

Celebrating diversity, strengthening community: A case study from the Connecting Schools with Indian Communities program

Featuring: Aruna Malhotra

School: Keysborough Secondary College

Meet Aruna

Aruna Malhotra is a teacher at Keysborough Secondary College, which operates across 2 campuses and has approximately 2,200 students. Teaching has always been part of Aruna's life. Inspired by her mother's dedication to changing students' lives as an educator, Aruna pursued teaching to do the same way by sharing knowledge, supporting student growth, and making a meaningful difference.

Recognising an opportunity

Her engagement with the Connecting Schools with Indian Communities (CSIC) program began in 2019–2020 while at Lyndhurst Secondary College, where she introduced Hindi as a language subject. She designed curriculum resources and student learning materials that were later used by other schools to support the teaching of Hindi across Victorian secondary schools.

Fostering intercultural understanding and community partnerships

When Aruna moved to Keysborough Secondary College in 2023, she applied for CSIC funding again, this time focusing on fostering intercultural understanding through authentic and meaningful learning experiences. By 2025, the program had evolved to include community partnerships and student wellbeing initiatives, such as the inclusive Chai and Chat parent support group—a safe, supportive space for families to share experiences and access guidance.

Through CSIC, Keysborough Secondary College developed a strong network with Indian stakeholders, students, parents, and local businesses. It partnered with Parkmore Shopping Centre and MCO Media to promote community events, while local businesses such as Vel Spices, MKS Spices, Punjabi Bazaar, and Sri Murugan also collaborated with the college.

The initiatives have received strong support from the community, with one memorable highlight being a heartfelt message from a parent expressing gratitude for the Chai and Chat sessions, acknowledging the practical support and sense of belonging they provided.

Motivation and professional growth

Aruna's proactive participation in the CSIC program, strengthened her leadership skills and deepened her understanding of communication, collaboration, and project management, ensuring every initiative aligned with the school's Strategic Plan (SSP), Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), and the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model 2.0.

The program also boosted her confidence in problem-solving, conflict resolution, and teamwork—capabilities that continue to guide her leadership approach.

Key projects and activities

In 2025, Keysborough Secondary College implemented three major initiatives under the CSIC program:

1. Whole-School Yoga Day

Delivered across both campuses, the event blended theory and practice, with students attending classroom sessions on the philosophy and benefits of yoga, followed by guided practice led by professional instructors. The day concluded with a shared fruit break to promote wellbeing and mindfulness, while active participation from both staff and students reinforced a strong sense of community.

2. Chai and Chat Parent Support Group

Held once each term, these sessions created a welcoming environment for parents to connect. Each session featured a guest speaker who offered advice on parenting strategies, financial literacy, wellbeing, and health. Parents consistently expressed appreciation for the initiative, noting that it strengthened their sense of connection and trust with the school.

3. Community Day and Diwali celebration

The annual Diwali celebration transformed the college into a vibrant Indian cultural fair. Partnerships with local businesses and artists enhanced the event's authenticity with traditional decorations, folk performances, and stalls. Performers included GS Heer Bhangra Academy, Narthanalya School of Dance and Music, and the college's own student dance group. The festival recreated the energy of a traditional Indian mela with a small animal farm, a giant elephant puppet, henna stalls, and colourful displays. The day celebrated unity in diversity and left a lasting impression on students and visitors alike.

Engagement with the Indian diaspora

Aruna also volunteers with Saras Care, a local not-for-profit organisation supporting multicultural communities. This collaboration ensures that school programs remain grounded in real community experiences, enhancing authenticity and inclusion.

Impact and learning

Through initiatives like Yoga Day and Diwali celebrations, students, staff, and families gained a richer understanding of Indian traditions, music, art, and cuisine. More importantly, participants developed a stronger appreciation for cultural diversity as a shared strength that enriches learning and community cohesion.

Reflections and lessons learned

Managing large-scale cultural events within a busy school calendar provided valuable opportunities to strengthen planning, enhance stakeholder consultation and develop more robust evaluation frameworks. These lessons will guide future implementation, ensuring continued alignment with school improvement goals and Departmental priorities.

Advice for schools interested in CSIC

Aruna's advice to other educators considering the program:

"Start small, build strong partnerships, and listen to your community. When schools open their doors to cultural exchange, they create spaces of connection, understanding, and genuine belonging."

Looking ahead

Aruna and the Keysborough team plan to sustain the CSIC initiatives into 2026 and beyond, embedding them into the school's culture.