrived to Coffs, we met this lady, and we already told her I'm a barber, and I have skills, experience. A lot of experience. But I need a certificate. And we can't get anything from our country now, because we just left. It's Certificate III. No, just I am cutting hair, man and woman...And I will learn how they colouring, because it's different from our country. (Syrian male, 2018)

Among the adult refugees interviewed in Coffs Harbour were those who were not able to attend English classes or look for work, due to **caring responsibilities**:

I want to do job when my kids grow up. When we were in Pakistan I used to work with my husband and I want to be like a partner of my husband in everything, like I want to build a life together and when my children grow up and I learn more English, when my English becomes good, then I want to work. I would love to do teaching. I have taught in Afghanistan. (Afghan female, 2018)

I attended TAFE for five months only, because my mum was not fine. I had to take care of her, and to be with her at home. So I left TAFE. (Young Afghan female, 2018)

One interviewee had to **abandon English classes to earn money to support his family**:

The money and the bill which Centrelink gave us, that was not sufficient for this so I started working. The money that Centrelink was giving was not sufficient, therefore I left TAFE and I left learning the language and I started working to complete the needs of the house and everything for my family. (Afghan male, 2018)

**Centrelink allowances** are enough for only a modest lifestyle, as reported by a few interviewees in Coffs Harbour:

If we spend like Australians, Centrelink money wouldn't be enough for us; but we buy from second-hand shops, and we make food at home. We don't buy from restaurants. It is easy enough for us that way. (Iraqi male, 2018)

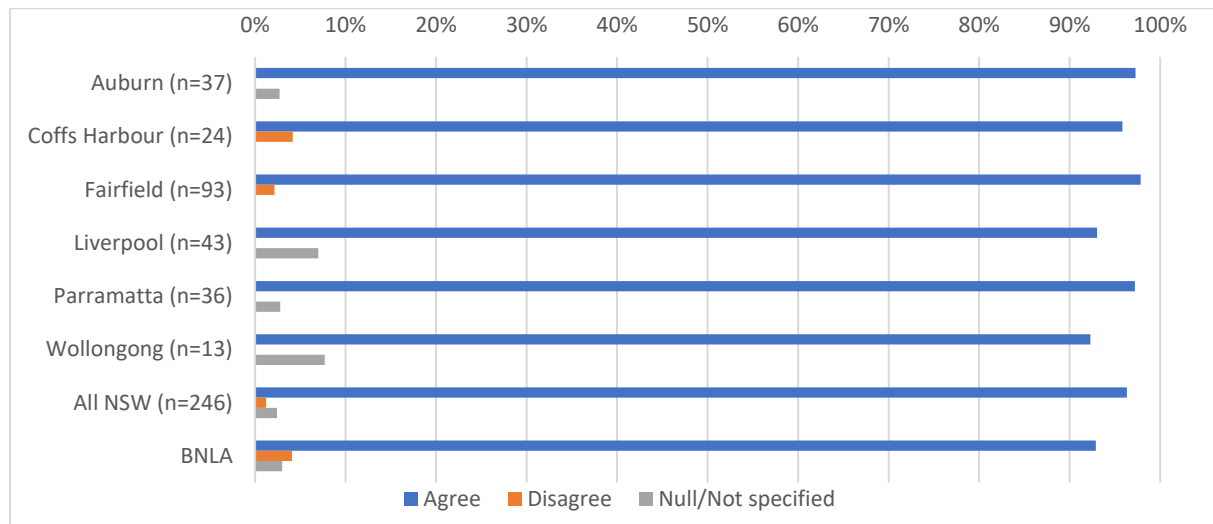
One woman explained that her husband's difficulties getting work have led to a **reversal of traditional gender roles** which has caused problems in the family's household:

Actually also it's major challenge for us, for me, for my sons, you know, because in our country we usually go outside, you work, he bring the money, he bring everything, you know, it's our culture we not say something different. So while here he just sit like a wife here at home. Sometime because I have a job, I work outside you know, sometimes we fight, 'Why you late?', 'What are you doing?' That is because he didn't have a job. (Syrian female, 2018)

One of the key reasons that refugees come to Australia is to find a safe environment to bring up their families. And **like refugees in most other NSW locations, every one of the young family members, and almost all of the adult family members (96%) in Coffs Harbour said that they felt safe living there (Figure 3).** One woman described the feeling of safety in Australia as a whole:

Yeah, absolutely we feel safe. That is the first thing we like. I think not just at Coffs Harbour, all Australia, all places in Australia. The first thing we be comfortable about – it's safe. (Syrian female, 2018)

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



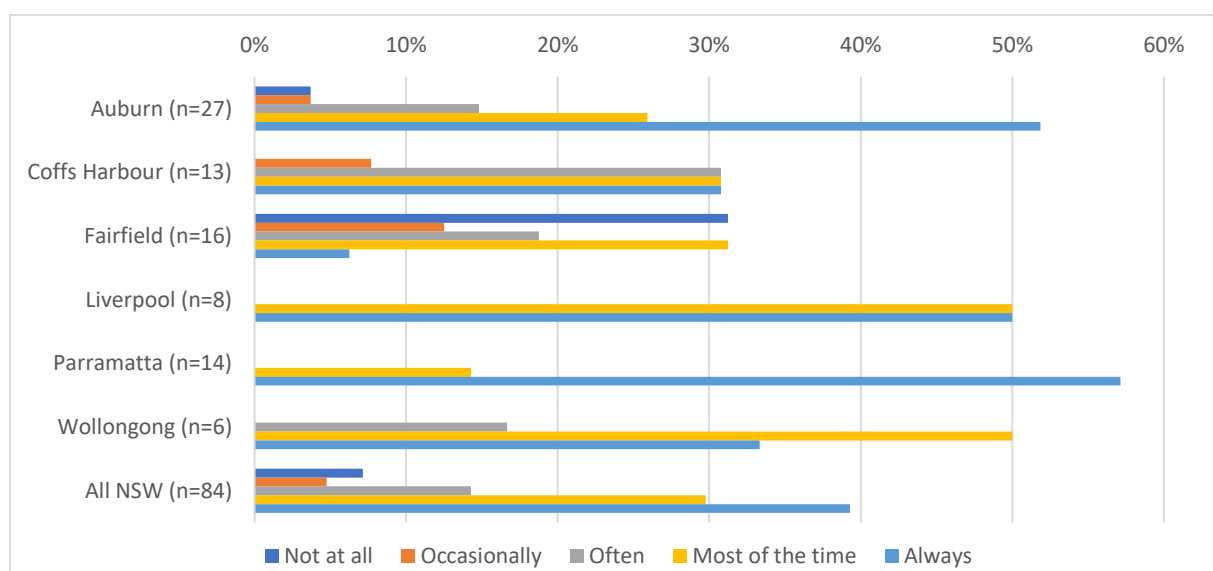
Others, including young people, thought that Coffs Harbour in particular is the best place to be:

Yeah, I like Coffs Harbour. When we went to Melbourne, there was good people, and teachers, and everything was fine; but I like most Coffs Harbour, because there was most of my friends and teachers, so I missed them, and I tell my mum to come back, and we came back. (Afghan female, age 12, 2018)

It's really good, yeah. It's safer than where I used to live before. (Afghan female, age 13, 2018)

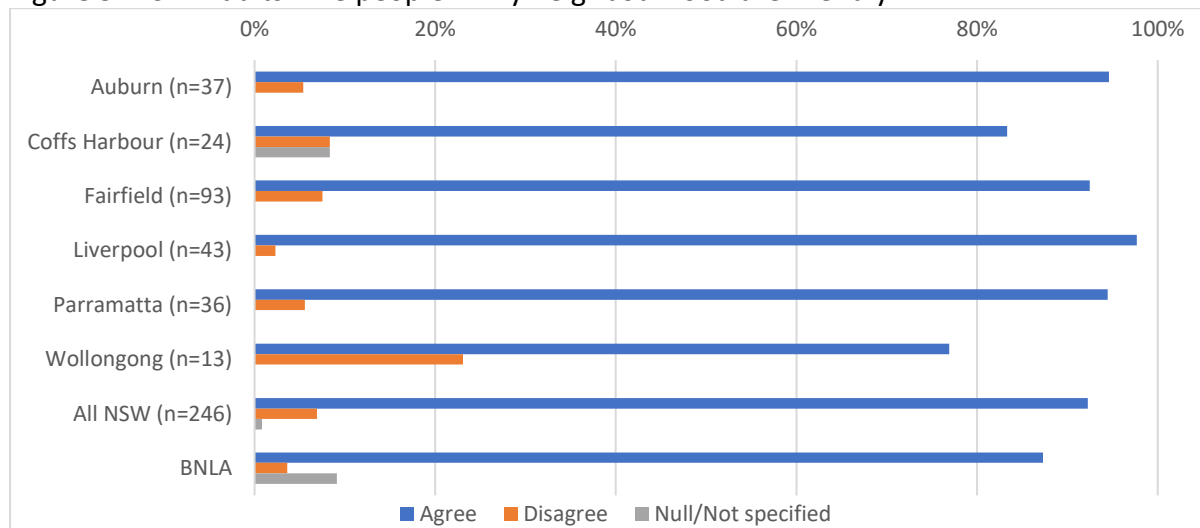
Children, in particular, feel that they belong in Coffs Harbour. **Nine out of ten young people in Coffs Harbour (93%) feel they belong to the local community 'often', 'most of the time' or 'always'** (Figure 4).

Figure 4: NSW Young People: Do you feel you belong to the local community?



**Friendly neighbours are an important factor in feeling welcome.** The local inhabitants of Coffs Harbour were well prepared to welcome the new arrivals, and since multiple families with similar backgrounds were settled in the area, familiarity within communities has been fostered. As a result, **eight out of ten adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour thought that their neighbours were friendly** (Figure 5).

Figure 5: NSW Adults: The people in my neighbourhood are friendly



Many interviewees said that **Coffs Harbour is a very welcoming place:**

The people are really good, but it depends on the person... When you are good with people, the people are good with you back. (Afghan male, 2018)

I am happy with the people, they're friendly. In Melbourne people are not as friendly as compared to here, like, when the people know that you are a refugee, they talk to you and they become friends with you. (Afghan female, 2018)

Wherever you go, like hospital, Centrelink, any other offices, we feel respected and tolerant and nobody gives you a hard look, everybody's so friendly. It is the same, like people are still friendly in street or in market and wherever you go. If you show respect we're going to respect you. (Syrian male, 2018)

Whenever they meet us, they talk to us with good behaviour. They talk to us and smile and they greet us. (Afghan female, 2018)

On the other hand, some of the adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour thought that **neighbours were friendly but kept to themselves**; or that **language barriers kept them from speaking to the neighbours** who are of different linguistic backgrounds to themselves:

People from Afghanistan, Iraq, China – yep, I meet new people at the classes. Yes, we talked to each other, we say 'hi' to each other, because we don't speak good English, we just say 'hi'. Stuff like that, 'How are you?' (Iraqi male, 2018)

The neighbours, we don't visit each other; it's not like Iraq. (Iraqi female, 2018)

Yeah, we like living in this neighbourhood, and we are good for all our neighbours, so they are also good for us. (Iraqi male, 2018)

This house next to us they are people of Burma and the other are, like some are different, and people come and go, like the house changes people. Yes. And people are good but this family we don't know their language and they don't know our language; they cannot speak English. (Afghan female, 2018)



**Some elements of the group of refugees who were interviewed in Coffs Harbour were less positive about settling into the new environment. Single women without children**, in particular, felt very isolated. One single Syrian female said that she did not know any of the neighbours and that they are not friendly. Her first two friends, who were Australian, were made through a shop, and while she had some friends at TAFE – they are Kurdish and African – she is scared of other people. The main drawback is her lack of English skills which so far had prevented her making friendships.

Another group having difficulties ‘fitting in’ is the **young people aged 17-21**. Having had a disrupted education, they are ‘too old’ for schools, and if accepted at a senior college age differences are not good for making friends. Similarly, at TAFE classes they are mixed with much older people. They need evening classes at TAFE if they were working part time, but these were currently not being provided due to limited capacity. Thus they are having a hard time finding suitable opportunities and as a result they do not feel motivated and feel ‘lost’. Age matters to forming friendships, as explained by a 17-year-old, especially when he compares his situation to his younger brother (12 years of age):

I had friends [at school], yes. Probably friends from my countries. Yeah, I had many from Iraq. Yes, I had. From Afghanistan I had some, yes. I do. But from Australia is really less. Probably the reason why, because they’re all growing together. They grow up in their same age, they start from... all of them in the same class, and they grow... They grow until Year 12, and they grow all together in the same class. When I came Year 12 or Year 10, I came to Australia, and I don’t know. They don’t know me, they don’t trust me. I don’t know what they want. We don’t know each other very well. My brother - he’ll have more friends, yeah. At the end of high school. (Syrian male, age 17, 2018)

As we wanted to study here, to go to school, me and my brother wanted to continue our studies; but as we didn’t know the laws and regulations of the education system of here, as they told us that we wanted to go to school, but in school they said that, “You are over-age.” I was 21 years old, and my brother was 19 years old. We could not attend the schools. But when we went to TAFE, there was lots of people over-age, and people who were not of our age. So we become... like, my brother become a bit sad, and he could not learn properly. Then going for some months, and then he quit TAFE. It was kind of like we can say that he was happy to go to school and start his studies from really beginning; he could not do that. And when he goes to TAFE, that didn’t... like, worked out what he wanted, then it becomes a bit... that makes him depressed and sad, so he left everything. And I do the same. (Young Afghan female, 2018)

One of the adult female refugees in Coffs Harbour was able to describe, from a teacher’s point of view, the difficulties children face in negotiating a new school environment, through her **experience of teaching** at the school in Australia:

I said, ‘Why not. I’ve already liked to teach.’ But now I change my mind, because it’s different from our country. It’s hard here than our country. Yeah. How you communicate with a student, it’s hard here. In our countries, they respect the teacher more than here. Yeah, Kurdish students also change because school is different here. No, they respect me. They okay. Because I still use my – how I treat them, like in my country, little bit. But like, in here. Because they need sometimes to be hard with them. Little bit, not a lot. Sometimes you... you will be very soft with them, because some of them have a lot of trauma. Sometimes I’m crying with them, when they are telling me something. Just two days a week I do this. (Syrian female, 2018)

**Young people had more opportunity than adults to interact with people of different ethnicities. Being together in classrooms with non-refugee children leads to diverse social groups:**

Lots of friends. I only have one friend from Afghanistan and the other ones are from other countries. China and another country, Africa. Some are from here. (Afghan male, age 12, 2018)

Yeah I have many friends at school. Even all of my class. There's one girl from Afghanistan, and all of them is from Australia. (Afghan female, age 12, 2018)

Yeah, a lot of friends. A lot of them are from Australia and some of them are Afghan girls and from Syria. (Afghan female, age 13, 2018)

Yes, I have many friends at school. There's like Iraq, like my brother said – Syria, and Afghanistan people. Yeah. And then some of them are Australian people. (Syrian male, age 12, 2018)

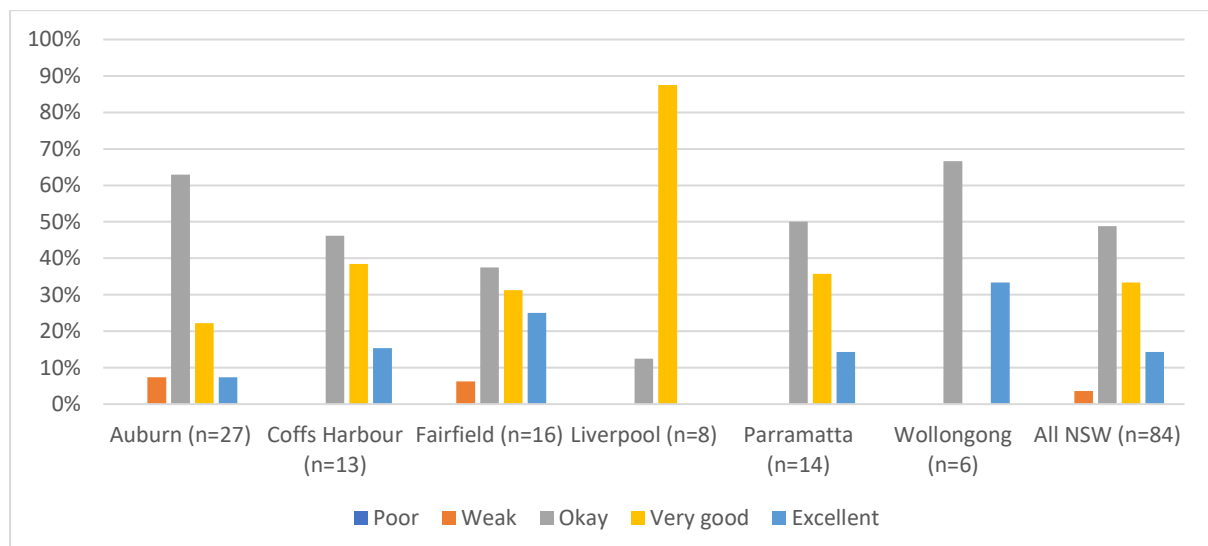
**Interaction with others gives the opportunity to practise English, which is the key to learning a language:**

Yeah my English is good now, probably when I had contacting with the people on street, or on school. Because we need that. The language is the key of the world. Probably I contact with the teachers, with the student... Because we don't have... most can't speak my other language. Even the new arrival from Afghanistan, if I want to contact with him, I should speak English, because they couldn't speak Arabic or Kurdish, and I couldn't speak Dari. We have a different language. But the key for the contacting together was English, and we need to learn English. (Syrian male, age 17, 2018)

I knew some basic words, some nouns. I couldn't make proper sentences in English when I came. I went to TAFE. I was 19 years old. So I went to TAFE and I did Certificate II and finished in one month and I did Certificate III and I finished it in six months and I got this one. Then I started Year 11. I had a six-month gap where I didn't have anything to do so I went to a school. I sat in the senior college with normal Aussie students to just get the language and that helped me a lot. It was like an extension course. I wasn't enrolled but the principal let me sit in the class. (Young Afghan male, 2018)

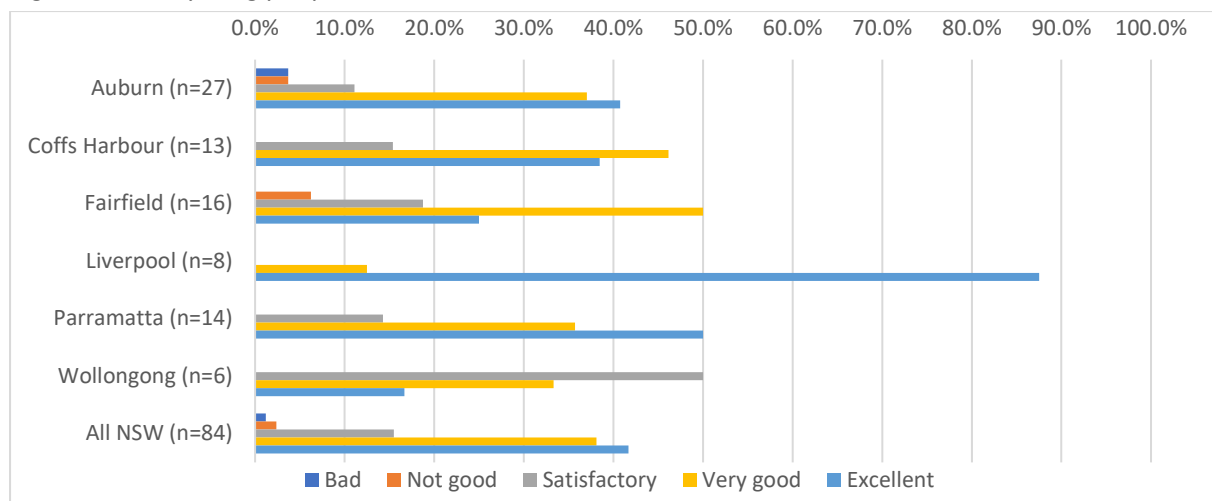
We asked the young people about their English language skills. No young people in Coffs Harbour thought that their spoken English was 'poor' or 'weak'. **Almost half of the young people in Coffs Harbour (46%) thought that their spoken English was 'okay'; more than half (53%) thought it was 'very good' or 'excellent'** (Figure 6).

Figure 6: NSW young people: ability to speak English



In spite of the difficulties experienced by some of the young adults, **all of the young people in Coffs Harbour who took part in the survey were satisfied with school or TAFE, and four out of five (85%) thought school/TAFE was ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ (Figure 7).**

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



**Along with the young people, parents also thought that the schools in Coffs Harbour were very good for their children:**

There is very kind and good people. I have good teachers; they are kind, and... our lesson, they learn us. They are so good. (Afghan female, age 12, 2018)

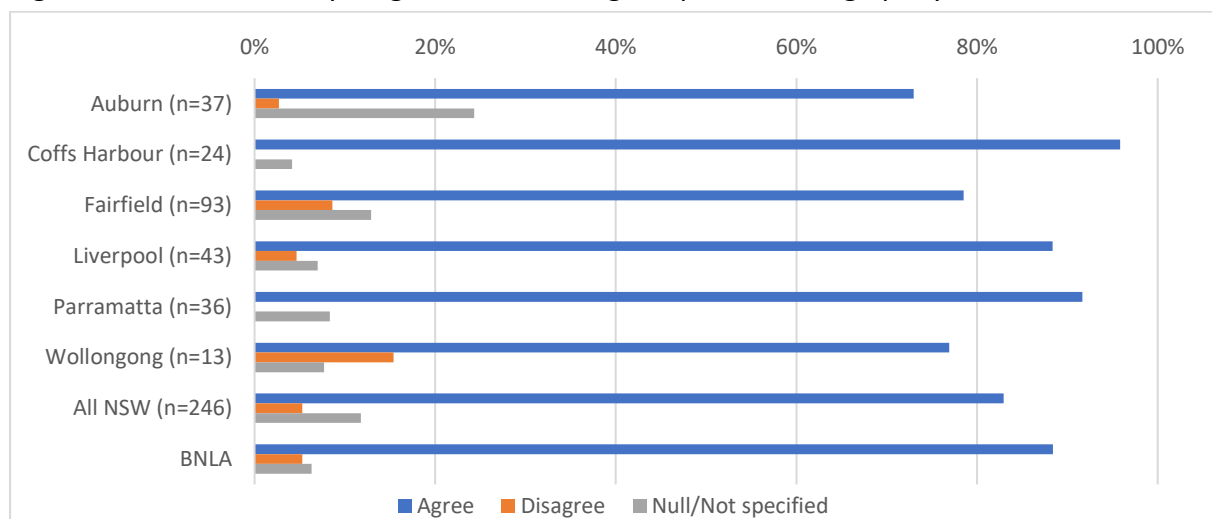
Yes, I like the school and the system. The teachers are really good. The teachers are really caring and encouraging the students. The children want to study and I received a certificate from the school two times, and their teachers encouraged them and the children love to go to school. (Afghan female, 2018)

They had a translation person, he came every two days in a week, and he translating. This really helped me. Yeah. He’s speaking Arabic. Yeah, just he’s in the class, and when the teacher’s speaking, or giving the lesson, something I couldn’t understand or I didn’t know what it means; maybe just I have my hand up, and I say... maybe I will ask the teachers, and he will explain it by Arabic, and I will understand that. (Syrian male, age 17, 2018)

Yeah, I like school. I learn new things. I have new friends. It’s so fun. (Afghan male, age 12, 2018)

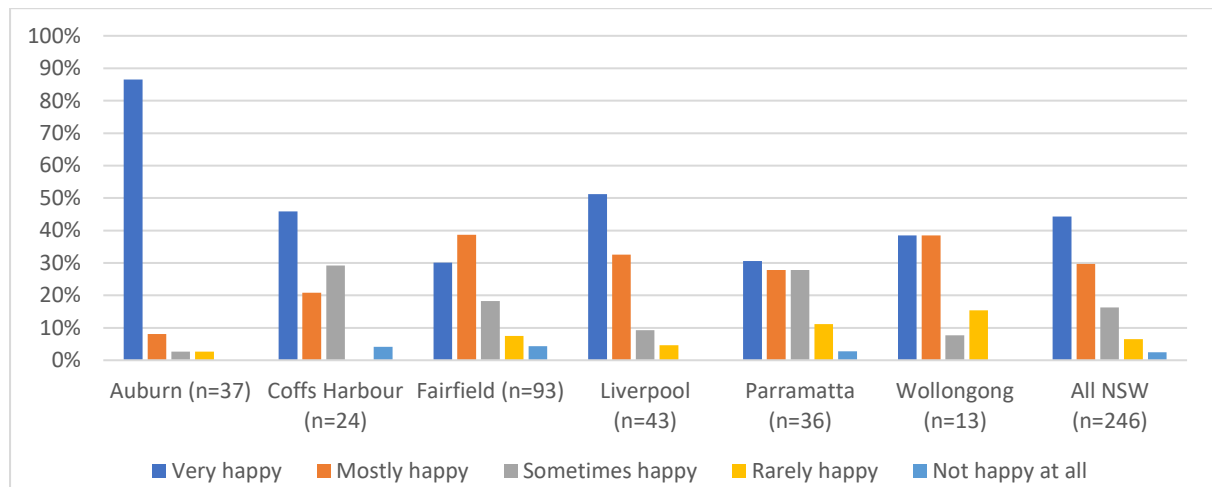
The positive experiences of the children described above contribute to **nine out of ten parents in Coffs Harbour – the highest proportion in NSW – believing that their neighbourhood is a good place to bring up their children (Figure 8).**

Figure 8: NSW Adults: My neighbourhood is a good place to bring up my children.



**Moving your family to a new country is difficult, particularly when you are escaping war and conflict. Nevertheless, almost every adult surveyed in Coffs Harbour (96%) had found happiness in Australia, and almost half of them (46%) were ‘very’ happy with their life now (Figure 9).**

Figure 9: NSW adults: how happy are you with your current life in Australia?



Adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour spoke a lot about **settling in a regional area in comparison to bigger cities**. Some prefer the calmness and closeness of a small place, while others miss the big city life:

The best things about living in Coffs are the schools, that there are not too many refugees, there is a lot of nature just like in Syria – trees, sea, mountains. The worst aspects are no work and some boredom. (Syrian female, 2018)

Some of the issues raised were limited opportunities for study, with no university nearby; and the dependence on cars, with limited public transport being available. The lack of transport was perceived as a life-threatening problem where health issues are involved, and refugees lack the confidence to call an ambulance. Additionally, a cemetery for the Ezidi is desired, as a number of the elderly are now frail. Therefore, **many acknowledged the high possibility of eventually moving to a bigger place**:

We are happy here. We have no problems in Coffs Harbour. Everything is good but we are just worried about our children, like when they complete their high school, for further studies they have to go to another state. We have talked to many people in other cities. Compared to other cities, Coffs Harbour is really good. But in terms of education, they don't have a university. Therefore we'll have to move to another city for the education of our children... (Afghan male, 2018)

It's good to stay here; it's safer, and a good place. But for work, it's hard to find jobs and work here. There are less jobs for people. If we say for jobs, it's not good; and for living, it's very good and safe place. We want to complete our studies here and want our language in English to be strong and good enough. When we are good enough there, then we might move there. (Young Afghan female, 2018)

The reason behind moving to Sydney, I would work there and my sons might work there so they can earn money. (Afghan female, 2018)

Mum wasn't happy to come here when we came here. She wasn't happy because we didn't have any Afghan restaurants or Afghan shops... mainly the food and a mosque and not many people around Coffs Harbour, and she was feeling a bit odd or alone in Coffs Harbour... Actually, when we arrived here there were more Afghan than at the moment. Most of them left. To Sydney, Melbourne. A few went to Adelaide. My brother and I decided to move to a bigger city but we said, 'No, we just had a big move. We'd better rest for the next couple of months and then we can move.' I don't know if it was a mistake or... I didn't want to move to Sydney... (Young Afghan male, 2018)

**Most of the hopes for the future surrounded family.** Adults interviewed in Coffs Harbour hoped to be reunited with loved ones scattered around the world, and for their children to flourish in their new home, Australia.

**Parents were confident about their children's future,** but also put some pressure on the children, due to their high expectations:

We came from Iraq just to build a future for the kids, so that they can be able to go to school. We became old, it's kind of over for us, to go to school and learn. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Yes, there is a good future for my children in Australia, because it's safe and there's no worry like in Afghanistan, where no-one can go to school because there's bomb blasts everywhere and they will burn the school and kill the children. They can go easily without any fear. (Afghan female, 2018)

I'm happy with the future of our children because as compared to Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the law and order there, this is much better than these countries. In Afghanistan because of the situation in the law and order they could not have good future, my children did not have good future in Pakistan. We all lived as a refugee there, like we could not have a good future there, and we think they would have a good future, but then God knows what will happen next. (Afghan female, 2018)

**Many families dream of reunification** with their loved ones. One Syrian family are very happy with their life in Australia but the female head of the family is sick with depression as she is missing her family and wants them here. Others explained:

Yes, I could sponsor my daughters. For filling of the forms for the sponsorship, we went to two offices. They said they cannot help us in filling these forms, and they told us that you have to hire a lawyer, and pay for the lawyer, so he can help you to sponsor... Yes, we talk to the office, to SSI, and they told us that... they give us someone's number; we call, and they... The office told me that 'He will help you'. We called the person, but he didn't come, and he told me that he could not help us. (Afghan female, 2018)

Yeah, I talk to my mum, and all her sons are with ISIS, in ISIS captivity. She doesn't know anything about them. I'm the only one, and I'm here, and when I talk to her through phone, she just cries. She wants to come join me here in Australia. (Iraqi male, 2018)

Yes, my husband's brother in Lebanon try to get to another country. And we also feel like for ... to sponsor him. Yeah, but we don't hear anything. Last year we put the form in. We didn't hear anything... There is a STARTTS organisation, if you know that; they sent person from Sydney, he speak Arabic. He take all our information, he said, 'I will send... fill all that form'. Because when we came, we said, 'It's hard to fill this form all in English'. And we need to write story and everything. Yeah, and ... a lot of family, 20, 25, 30 family, we give all our information to him; and after that, he went to Sydney. We didn't hear anything. But after that, he said, 'I will send all the paperwork'. (Syrian female, 2018)

**Some adults, especially the young, dare to look towards their future in Australia with hope:**

When we left Iraq we came here with an idea to settle here in Australia, to be provided with a good land, good services and to become Australian citizens. (Syrian male, 2018)

We're going to be safe here, and we'll not be worry about ourselves, and we may have a future here. (Young Iraqi female, 2018)

I was happy, and I was thinking that now I can achieve what I want, and I want to reach to the place where I want, and I'll be free. Free of everything that... whatever I want, by myself, I can do that. (Young Afghan female, 2018)



## CONCLUSION

All of the newly arrived Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Coffs Harbour 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.

Families interviewed in Coffs Harbour were very satisfied with the on-arrival services provided to them and their families by Settlement Services International and Anglicare. 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. However, service organisations in Coffs Harbour were well prepared to support the large cohort of new arrivals.

Many of the newly arrived refugees in Coffs Harbour had skilled jobs in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan before the conflict – **their greatest concern is to find a job in Australia**. Most were very frustrated that they could not work and contribute to their new society. One frustration was that they could not use their qualifications to gain suitable employment. Another frustration was the lack of permanent employment opportunities, with only low-skill seasonal work available in the region.

Some adult refugees in Coffs Harbour 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 most with an opportunity to make new friends in Australia. However, young adults had difficulty fitting into existing educational structures, and there was a concern that there was little opportunity for adults to practice English language skills in the wider community.

**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 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.**