

EDUCATION

Time to get talking

NEW PUSH TO BOOST ENGLISH AMONG MIGRANT COMMUNITY

Angus Livingston

LANGUAGE barriers affecting more than half of Brimbank's population can be addressed, the Brimbank Council believes.

More than 50 per cent of the city's population speaks a language other than English at home.

Women's Health West data shows 23.1 per cent of female residents in Brimbank who speak a language other than English speak English 'not well' or 'not at all.

The council has revised its Community Learning Strategy to help migrant adults learn functional spoken and written English.

Community Wellbeing director Neil Whiteside said promotion of adult English lessons was now a priority.

Women's Health West chief executive Dr Robyn Gregory said language was a major barrier for migrant women in Brimbank, who couldn't get into English-as-a-Second-Language classes.

"(We're) aware that many newly arrived women are

unable to access ESL classes when they settle in Australia due to childcare responsibilities and inadequate information about their entitlements," Dr Gregory said.

"Over time, women who do not learn English are more likely to experience long-term isolation, associated health problems, poverty and social exclusion."

Dr Gregory said language was just one of the barriers women in Brimbank faced to get work and be part of the community.

The council's strategy said education rates were rising in Brimbank, but challenges remained.

Brimbank adults are almost twice as likely not to have attended formal schooling, compared to the Victorian average.

Nearly 20 per cent of the population aged 15 and over said their highest level of schooling was year nine.

The council adopted the final draft Brimbank Community Learning Strategy 2014-2017 at its most recent council meeting.