

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011

Travellers Aid Australia

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ABOUT TRAVELLERS AID AUSTRALIA

At Travellers Aid Australia:

Our Vision is for travellers at the point of need to have access to services which are relevant and to assist in providing solutions with dignity.

Our Mission is to assist travellers at the point of need and to ensure that travellers reach their destination safely and confidently.

Our Purpose is to provide support, advice and assistance at the point of need to the travelling public with special requirements and to those in emergency situations.

Our Values are compassion, integrity and fairness. We are governed by and believe in displaying these values at all times to users of our services, our clients, our members, staff and volunteers.

About our organisation

Travellers Aid Australia is a not-for-profit organisation with a proud 95-year history.

We provide vital services and dignified outcomes to travellers in need, including those with special needs and those facing emergency situations. Our clients include seniors, people with a disability, people with mobility challenges, students and their families, general public transport users and people facing financial disadvantage or unexpected emergency situations.

With a strong sense of social justice, we are committed to changing attitudes towards travel access and equity. We know that practical travel assistance can make a large difference to a person's participation in their everyday life.

Since 1916 we have dedicated ourselves to innovating and developing our services so that they best meet people's needs. Today they include:

- **Emergency Relief:** Transport options and advice to help travellers in emergency situations feel safe and empowered through subsidised travel tickets for medical, family, employment matters and other reasons, as well as information and referrals onto crisis accommodation and other supports
- **Pathways to Education:** Provision of myki, Metcard and V/Line tickets to enable disadvantaged students to attend school
- **Buggy and Personal Guidance Service:** Helping ensure safe passage at Southern Cross station for people with mobility needs
- **Travellers Aid Access Service (TAAS):** Free personal care assistance to travellers with a disability or seniors
- **Medical Companion Project:** Assistance for travellers getting to and from medical or health appointments

- **Mobility Equipment Hire:** Assisting people who are frail, aged or living with a disability through mobility aids
- **Internet Access:** Internet access for the general public with JAWS software available
- **Transport Information:** We also provide transport information and rest facilities for people in transit, as well as a professional meeting room in the heart of Melbourne's CBD for hire.

We deliver our services from two primary locations: Southern Cross station and Flinders Street station.

Our **Pathways to Education program** however, operates out of our Emergency Relief office in Southern Cross station.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

What is the Pathways to Education program?

Our Pathways to Education program is part of our larger Emergency Relief program. It provides student travel passes to young people who are experiencing financial difficulties. These travel passes help them attend school and social opportunities and stay connected with family, friends and the community.

Without this assistance, students and families who are unable to afford travel passes can have higher rates of school absenteeism, stress and risk fare evasion.

In collaboration with referring agencies, such as youth and family services, schools and migrant centres, we provide monthly, half-yearly and annual travel passes to students in need, including:

- Students from families of low socio-economic backgrounds
- Students experiencing various stages of homelessness
- Students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The program is unique. In contrast to other relief and assistance programs that provide assistance with school fees, books and uniforms, our Pathways to Education focuses on providing travel assistance to students.

What are the Pathways to Education program's overarching objectives?

The Pathways to Education program's primary objective is to assist students who are facing financial disadvantage to get to school and social activities so that they can complete their education and stay connected with family, friends and the community.

How does the program operate?

To access this program, which is available at Southern Cross station, students or referral agencies are required to call ahead to discuss their eligibility, currently available funding and appointment times.

1. To ensure that students are assisted when they need it most, the majority of travel tickets under the Pathways to Education program are issued in January and February, immediately before and after the commencement of the school year. When passes are no longer available, people are put on a waiting list.
2. In the middle of the calendar year in June and July, half-yearly passes are distributed if funding is available.
3. Since tickets are issued on a calendar year basis, any unexpended financial year end funds are carried forward to the next financial year thereby covering a complete calendar year.

To ensure that value for money is obtained, we purchase yearly or half-yearly travel passes where possible. These are valid across the whole of Victoria, in Zone 1, Zone 2 and V/Line areas and expire at the end of February of the following year. This means that students can travel using their passes in the first month of starting their new school year and during the end of year school holidays.

While all tickets attracted an average 3.1% fare increase in March 2011, yearly and half-yearly tickets continue to attract significant discounts. A monthly Zone 1 + 2 Concession Card, for example, costs \$87.10 and subsequently adds up to more than \$1,000 over a 12-month period. In contrast, a student's yearly travel ticket costs \$422, resulting in cost-avoidance to the tune of \$624 for each yearly ticket purchased. Half yearly tickets cost \$220, as opposed to \$522.60 for six lots of monthly tickets. The exception to this is when we purchase tickets for tertiary students. As they are not eligible for half-yearly or yearly passes, we usually issue up to 8 monthly tickets per year for this group.

How are eligibility and transport disadvantage identified?

Eligible students come from low income, vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds and experience financial difficulties affecting their ability to pay for transport – including students who are facing homelessness. Students aged up to 25 years old, part time or full time who are in primary, secondary or tertiary education are eligible for the program. People aged over 25 years may also be eligible for assistance depending on their circumstances.

In general, students are referred to the program by other agencies, such as youth and family services, school social workers, counsellors and teachers, migrant resource centre and migrant information centres.

With demand for the program high, it is not feasible to conduct individual, in-depth assessments of each student who requests assistance through the program. Subsequently, in the event that a student is linked to a referring agency such as a school or migrant agency and their circumstances are known by these referral agencies, we make assessments about a student's 'transport disadvantage' based on the recommendation of the agency referring them on. When submitting a referral, agencies are required to advise the Emergency Relief officers of the needs of each student or family, the school they attend and their year of study.

In instances of self-referral Travellers Aid Australia staff will interview and assess the student or family's finances through provision of income statements from Centrelink, expenditure and previous assessments from a referring agency.

All yearly and half-yearly student passes are loaded onto a registered student myki.

Who provides the service?

In 2010-2011, Travellers Aid Australia employed 1.3 EFT staff member to provide Emergency Relief advice and assistance over the available working hours of the service.

We employ staff who are skilled and experienced in providing our ER services. It is vital that they have a special combination of skills, expertise, approachability, resilience and empathy to provide Emergency Relief to people who are facing hardship.

The skills and expertise of our ER staff, which includes their qualifications in social work, community welfare and counselling is recorded in *Our Staff and Support Services*.

How is the program evaluated?

Throughout the year Travellers Aid Australia conducts evaluation surveys with students to seek their feedback about the program. Feedback is also sought from referring agencies and schools about the program.

In addition to month-to-month monitoring of the program, this report forms the end-of-financial year evaluation of the program. It helps ensure that objectives are being met and patterns identified.

How is the Pathways to Education program funded?

Since its inception the program has been generously funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), philanthropy, other agency and general donations. Notwithstanding V/Line who provide in-kind travel ticket support, we do not receive any funding from public transport operators or the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Southern Cross Station Pty Ltd and the Department of Transport also contribute to in-kind support via the provision of office and services accommodation at Southern Cross Station.

SUMMARY

Why is the program needed?

This year, Travellers Aid Australia issued **542** tickets to **367** students who required assistance with getting to school.

At one stage during 2010-2011, we also had 350 students on our waiting list for available travel passes.

The beginning of the school year is an expensive time. Many families and young people struggle with the temporary rises in costs associated with education. While a public education is technically free, many people experience difficulties in meeting associated costs such as text books, camps, uniforms and transport. These people are not in a position to opt for the more cost-effective method of purchasing yearly or even monthly, travel tickets due to the high upfront cost that is required.

At the same time, according to the 2009 report "Cost shifting in education: Implications for government, the community sector and low-income families", the cost of education has mostly shifted from the state to individuals who then seek assistance from the community sector. Where Government assistance *does* exist, travel assistance is not provided. Subsequently since 2004-2005, demand has grown for travel passes that allow young people to get to school without the financial burden of paying for transport or risking costly infringement notices.

What are the impacts of not receiving a travel pass to attend school?

The travel passes we provide to young people give them 'transport security' and the confidence that they can get to and from school and other extracurricular activities safely, easily and reliably. It is a major influence in young people's academic application towards their studies, hopes and aspirations for their future.

Being unable to travel to school due to a lack of finances can lead to absenteeism, fare evasion, stress, depression or an inability to focus or concentrate. Social isolation and/or antisocial behaviour may also occur as low income students have less opportunity to be socially included, attend activities, catch up with friends or visit their family.

Numerous studies show that students who underperform or do not complete their education are often disadvantaged in the future. Statistically, they experience reduced opportunities, increased rates of unemployment and an inability to gain the skills and training they desire at a later date.

Elsewhere, fare evasion can result in fines that students or their families cannot pay due to their limited budgets. If these fines are followed through in a court of law, the problem exacerbates. Ultimately the community ends up paying the costs as vast resources are consumed from legal, community and transport operator services. Metlink has estimated that fare evasion has a net cost of \$80 million to taxpayers (ABC.net.au April 2011). This is on top of the impact that fare evasion has on individuals themselves, since they can suffer from increased stress and anxiety as a result of being unable to afford fares.

Throughout the report, we provide case-studies which highlight the difficult circumstances that students can sometimes face in getting to school. These case studies demonstrate how the assistance that we provide helps alleviate problems and disadvantage that would otherwise be faced.

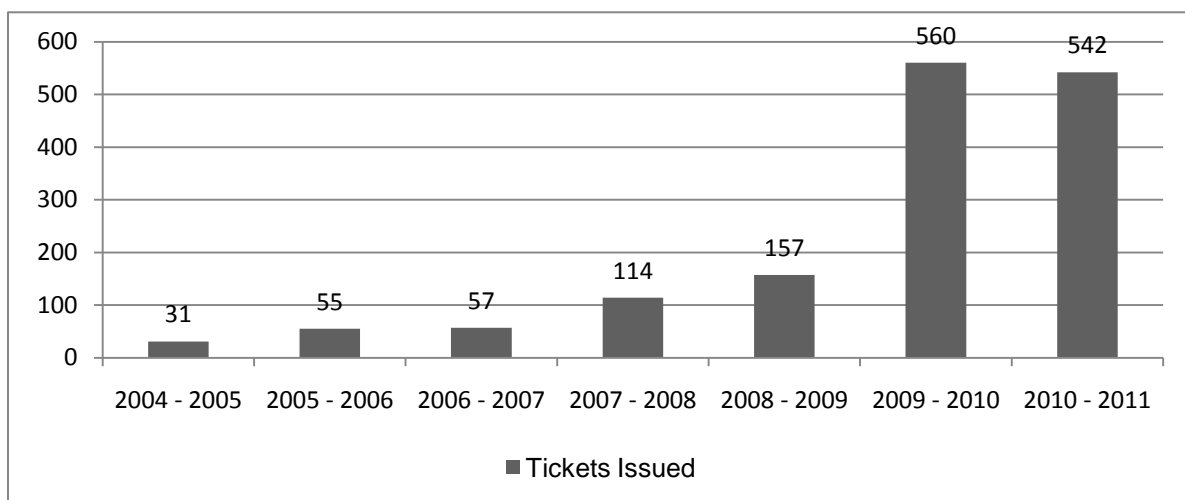
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Demand is outpacing supply. We issued **542** travel tickets to **367** students. However, our waiting list for travel passes has continued to grow each year. At one stage during 2010-2011 we had **350** students on our waiting list for travel passes.

Table 1: Number of students assisted in the program

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Students Assisted	367	397	112	64	75

Chart 1: Tickets issued to students over the years



We successfully fulfilled **97%** of equivalent demand from last year.

This is despite a one-off Global Financial Crisis Grant from the Department of Families, Housing and Community Services (FaHCSIA) no longer being available.

Chart 1 also shows the dramatic increase in the number of tickets that have been issued to students since 2009-2010.

CASE STUDY 1 – NIRMALA’S STORY*

Nirmala arrived in Australia a couple of years ago from Sudan.

She carried with her five children while her husband stayed behind to help the rest of his family. Unfortunately, he was killed shortly after Nirmala and the children left Sudan. The family only heard of his death months later.

Nirmala had very limited English and her children had regularly been attending English classes the previous year. This year the children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. With their special needs with English as a second language however, they were not enrolled at their local schools but at schools further away that could better cater for their needs.

Due to language barriers and a lack of support to help her look after her children, Nirmala had not been able to work since her arrival in Australia. Subsequently when they heard about her case, a migrant organisation contacted Travellers Aid Australia for further assistance with travel tickets to allow the children to keep up their studies.

The case worker came down with the children to process their yearly tickets for 2011. Five yearly tickets were issued and myki processed for this family. The eldest son was very grateful as those tickets would allow him to finish high school and keep his siblings educated.

Unfortunately due to a lack of guaranteed long-term funding, we could not promise further assistance for the following year. Nevertheless, the eldest son who is now 17 years of age is confident that he can find a job during the school holidays to support his siblings over the coming year.

*Names and identifying information have been changed for each case study

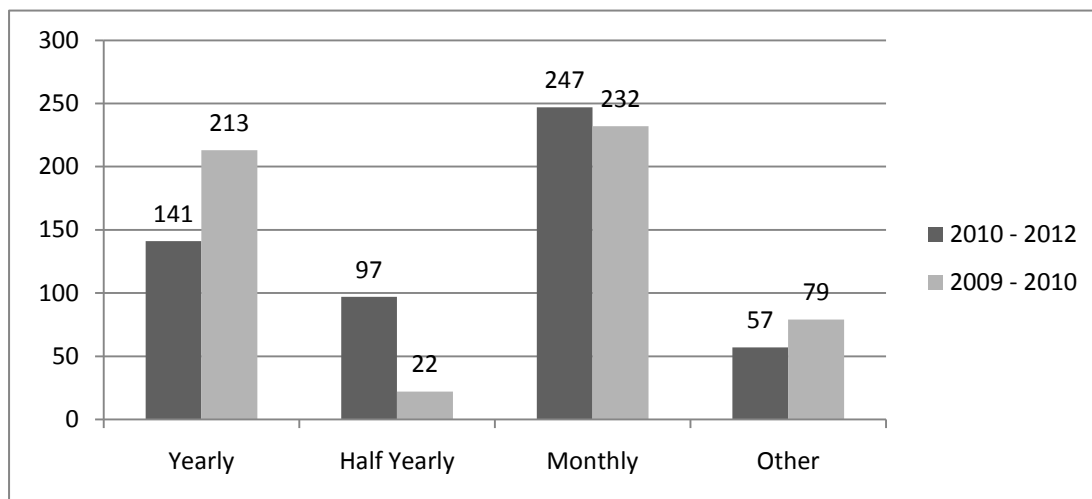
Costs and type of tickets issued

The total cost of student tickets issued was **\$104,424.20** (inclusive of GST).

Compared to last financial year where the total cost was \$113,513.80 (inclusive of GST) **\$9,089** less was spent in 2010-2011. This can be attributed to reductions in funding availability and changes to the types of tickets we provided to students (e.g. monthly, half-yearly). No discount applies to bulk purchases of yearly or half-yearly tickets.

Chart 2 shows the types of tickets we have issued to students over the past two years. As large numbers of students were placed on waiting lists for half-yearly tickets, we issued less yearly tickets than the year previously and significantly increased the number of half yearly tickets we provided. The slight reduction (i.e. of **18** passes) in total tickets can be partly attributed to changes in the types of tickets we provide to students (e.g. monthly, half-yearly). It is not a reflection of decreasing demand.

Chart 2: Types of travel passes issued



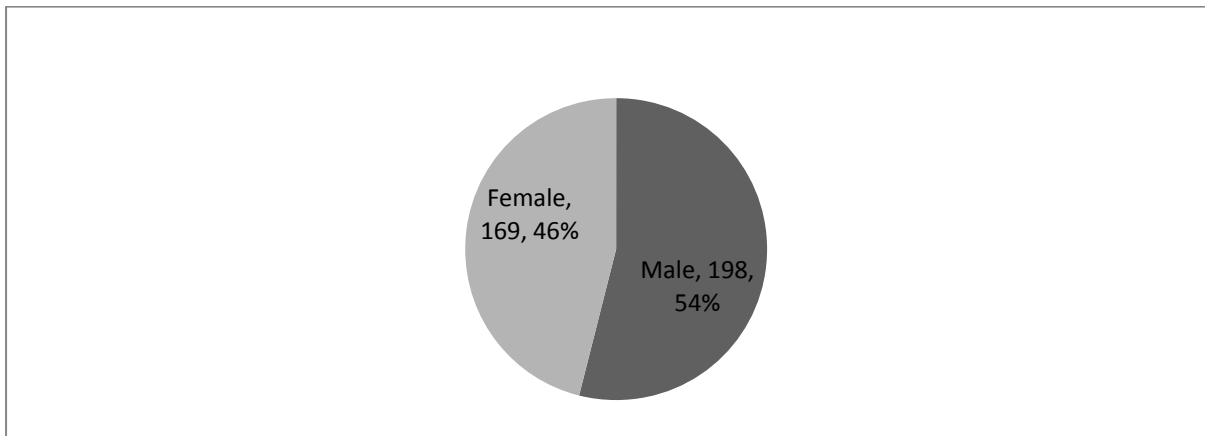
We remain committed to exploring further funding options for supporting students and their families in 2012.

WHO AND HOW WE ASSIST

Gender of clients assisted

This year, of the students we assisted, **198 (54%)** students were male and **169 (46%)** were female. This contrasts the previous year where more females than males were assisted.

Chart 3: Students assisted by gender

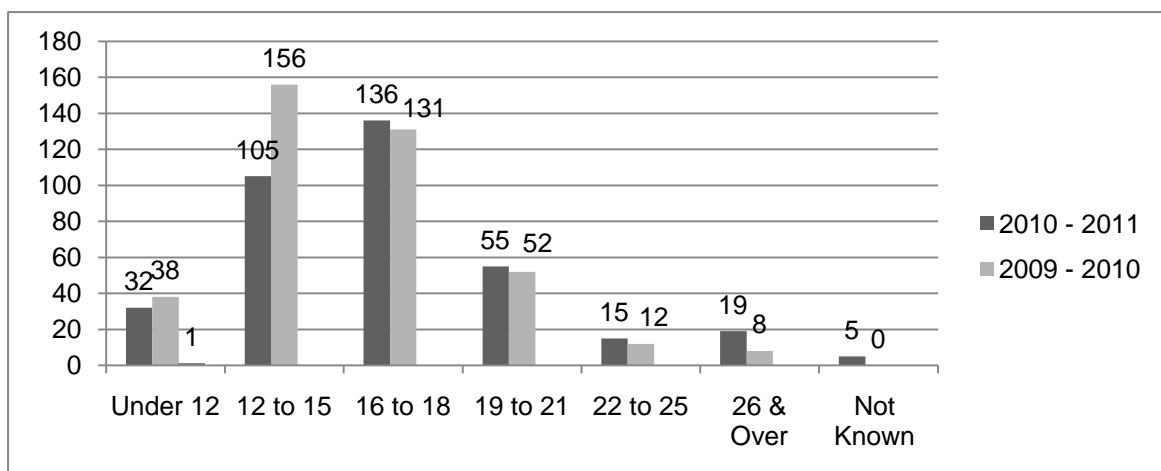


Age groups of students

As with the previous year, we assisted students across all eligible age brackets.

Fewer 12-15 year olds were assisted this year and more people in the 16-18 year old and the 26 years and over age brackets were assisted due to their circumstances. It is likely this relates to an issue that we discuss later in this report, where there is an increasing need for disadvantaged students to be assisted right throughout their school years and university years and not as a one-off. Repeat visits each school year from the same students are taking place.

Chart 4: Students by age group

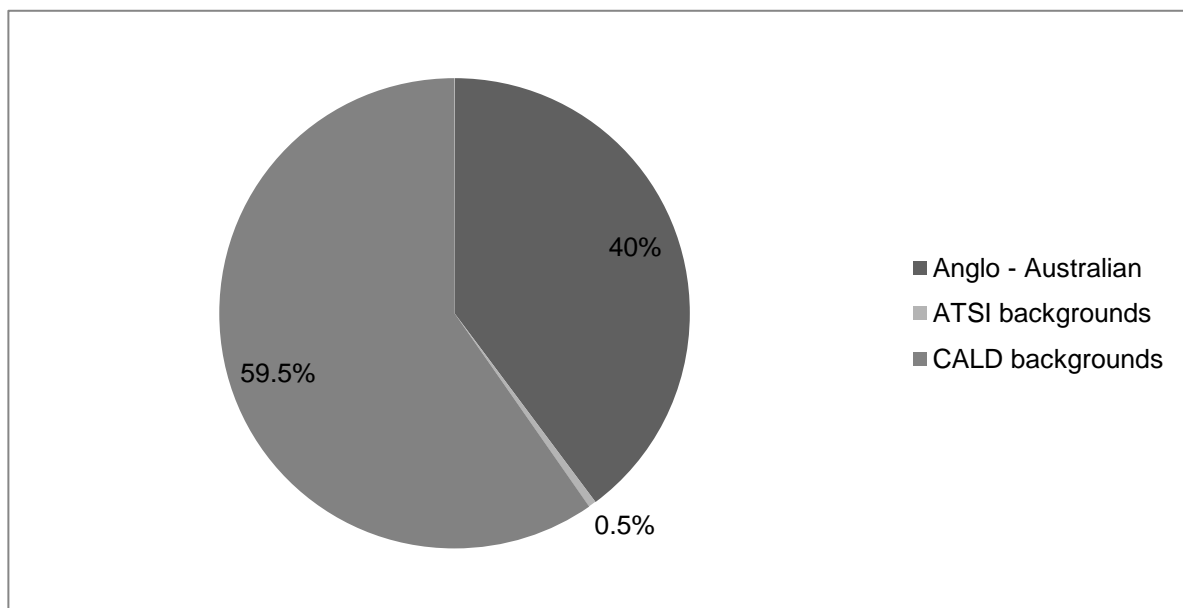


The number of students in primary school (i.e. the under 12 age bracket) continues to be comparatively low. Possibly, parents of primary school children drive or walk their children to local schools, rather than encouraging use of public transport. More often than not, secondary schools and universities are not always in walking distance and so older students are more likely to need public transport to get to school. Furthermore, if a local public secondary school is not able to meet a student's specific needs, they sometimes travel long distances to attend a school that better caters to them and helps them develop their full potential.

Cultural identity of assisted students

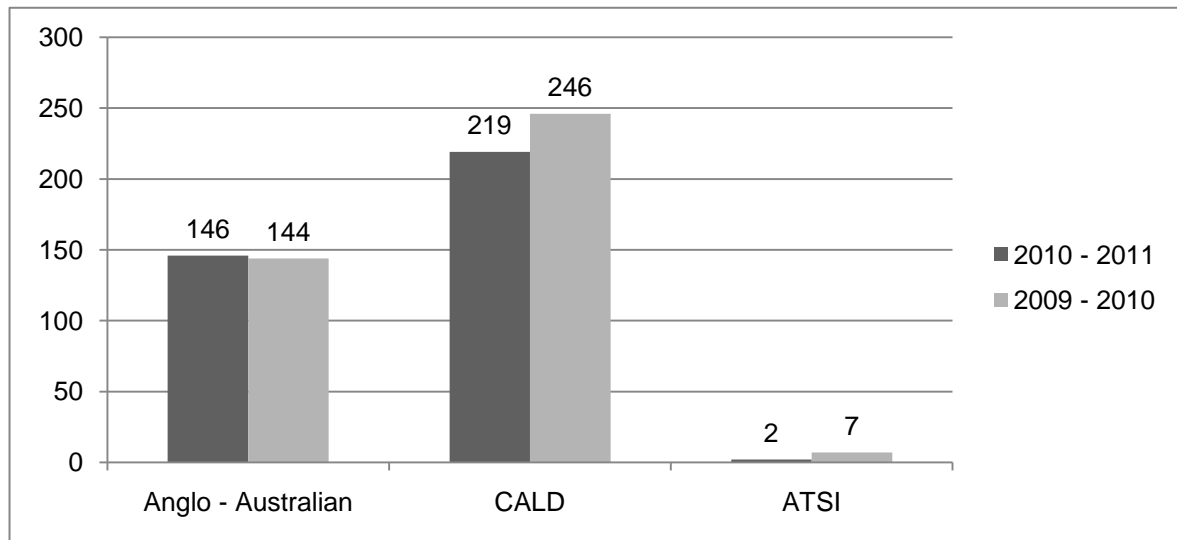
In 2010-2011, we assisted **219** people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds (**59.5%**), **146** people from Anglo-Australian backgrounds (**40%**) and **two** students from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) backgrounds (**0.5%**). Percentage wise, these numbers are similar to the previous year. Numerically, the number of people from Anglo-Australian backgrounds that we assisted remained steady, while slight reductions in the number of students from CALD and ATSI backgrounds are likely to have come from the slight reduction in total program numbers.

Chart 5: Students by cultural identity



The number of students from CALD backgrounds that we assist remains higher than the number of Anglo-Australians because students from migrant and refugee backgrounds can often experience heightened disadvantage in the first few years that they arrive in Australia. Previously, they have also been more likely to leave school citing lack of finances as a major contributing factor. Assisting students with travel passes, whether they are from CALD or other backgrounds, is one way we can help increase the likelihood that they will continue their education.

Chart 5: Students by cultural identity over two years



Elsewhere, the highest number of people from CALD backgrounds continue to come from Afghanistan (**28**) and Sudan (**35**). The exception is Myanmar/Burma where numbers were reduced to 11 in 2010-2011 down from 35 in 2009-2010. This year we also have new groups of students coming from countries like Cameron, Colombia, Congo, Ghana, Greece, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Poland, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The number of students assisted who were born in Rwanda increased from 0 to 9 this year, the number of students from Kenya increased from 5 to 10 and the number of students from Somalia grew from 10 to 13.

Map 1: Country of birth for assisted students



Note: The numbers represent number of students in a region.

It is worth noting that the low percentage of students from an ATSI background (0.5%) who use the Pathways to Education program is explained by the low student from an ATSI background population in Victoria. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Koorie student population in Victoria is 0.9% and the ABS also indicates that students with ATSI backgrounds tend to leave school earlier than other groups in the student population. In our general Emergency Relief program however, the number of people from ATSI backgrounds has increased over the past year.

For information about our Cultural Diversity initiatives at Travellers Aid Australia, visit *Appendix 1*.

Living situations of assisted students

As with the previous year, the majority of students who were assisted through the Pathways to Education program live with their families. This suggests that families continue to find it difficult to afford the additional expenses associated with keeping their children at school.

This year, 43 students we assisted were by definition “homeless”. These students experienced secondary or tertiary homelessness such as emergency or crisis

housing, hostels, shared accommodation or transitional housing. These figures are the same as last year and are alarming. It is difficult to keep going to school and concentrate on your education if you are worried about where you will sleep at night. Elsewhere, presumably, the increase in people in shared accommodation this year reflects the growing number of students in the 22-25 year old age bracket using our services. These students are more likely to be living out of home. It is not just families who are struggling to meet the associated expenses of their day-to-day lives and education. Young adults also face difficulties.

Table 2: Living situations of assisted students

Accommodation	2010 - 2011	2009 - 2010
Boarding	n/a	4
Emergency or crisis housing	11	13
Family	291	269
Foster care	2	n/a
Hostel	1	1
No fixed address	n/a	1
Private rental	15	29
Public housing	10	51
Shared accommodation	27	18
Transitional housing	4	18
Unknown or not recorded	5	5

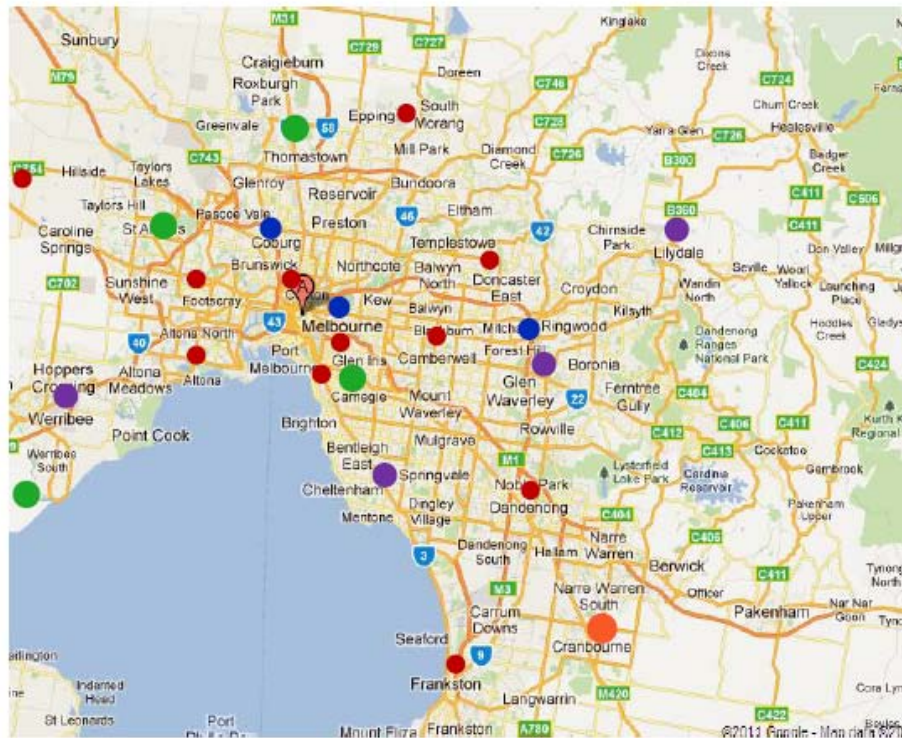
Note: Transitional housing describes temporary (mid-term) housing for people waiting for long term options such as public housing. Usually case management and support are provided.

Locations of students assisted

The locations that students come from are varied. We have assisted students living in suburbs ranging from Geelong to the Yarra Ranges.

This year, the highest number of students came from South Melbourne (**24**), St Albans (**16**), Corio (**12**), Doveton (**10**) and Clayton South (**10**).

Map 2: Geographic locations of students assisted



- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- > 20

Note: Numbers represent number of students in a region.

Table 3: Local Government Areas for students assisted

Local Council	Number of students
Greater Bendigo	1
Nillumbik Shire	1
Frankston	2
Hobsons Bay	2
Greater Dandenong	2
Boroondara	3
Manningham	3

Whittlesea	3
Yarra	4
Maribyrnong	4
Melton Shire	5
Port Phillip	5
Moonee Valley	5
Melbourne	9
Whitehorse	10
Moreland	10
Kingston	11
Wyndham	12
Yarra Ranges Shire	13
Monash	15
Hume	16
Greater Geelong	16
Brimbank	17
Glen Eira	17
Casey	22

FEEDBACK FROM PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Student feedback

As with last year, we surveyed Pathways to Education participants and/or their case workers to gauge the effectiveness of our program and service delivery. Since it was not compulsory to complete the survey and “return to sender” issues arise with students experiencing transience, we were pleased with the response rate of 36.

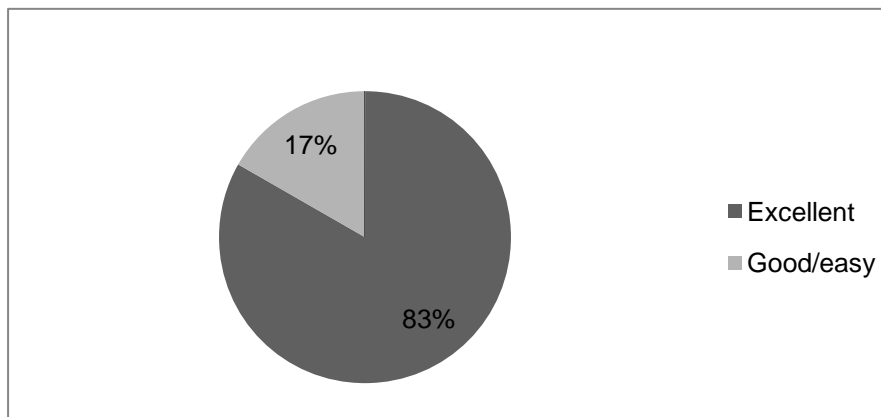
This year, the largest group of respondents to the survey were secondary school students aged 15 and 16. Students older than 18 also had a high response rate, as did 17 year olds. These students represent the greatest demographic of our client base.

Satisfaction with processing of passes

Positively, when asked about the way that we processed travel passes, satisfaction from respondents had increased from the year before. In fact, no one said our service was “average/okay” or “bad/difficult”.

- **83%** said the process was “excellent”.
- **17%** said it was “good/easy”.

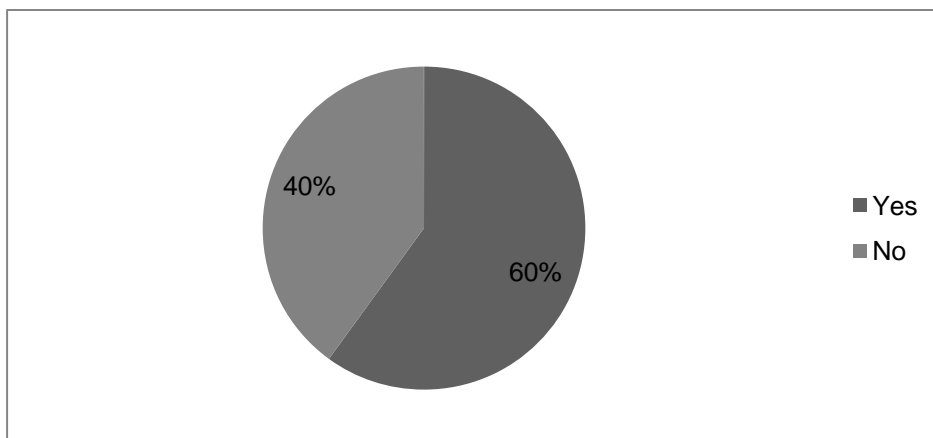
Chart 7: Rating of the way we process travel passes



Likelihood of school attendance without assistance

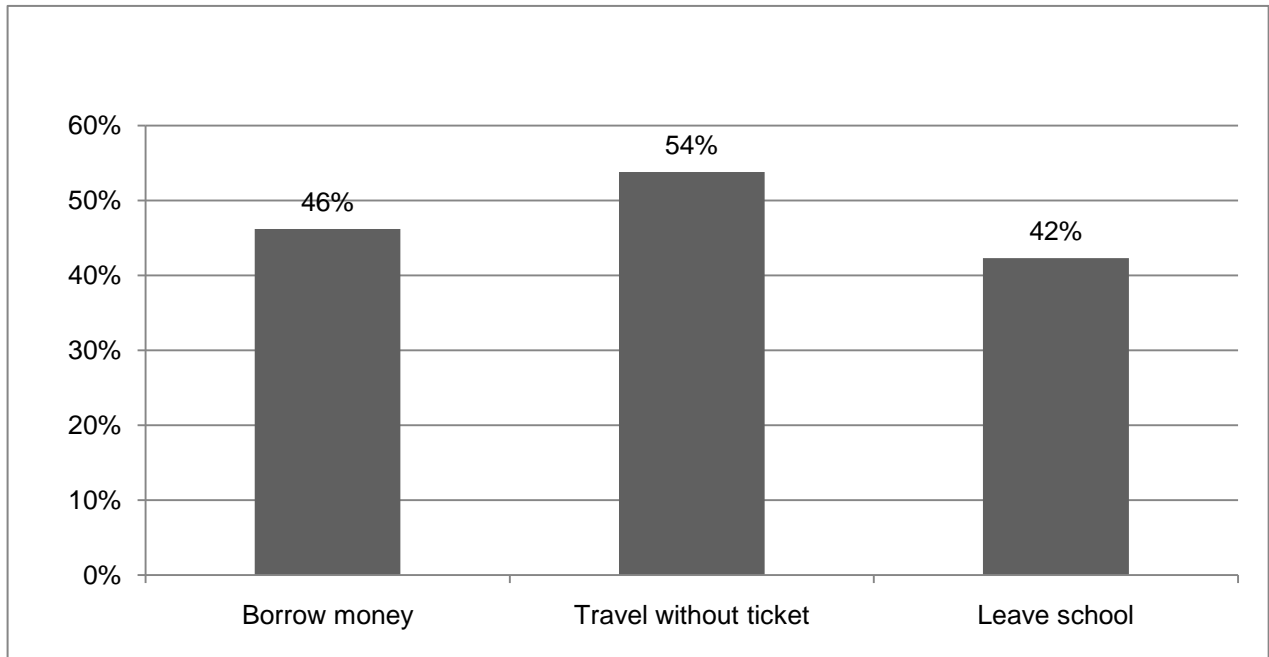
When asked about the likelihood of truancy if assistance was not available, roughly the same number students as last year said they would continue to study. However unlike last year, no one selected that they would study but ‘not every day’. Instead, the percentage of people who said they would not study at all increased from 22.5% in 2009-2010 to **40%** in 2010-2011.

Chart: 8 Likelihood of studying without a travel pass



Elsewhere, more students this year said that fare evasion was a possibility. This is problematic as fare evasion risks infringement fines that place more stress on students and their families.

Chart 9: Other options if a travel pass was not available



Note: Some people may have chosen more than one of these options.

These statistics continue to justify the existence of the Pathways to Education program.

Testimonials from program participants

28 of the 36 survey respondents chose to leave comments on the Pathways to Education program. The following testimonials have been taken from participant surveys.

“The people who work for Travellers Aid Australia are fantastic. They were helpful and we are grateful for their help”.

“Thank you. It has made life easier having a yearly pass for transport. I don't have to worry about paying when I have no money or have to borrow as it is expensive paying for everything you need for school and to get to school. Thank you for your great support! Much appreciated!”

“This ticket [is...] a good thing because I can go to school anytime. When I finish my education I can come back home by using this ticket.”

“Very useful for people with low income like me and I am very thankful.”

“The way I was treated at Travellers Aid Australia at Spencer St (Southern Cross station) was great and they didn't make me feel degraded. They were lovely. ... thank you for a great support in kids' education...[the service also] helps kids feel normal as we are not rich and he feels rich! My nephew can't wait for my myki card, he thinks you are great and feels so good to feel like he has something so great! Thank you!”

“Without this service, my daughter could not attend school. My family thanks Travellers Aid Australia for this assistance.”

CASE STUDY 2 – CAULFIELD PARK COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Caulfield Park Community School is one of eight community schools in Victoria. It caters for students who have difficulties remaining in mainstream schooling. The students we spoke to experienced high levels of disadvantage, including some who faced difficult family situations, homelessness, mental health issues, drug addiction, family violence or other risk factors. Caulfield Park provides these young people with a supportive environment that helps them obtain an education and break the cycle of inherited disadvantage. For many of them the school community is the only stable factor in their lives. It means staying connected.

For most of the students poverty contributes to their disadvantage. This means some young people either cannot attend school or have to fare evade. These two choices are not beneficial. Those who fare evade often end up in court for behaviour they did not voluntarily choose. Other students describe a high level of anxiety when they travel without a valid ticket. This anxiety can manifest in interruptive and sometimes destructive behaviour on trains, at the station and on the way to school.

Over the past years Travellers Aid Australia has helped an increasing number of students from Caulfield Park Community School. It enables students to attend school on a regular basis and helps them feel more socially included in other aspects of their lives. They use their tickets to go out with friends, visit family members and access youth and health services. The assistance relieves families of financial burdens. It is also amazing how proud the students are of their tickets. One student told us she now is able to walk through the gates proudly using her myki card knowing she is doing the right thing.

Overall attendance at the school has reportedly increased significantly over the past years since we started assisting students. This year there is a Year 12 class! The local station and traders also now experience much less damage and disruptive behaviour and the school attracts more support from the local community. Members of the community have commissioned artwork and supported the school financially and through projects.

The tickets tell our students “we understand that you want support to get to school and we will give it to you”.

Simon Clarke, recently retired Principal, Caulfield Park Secondary School

Referral agencies

As we have already highlighted above, students are often referred to Travellers Aid Australia by other agencies or school welfare officers. We work with a core group of social workers, youth workers and pastoral care staff who are employed by the schools or other youth services such as the Ardoch Youth Foundation.

Several organisations – including refugee and migrant organisations and schools – who used our services last year continued to use our services again this year. As such, there are a number of students who return to the Pathways to Education program each semester or year. While there are cost implications to this, it also shows how beneficial the service we provide these organisations and their students is.

This year, we received more referrals from refugee and migrant centres and an increased number of self-referrals as well. Schools continued to approach our services with the most number of clients coming from Caulfield Park Community School (**90**). The Migrant Information Centre (**32**), self-referrals (**32**), the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (**30**) and the Refugee Minor program (**24**) had the next highest referral rates. We also received four referrals from myki via the Transport Ticketing Authority (TTA) suggesting our relationship with the TTA is providing dividends for people in need.

Table 4: Snapshot of referring agencies working with Travellers Aid Australia

Referring Agent	Number of Clients
Migrant Services	142
Migrant Information Centre	32
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre	30
Refugee Minor Program	24
AMES Settlement Services	10
Hotham Mission	10
Australian Red Cross	10
New Hope Foundation	14
Migrant Resource Centre	6
International Student Care Services	6
Education	153
Caulfield Park Community School	90

NMIT	18
St Albans Primary School	14
Northcote High School	8
Victoria University Secondary College	7
Kensington Community High School	6
Western English Language School	6
Galvin Park Secondary College	4
General Welfare/ ER Services	66
South Port Uniting Care	28
Diversitat Geelong	26
Port Phillip Community Group	6
St Vincent de Paul Society	6
Youth/ Family Services	72
Ardoch Youth Foundation	14
Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services	18
Moira Disability and Youth Services	8
SKYS	8
Family Life	6
Front Yard	6
Melbourne City Mission	6
Youth Connections	6
Employment	12
FOCUS Employment	12
Self	32
Self	12

Note: Only agencies with 6+ referrals have been listed here.

Feedback from referring agencies

Feedback from referring agencies this year reiterates the value of the program to their students and clients, while also demonstrating the importance of increased funding to the program.

“This service enables these young people to get to school regularly, removing one of the biggest barriers to full participation in education. This means that they avoid fines and the families do not have to make a decision whether to send the children to school or to use the money for food and other essential items. For the students who were able to access the passes, the process worked well.”

“We really appreciate the service that the Travellers Aid Australia Pathways to Education program is able to offer. It is a fantastic concept and should be funded better.... The Pathways to Education program is an excellent initiative.”

“On Behalf of the Refugee Minor Program I would like to thank Travellers Aid Australia for all their hard work and assistance...We are aware Travellers Aid Australia has gone above and beyond to assist Refugee Minor Program clients in particular and we want you to know that the assistance you provide is invaluable. It means the kids we work with can take part in the community, attend education and ultimately improve their prospects of finding employment, settling in Australia and making a better life for themselves and their loved ones. We look forward to working with you again in 2012 and beyond.”

“I think is a really valuable service and it would be great to see more funding allocated to it so that more young people can benefit.”

“Families who have received the assistance for yearly or half yearly tickets appreciate this assistance greatly. It means that families have at least \$10 extra per week to spend on groceries or paying for other items such as bills and education fees.”

“We value the partnership and the support that Travellers Aid Australia offer and hope the funding continues. It makes a big difference to the families that we help and as an agency it provides us with support where our resources are limited.”

CASE STUDY 3 – KATHY’S STORY*

Kathy was referred by an Aboriginal Co-op. She is currently studying her first year in midwifery and is the first Indigenous person to attend university in her community. Kathy was finding it financially difficult to attend her classes though she was very eager to complete her studies. Due to lack of funds and the financial hardship that was facing her family, Kathy was contemplating dropping out of university.

The family case worker called Travellers Aid Australia to see if there was some assistance that we could provide to help her get to university. As a result of our Pathways to Education program, Travellers Aid Australia provided Kathy with some monthly travel tickets. It would have been detrimental for Kathy as an individual to pull out of university simply because of lack of funds to get her there. We also believe that by continuing with her education and finishing university Kathy will be able to play an important role in providing services to her community.

Indigenous Australians are still amongst the most disadvantaged communities in Australia. This disadvantage shows in all aspects of life such as health, housing, financial, social and political participation, employment and education.

We were pleased to be able to assist in this case, though there remain many more people in need of assistance. Education is one of the most important aspects for improving conditions and breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

*Names and identifying information have been changed for each case study

Additional measures of success for the Pathways to Education program

We remain recognised and well regarded in the sector by our peers, other agencies and community corporate partners for the delivery of transport-related Emergency Relief at the point of need.

On top of the positive results already shared, additional measures of success over the 2010-2011 period include:

- Our successful acquisition of near-commensurate levels of funding for the Pathways to Education program, despite the fact that a previous year, one-off Government grant in response to the Global Financial Crisis was no longer available.
- An increase in referrals from schools and other organisations, which indicates growing awareness of the program.
- Further anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that assistance with getting to school or education leads to positive outcomes from students:

“A number of our young Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) newly arrived migrant or refugee students received six month secondary travel cards from Travellers Aid Australia. Some of our slightly older young people received monthly tickets. These students were so grateful for this assistance as it allowed them to travel to TAFE (sometimes across two zones) and complete a VCAL certificate and in some cases a pre-apprenticeship course. Some of these young people have now obtained apprenticeships.”

Northern AMEP Counselling Service Co-ordinator, NMIT

“As most of our students come from low socio-economic backgrounds, have family relationship issues and come from the outer suburbs, being able to have access to the travel cards lessens the financial burden on them and their families and improves their school attendance.”

Social Worker, Kensington Community High School

OUR STAFF AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Marketing and promotion

In addition to the increasing need for assistance with the cost of travelling to school, the growth that Travellers Aid Australia has experienced can be partly linked to our commitment to community engagement and promotional activities. We target relevant individuals, schools, refugee and migrant groups with information about our Pathways to Education program and speak to donors, funders and corporate entities who have the potential to assist us in providing our service. However, promotion of the program needs to be balanced against demand management given our limited financial resources.

Over the year, marketing and promotions for the program have included:

- Developing new marketing collateral that better explains our services – including Pathways to Education – to all our audiences
- Implementing our Community Education Program which includes information about our Pathways to Education program. We gave 72 talks to 1,527 people over the year
- Developing a donations envelope that promotes the Pathways to Education program and provides donors with the opportunity to fund students or general programs such as our Emergency Relief service. Our new website also provides an online donations tool
- Formalised partnerships with organisations such as V/Line and Destination Melbourne which provided in-kind sponsorship and other benefits such as travel tickets for our Pathways to Education program.

Our staff

Our Travellers Aid Australia Emergency Relief employees, who provide our Pathways to Education program service, have many years experience in the sector.

In addition to their skills and experience, our staff have received training in First Aid, cultural diversity, Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Deafness Awareness Training. They are fully capable of assisting a cross-section of travellers and clients in need.

Karen Lovell, ER Officer - Emergency Relief Coordinator from December 2010

Karen started with Travellers Aid Australia over 20 years ago. As a mother of a teenage son she is a caring and empathetic woman who loves her job and the satisfaction she gets from making a difference to someone else's life. Karen has completed a wide range of different roles at Travellers Aid Australia. In December 2010, Karen was appointed Emergency Relief Coordinator after the departure of Maria Groner.

Maria Groner, ER / Social Worker - Emergency Relief Coordinator until November 2010

Previously CEO of a small Family Education Centre in Germany, since arrival in Australia, Maria has had major involvement in sector development activities such as the CBD Homelessness Health Access Protocol and the review of the ACROSS Emergency Relief Handbook. She is also on the Victorian Branch Management Committee for the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Post-departure from the role of ER coordinator, Maria was contracted for the development of the ER Travel Online Manual for Travellers Aid Australia. Maria also has:

- A degree in Social Work

- Completed a post-graduate course in Counselling
- Completed the Leadership Victoria Board Orientation Series.

Maria returned to Travellers Aid Australia one day a week in April 2011, with days increasing to three from October 2011 onwards.

Marie Rachelle Chiffone - Emergency Relief (ER) Officer

Rachelle arrived in Australia from Mauritius. She has a strong commitment to assisting the most disadvantaged in our community. Rachelle is fluent in English, French and her native Mauritius dialect. She also has:

- A diploma of Community Welfare
- A Certificate III in Aged Care
- A degree in Social Work (to be completed)
- Completed Motivational Interviewing training.

Priya Juggernaut - ER Officer

Priya grew up in Quatre-Bornes, Mauritius before coming to Australia. She is fluent in French, Hindi and English. Priya has a Diploma in Community Welfare.

Our training, networking and sector involvement

Travellers Aid Australia is actively engaged in the sector and its employees take every opportunity to up-skill themselves, as well as network with other agency employees, share and disseminate information. In 2010-2011 relevant Emergency Relief staff also:

- Attended a seminar on Privacy that was provided by PILCH (Public Interest Law Clearing House).
- Participated in training for managers in Financial Management Program (FMP) services that will be provided by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and rolled out to a number of local Emergency Relief networks.
- Attended a sector briefing on the Victorian Government Vulnerable Youth Framework which outlines the government's new approach to improve services for vulnerable young people.
- Met with workers from 'Kids Under Cover' and 'Skyline Foundation' to discuss opportunities to assist young people.
- Liaised with the Department of Health and the Health Issues Centre who launched the 'Resource Kit for Consumers Travelling for Health Care'. The resource kit is targeted at rural consumers who need to travel for medical

reasons and comprises a range of check lists and information on services including Travellers Aid Australia. Travellers Aid Australia was part of the working group developing the resource kit under the leadership of the Health Issues Centre.

- Shared specialist knowledge with other agencies, including the Melbourne Youth Support Services interagency protocol and inclusion of Travellers Aid Australia support services in collaboration with the CBD Homelessness Health Access Steering Group who launched its revised edition of the *Guide to Accessing Services – CBD Homelessness Access Protocol*.

Travellers Aid Australia is part of a range of networks including Emergency Relief Victoria (see *Appendix 2*), the CBD Services Network, Darebin Emergency Relief Network and the Asylum Seekers Emergency Relief Working Group. Jodie Willmer, our CEO continues to be a representative on the State Consultative Committee for Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), is the President of ER Victoria Inc, the peak body for Emergency Relief and is also a board member of Victorian Council for Social Services (VCOSS)

Elias Lebbos, Travellers Aid Australia's General Manager is a member of the Ministerial Public Transport Advisory Committee (PTAC) where he represents the interests of vulnerable persons. Travellers Aid Australia also participates in the Victorian Council for Social Services (VCOSS) Transport Disadvantage Strategic working group and provides strategic advice to the Department of Transport (DOT) Social Transit Unit. We have also developed a relationship and referral protocol with the Public Transport Ombudsman to assist our clients in passing on complaints about public transport operators.

THE YEAR AHEAD – OUR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The main challenge for Travellers Aid Australia's Pathways to Education program continues to be the acquisition of adequate funding to address ever-increasing need. High ongoing demand for our Pathway to Education program is also an issue that needs to be addressed. We continue to receive referrals for the next school year now and already anticipate that needs will continue to exceed our currently available funding.

Elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there is:

- A need for “whole-of-school-life” initiatives. Students need to have travel supported right throughout their school years, rather than on a one-off or case-by-case basis
- A need to assist older students, including those living outside of family homes by themselves or in shared accommodation.

With these challenges however, come exciting opportunities. On top of our fee-for-service initiatives in the areas of mobility equipment hire and traveller rest facilities, we will continue to develop our fundraising capacities including through:

- The implementation of a micro-finance No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS®) in 2011-2012 (see *Continual Innovation* section below)
- Exploration of other fundraising initiatives including for our Pathways to Education program such as “Adopt a School” or “Adopt a Student” corporate programs
- Funding such as through the Vulnerable Groups Funding, FaHCSIA

We will also continue to:

- Actively promote our services through our Community Education and marketing programs so that organisations such as the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are aware of and can access services that their clients can benefit from.

Continual innovation – No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS®) and Pathways to Education

With finite funds, we are always exploring ways to ensure that we assist as many students as we can.

Thanks to a grant provided by The Reym Fund during 2010-2011, our new micro-finance No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS®) program will launch in 2011-2012.

We will provide interest-free loans to students or their families to help them pay upfront for cost-effective yearly or half-yearly travel tickets that will get them to school. This arrangement will help minimise the stresses and fines that families may experience and which exacerbate financial hardship. It will also:

- Ease the pressure experienced by families through repayment options spaced over 1 year
- Provide opportunities to learn budgeting skills and improve financial literacy
- Remove barriers that may prevent school attendance
- Improve family dignity.

By providing loans that can be repaid over time to some families and students, this also frees up fully subsidised travel tickets for our most severely disadvantaged students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of all students and their families who have benefited from the Pathways to Education program, Travellers Aid Australia wishes to acknowledge and thank the following for their support in the 2010-2011 financial year:

- Besen Family Foundation
- Destination Melbourne
- Flora and Frank Leith Charitable Trust
- Jack Brockhoff Foundation
- Joe White Bequest
- Scanlon Foundation Grant
- Skybus
- Southern Cross Station Pty Ltd
- The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation – including Youth in Philanthropy
- The Marian and E. H. Flack Trust
- The Myer Foundation - The Reym Fund
- The Invergowrie Foundation
- Victorian Department of Transport
- V/Line

We also appreciate the tireless work of our dedicated volunteers. Without their compassion and ongoing support, our service delivery would not be so seamless.

APPENDIX 1 - CULTURAL DIVERSITY AT TRAVELLERS AID AUSTRALIA

Travellers Aid Australia's dedication to cultural diversity has resulted in the implementation of specific measures during 2010-2011. Some of these initiatives are part of our Cultural Action Plan (CAP).

- Over half of our employees come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- We have employees who can converse fluently in 12 different languages including Cantonese, Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic, Spanish, Dutch, Mandarin, German, Polish, French, Hindi and Australian Sign Language (Auslan)
- We provided brochures to clients in six different languages including Polish, Vietnamese, Somali, Burmese, Italian and Sudanese (Arabic) and distributed these to key community organisations
- We developed and distributed 8,000 brochures catering to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users and Victoria-wide Aboriginal organisations
- We promoted Travellers Aid Australia's services on SBS Radio via four interviews held in German, Hindi, Dutch and Arabic.

This work reflects our commitment to embracing the diversity of all our staff and clients.

APPENDIX 2 - ER VICTORIA

Jodie Willmer, Travellers Aid Australia's CEO has been President of ER Victoria since its incorporation in October 2008.

This meets Travellers Aid Australia's strategic direction of growing solutions for travellers through partnership and collaboration. It has helped us achieve more complete service options to customers, an increased range of services/choices for customers, increased customer satisfaction and improved funding opportunities.

About ER Victoria

ER Victoria Inc. is the state peak body for the Emergency Relief sector. The aim of ER Victoria is to bring Emergency Relief agencies together to support their work as providers and advocate on issues effecting disadvantaged people. Members currently comprise of 89 agencies throughout Victoria who provide or fund the provision of Emergency Relief and the Committee of Management currently has seven members. The Secretariat is currently contracted to CIVic and they manage a project officer- who is employed by CIVic – on behalf of ER Victoria Inc.

Planned activities for 2011-2012

ER Victoria is developing a Strategic Plan to guide the development and expansion of the organisation over the coming years. The Plan will be a key tool to broaden ER Victoria's profile and thus improve its effectiveness, reach and overall service. ER Victoria Inc. has been funded by Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) for a three year period for sector development activities in Victoria. A consultant will deliver the following project objectives:

1. Strategic Plan: Create an ER Victoria Strategic Plan for the years 2012-2014
2. Program Plan: Ensure that there is an appropriate Program Plan flowing from the Strategic Plan, so that the ER Victoria appointee's work reflects the work required in support of ER Victoria's Strategic Plan.

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www.travellersaid.org.au

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A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several horizontal lines of red dots. The lines are slightly wavy and vary in height, creating a modern, abstract border.