



ACL rebuilds lives

by Jacqui Elson-Green

Australia's largest English language provider, ACL, has introduced a suite of courses to cater for growing demand for migrant and refugee education.

ACL recently released figures which indicate that more than 10,000 students were studying the Adult Migrant English Program in its colleges and centres in 2006-07.

Almost 2000 students aged between 18 and 25 were enrolled during the same period with the top countries of birth being Iraq, China, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Sudan.

The language courses in western Sydney and Adelaide are part of the a

Commonwealth program to integrate refugees and newly arrived migrants into the community.

Jennifer Whitmarsh, general manager of government programs, recently kicked off an employment pathways initiative to improve students' job prospects.

She says that while English language is part of every course, students – particularly those with troubled backgrounds – frequently lack the confidence needed to start a new job and the necessary knowledge to succeed once employed.

Language and contextual knowledge are embedded into programs, which range from occupational health and safety to safe food handling – courses which lead to local employment.

All students exit with a qualification which can range from a statement of attainment through to certificate level.

Whitmarsh says these programs give students a first step toward their first job in Australia. She notes that working with migrants and refugees is often very moving, not least because success in the course often determines a family's life chances.

Karen Aylott, acting operations manager for the Adult Migrant English Program recognised the need for youth classes to meet the specific needs of young people aged 18 to 24.

The classes focuses on making students job ready, teaching skills to cope with a new environment with a particular emphasis on recent arrivals. Classes are tailored to student needs with women-only classes provided where appropriate.

A citizenship course is taught as part of the AMEP covering areas such as Australia and its people, democratic government, your rights, responsibilities and privileges as a citizen and law and democracy.

Since 2005, ACL has settled more than 6600 people through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship-funded Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.

Designed to help people rebuild their lives in Australia, the initiative provides support designed to meet initial settlement needs with emphasis placed on sensitivity to cultural differences and minimum intrusion into individual's lives.

