Getting to Know the Locals
Researching the Impact of the Mentor Program for Tibetan Refugees

DR AMANDA WISE & MS KYLIE SAIT

August 2008
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................................. 3
Executive Summary ............................................................................................................................ 4
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ 5
Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 6
Chapter 2: Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 12
Chapter 3: Literature review .............................................................................................................. 14
Chapter 4: Mentor training course .................................................................................................. 22
Chapter 5: Matching process .......................................................................................................... 38
Chapter 6: Mentee experience ......................................................................................................... 47
Chapter 7: Mentor experience ......................................................................................................... 78
Chapter 8: Program staff experience ............................................................................................. 106
Chapter 9: Conclusions & Summary of key findings ...................................................................... 112
Chapter 10: Recommendations ..................................................................................................... 119
References ........................................................................................................................................... 122
Appendices .......................................................................................................................................... 125
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation has been funded by the Health Promotion Service, Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service (NSCCAHHS) and conducted by Dr Amanda Wise and Ms Kylie Sait at the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion (CRSI), Macquarie University. The aim of the study was to evaluate the short and long term impact on participants of the program. We were interested in exploring whether this approach to helping refugee families settle in the local community has any advantages over traditional community settlement models.

The program was established in response to issues raised by the Tibetan community and was developed in a consultation forum with the Tibetan community.

The mentoring program was evaluated through the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods including surveys, focus groups, in depth interviews and observation. Separate focus groups were held with staff, mentors and mentees. The mentees were asked to take photos around a range of themes and then select some of these photos to show the researchers.

Essentially, this mentoring program was very positive and was highly valued by both the mentors and mentees. As a result of this program mentees were able to make contacts and build networks within the broader Australian community, learn new skills, increase their English proficiency and engage in new experiences. The mentors, who were ‘typical’ Anglo Australians, also benefited from this program gaining a great sense of satisfaction from helping, learnt about Tibetan culture; acquired new skills and developed friendships with other mentors.

Some of the key challenges within the program included creating a more comfortable initial environment for mentors and mentees to meet and encouraging mentors to take on the mentees who had lower levels of English language proficiency.

A significant challenge for the continuation of the program is the wider service provision context, particularly, the lack of a dedicated Tibetan full-time settlement/community development worker. In addition, another challenge to the success of the program is a lack of appropriate funding for a mentoring co-ordinator. The resources needed to run this program relied largely on the goodwill of the staff who dedicated many unpaid hours towards the project to ensure its success.

Programs such as this should not be viewed as a replacement for traditional migrant and refugee settlement services. Rather, mentoring should be seen as an essential and valuable strategy to augment existing services. The program can successfully be adapted and modified for use with other refugee groups but needs to be supported by traditional ethnic community development workers.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tibetan Mentoring Program Steering Committee:

- Phillipa Bellemore
- Jo Black
- Cathy Butler
- Dorjee Dadul
- Tenpa Dugdak
- Daena Tyerman
- Peter Whitecross

Health Promotion Service, Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service (NSCCAHS)

Multicultural Health Service, Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service (NSCCAHS)

Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE – Northern Beaches College Outreach

Centre for Research on Social Inclusion (CRSI), Macquarie University

Liz Brownlee, Bostock Secretarial Transcription Service

Mentors

Mentees
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The Tibetan mentoring program is the result of collaboration between the Health Promotion Service and Multicultural Health Service of Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service, Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE (Outreach program) and Manly Community Centre. The program involves matching Tibetan refugees with mentors living in the Northern Beaches area (long-term Australian permanent residents or citizens). It stems from feedback from the local Tibetan community that one of the most important settlement needs they have is assistance to ‘get to know the locals’ and help in understanding and fitting into the local community.

The foundations for the program were laid in late 2006 when an ESOL teacher at the Northern Beaches TAFE contacted Daena Tyerman, the TAFE Outreach Coordinator, about the needs of Tibetan English students in the Dee Why area including driver education, nursing assistant and kitchen hand training. Daena was also contacted by Cathy Butler, Area Manager, Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS to discuss the findings of a consultation held with recently arrived Tibetan refugees that had identified a desire amongst the new arrivals to meet people in the local community and to learn more about the Australian culture. At subsequent meetings to discuss possible opportunities for training, Daena met with Cathy and Tenpa Dugdak, the Tibetan Community Health worker. At this meeting Tenpa informed Daena that “what Tibetans really need is a friend”. As Daena had previously coordinated the TAFE Mentoring in the Community course for youth she thought it would be possible to adapt this course for a refugee community. TAFE Outreach has the capacity to design courses to meet community needs. It has very generic modules that can quite easily be adapted and negotiated to meet the needs of particular groups. The Outreach department develops various programs based around specific needs, using a ‘ground-up’ approach (as opposed to a ‘top-down’ model). They also partner with a number of community organisations. After some consideration, Daena contacted Jo Black who had run Aboriginal Mentor training. They met with Tenpa and developed a proposal for the Tibetan Mentoring in the Community course which was tabled at a meeting of the Northern Beaches Refugee Working Group meeting, a local interagency group chaired by the Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS. The proposal was greeted with support from the members. Jo, Tenpa and Daena negotiated and refined the aims of the program and discussed the course content at length. Three core elements were identified, the mentoring process, Tibetan culture and local community and government services. Tenpa felt that mentoring should be a reciprocal process where Tibetans could share their culture with an interested person. Jo and Tenpa designed and co-facilitated the course and continued to discuss and refine the course as it proceeded. After the success of the first program, the program continues to run and is now co-facilitated by Phillipa Bellemore and Dorjee Dadul. This is the third time the program has been run and it is on this experience that the evaluation is based (a fourth program will begin in mid 2008, with the mentor training course offered at night).

The evaluation has been funded by the Health Promotion Service, NSCCAHS in consultation with the Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS. In addition to evaluating the impact of the mentoring program on the Tibetan participants, the funding organisation was also interested in determining whether the program has the potential to be a model for mentoring which could be implemented to support the needs of refugees from other backgrounds in the Northern Sydney and Central Coast regions. The evaluation was conducted by Dr Amanda Wise and Ms Kylie Sait at the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion (CRSI), Macquarie University. The aim of the study was to evaluate the short and long-term impact on participants of the program. We were interested in exploring whether this approach to helping refugee families settle in the local community has any advantages over traditional community settlement models.
AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

The overall objective of the program is to offer one on one assistance to Tibetan refugees through a mentoring relationship with a local Australian resident. It aims to provide opportunities for:

- Developing positive relationships within the community
- Cultural exchange
- Practising and developing English language skills
- Learning about Australian culture and customs
- Extending knowledge of local community and government services

Expectations of the Tibetan mentees include:

- Being able to engage with people from the Dee Why community with increased confidence
- A positive experience with an Australian person who is compassionate and interested in them and their culture
- A sense of belonging in the local community
- Increased familiarity with Australian customs and services

(Tibetan Mentoring Program 2008 Information Sheet)

Expectations of the mentors include:

- A commitment to attending the seven week training and seeing a Tibetan weekly for a 12 week period following the training
- Attending a fortnightly ‘debriefing’ and supervision session for one and half hours where issues and challenges will be discussed
- Assisting Tibetan mentees to feel a sense of belonging and part of the broader Dee Why community
- Assisting the mentees to meet their needs but being mindful to respect boundaries and refer on to relevant community services if necessary
- Respect for the Tibetan mentee and maintaining privacy and confidentiality

PROCESS

The program has the following components:

- Training a group of Australian (citizens or long term residents) mentors from the local community through a formal TAFE run program for a period of seven weeks
- Matching each trained mentor with a Tibetan mentee at the completion of the seven week training program
- A minimum commitment to a twelve-week mentoring relationship
- Six fortnightly compulsory debriefing sessions for mentors
Mentors are recruited through an information flyer (see page 9) distributed at various local community spaces. This year some mentors also found out about the program through a Manly Daily (local newspaper) article about the benefits of the program. An information session is held prior to the course starting where potential mentors complete an expression of interest form, detailing why they are interested in the program, particular skills they can contribute as a mentor and their availability during the course and minimum mentoring relationship. The Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS assists with the promotion of the program. Tenpa Dugdak, also recruits the Tibetan mentees as part of his role as the Tibetan Community Health Worker.
Mentoring in the Community Course
Working with Tibetans

TAFE is offering a free mentor training program for people interested in working as mentors to Tibetan people. The Northern Beaches has become a major settlement area for Tibetan refugees and volunteer mentors are needed to assist them with getting to know their local community and Australian customs.

Would you like to learn more about Tibetans and Tibetan culture? Would you like to get to know a Tibetan and help them to find their way through employment, education, social and health services?

This course covers the role of the mentor and focuses on communication, interpersonal skills, values, ethics and community referral skills. Mentors come from all walks of life and might be retired, retrenched, working part-time or an interested citizen of any age.

The course will run on Thursdays (9:30am – 1pm) from

X date for 7 weeks at Library, Room X,

M Block, Northern Beaches College of TAFE,

154 Old Pittwater Rd, Brookvale

One on one mentoring sessions will follow with some follow-up course meetings also held on Thursdays

Further enquiries: Outreach Coordinator

Ph: XX
TIBET

Tibet is located north of the Himalayan Mountains. The official name of Tibet is currently Xizang Zizhiqu, the Far Western Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Wiley, 2002). The PRC invaded Tibet in 1950. Protests occur each year on March 10, the anniversary of the first day of uprising in Tibet. On this day in 1959, 300,000 Tibetans protested outside the palace of the Dalai Lama (Tibet’s head of state and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people) in order to protect him from the Chinese Government and the annexation of Tibet. It was following this that His Holiness fled to India. The Tibetan government in exile was established in Dharamasala in Himachal Pradesh, North India with the assistance from the Indian government and international humanitarian agencies (Bhatia et al 2002 cited in Ruwanpura et al 2006). The Dalai Lama has consistently held that Tibet has been under illegal Chinese occupation since China invaded the independent state. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) insists that its relation with Tibet is purely an internal affair, because Tibet is, and has been for centuries, an integral part of China. From a legal standpoint, Tibet has not lost its statehood. It is an independent state under illegal occupation. Neither China’s military invasion nor the continuing occupation by the PLA has transferred the sovereignty of Tibet to China (Van Walt van Praag, 1996). Awareness of the plight of Tibet and Tibetan refugees has recently increased due to the protests surrounding the Beijing Olympics (August 2008) and the accompanying worldwide Olympic Torch Relay (in the first half of 2008).

Available population figures for Tibet vary. According to the office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamasala it is six million, whereas others estimate between two and four million. This variation is due to the different ways of measuring the population – people living within the political boundaries; ethnic Tibetans (many of whom live outside of the borders); inclusion of Han Chinese living in the area etc. Following the uprising many Tibetans have fled Tibet, settling in India and neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Burma. There are also Tibetan communities in the USA, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Scotland and New Zealand (Wiley, 2002). The status of Tibetans with the PRC is that of being one of its fifty five minority groups (people who are not Han Chinese). Ethnically and culturally, Tibetans are quite distinct from the Han. The people who originally settled in the region are thought to have been nomads from North-Eastern Asia. Some continued a nomadic life as herdsmen and hunters, whilst others settled as farmers. Culturally, Tibetans have their own spoken and written language, and over the centuries have developed their own form of the Buddhist faith. Buddhism (and the teachings of His Holiness) are very significant for Tibetans (the Sherpas and the Menpas), influencing their political, social and economic systems (Wiley, 2002).

THE STATUS OF TIBETAN REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA

Tibetan refugees (ex-political prisoners and family members who have escaped to Nepal and India from Tibet) enter Australia under the ‘Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)’ and are regarded by the Australian Government to be “Humanitarian Entrants” rather than “refugees.” The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA, 2008) notes that one of the core problems of the SHP is the overwhelming demand for places under the program; the number of applications in any year is generally 12 to 15 times greater than the number of places available. Migration to Australia can thus be a very long drawn out process for Tibetan refugees. SHP entrants are people who are outside their home country who have experienced gross violation of human rights and who are proposed or sponsored by an Australian citizen, permanent resident or organisation who will provide support. The proposer is officially responsible for paying all travel costs which can be quite substantial and as many proposers are former refugees or humanitarian entrants themselves many have to borrow money (RCOA, 2008). However, in the Tibetan community the humanitarian entrants are responsible for borrowing the funds needed to pay for the airfares and often arrive in Australia with a significant debt.

Upon arrival in Australia the Tibetan Humanitarian Entrants access services provided through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. However,
as they arrive under a 202 visa with the support of a proposer, the Tibetan Humanitarian Entrants are not entitled to receive the full range of IHSS services (IHSS services include reception and assistance on arrival; information and referrals; housing services; and short term torture and trauma counselling during the first six months of settlement (DIAC, 2008; RCOA, 2008). As a result the small Tibetan community are responsible for meeting the new arrivals at Sydney airport, providing transport to the Northern Beaches, assisting the new arrivals to find permanent accommodation and providing ongoing support on a day to day basis.

The Tibetan Humanitarian Entrants are also entitled to 510 hours of free English classes through the Adult Multicultural English Service’s (AMES) Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). On the Northern Beaches AMEP is offered at the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE Northern Beaches College. Most the Tibetan mentees involved in the mentoring program attend English classes at TAFE.

In acknowledging the background and experiences of the Tibetan community prior to migrating to Australia, specifically the traumatic experiences which resulted in the flight of these individuals and families from Tibet, they are referred to as “refugees” rather than “humanitarian entrants” in this report.

THE TIBETAN COMMUNITY IN DEE WHY

Tibetans are regularly described as kind, good-natured, gentle and peaceful. The stereotypical image that often comes to mind is the happy smiling Tibetan monk in his maroon robes. Yet as Houston and Wright (2003: 223) note, although essentialised categories of language, culture, religious affiliation are important for the political project of freeing Tibet, such homogenous descriptions of culture and identity do not necessarily correlate with the attributes of actual Tibetan refugee life. The Tibetan community of Dee Why certainly reflects this diversity. It is estimated that there are over 400 Tibetans in Australia in total with 350 Tibetans living in NSW. The Tibetan community in Dee Why numbers about 300 people, the largest Tibetan community in Australia. In 2004, Manly Council Community Services indicated that of 137 Tibetan people living in NSW, 121 live on the Northern Beaches (Ladd, 2004). Therefore, more than half of the current population has arrived in the past 4 years. When the first Tibetans came to Sydney they settled in Dee Why. Others joined them and those who initially moved to Western Sydney moved to Dee Why as they found it too far to travel to visit other Tibetans. The Tibetan mentees range in age from late 20s to mid 50s; many are Buddhist monks and nuns. Some of the Tibetans were also formerly nomads. Some Tibetans had almost no English language when they first arrived. Some are not literate in their native language, nor used to formal schooling. For these refugees, learning English is a slow process. Others, on the other hand, may have learnt English in India, been formally educated and have a relatively good grasp of English. Yet this does not necessarily translate into the everyday, where accents, slang and the Australian tendency to speak fast and shorten words, can still make it difficult for those who can speak English.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research was to evaluate the short and long term impact on participants of the program. We were interested in exploring whether this approach to helping refugee families settle in the local community has any advantages over traditional community settlement models.

The key research questions guiding the evaluation were:

- How effective is this program in achieving its stated goals for the mentees?
- How might the program be improved to achieve these goals?

To evaluate the program an in-depth qualitative study employing narrative based and visual ethnographic techniques to best capture the everyday complexity of feelings and experiences of participants in the program was conducted. Therefore the following research methods were employed:

- Participant observation
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Photo-voice

Kylie Sait participated in the seven week training course for mentors, two of the debriefing sessions and reviewed the course materials. Key program staff members were interviewed in a focus group setting to explore their perceptions of the program and their views on the Tibetan community’s settlement needs (see appendix 1). Eleven mentors participated in the first focus group held on May 1 2008 at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. In this focus group their hopes and expectations for the program were discussed (see appendix 2). Ten mentors participated in a second focus group (see appendix 3) in mid June 2008, about halfway through the required twelve week mentoring relationship. At this meeting a survey was distributed (see appendix 4) to the mentors. Nine completed surveys were returned, a response rate of ninety percent.

Tibetan mentees participated in a separate focus group discussion on May 1 2008, facilitated with the assistance of Tenpa Dugpak (see appendix 5). Also at this meeting the project team distributed disposable cameras to each of the Tibetan participants to record their experiences through the mentor program. They were asked to take photos around a range of themes such as ‘places I went to’, ‘places I went with my mentor that I would never have gone to otherwise’, ‘places I feel I belong’, ‘people or places that make me uncomfortable’. In addition, each Tibetan was issued with a notebook, which they could use as a diary to record their thoughts and experiences through the process. The Tibetans selected from the photographs those they wished to show the researcher for discussion. The role of the photographs was to facilitate discussion. We were advised by the Tibetan community leader that this visual medium is most appropriate for this community, more so than regular interviews. Eleven Tibetan mentees were interviewed (see appendix 6) in small groups (three people per group) using a survey (see appendix 7), photographs and diary notes as prompts to talk through their experiences in the program. A Tibetan Health Care Interpreter was provided by the Multicultural Health Service to be present in all of these interviews and translated when necessary. A final follow-up focus group with the Tibetan mentees will be conducted twelve months after the completion of the program (in mid 2009) to assess the longer-term impacts of the program.
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). Information and consent forms were distributed to mentors on the first day of the course, to Tibetan mentees in an information session prior to the focus group, and to the program staff prior to the focus group. Information and consent forms for the Tibetan participants were translated into Tibetan and the process also verbally explained to them with the assistance of Tenpa Dugpak. Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded with the informed consent of participants and transcribed verbatim. All focus groups and interviews were conducted by Amanda Wise and Kylie Sait in the library of the Northern Beaches College of TAFE.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the existing research, literature and key debates surrounding a) refugee resettlement, and b) mentoring.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The literature on refugee resettlement in Australia and comparable countries generally takes either a medical or a wider social inclusion focus (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2003). The medical perspective tends to see the other causes of resettlement difficulties, such as loss of assets, job, status and community, as secondary. The social inclusion approach focuses on social adaptation and integration on the basis of refugees’ human and social capital. It emphasises the empowerment of refugees and their communities, their ability to actively approach acculturation and integration, as well as the concrete opportunities for social inclusion in the host society, as the most important factors in resettlement (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2003:64).

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003:83) argue that resettlement services are based on a Western perspective of social and psychological well-being and suggest that whilst refugee resettlement should include medical and mental health assistance where needed, it should not pre-empt such a need by pathologising (or medicalising) the refugee experience. There are many issues which refugees face which impact on their resettlement process.

Trauma and displacement

Difficulties in resettling may be exacerbated by pre-migration trauma and torture with many refugees having spent long periods of time living in refugee camps resulting in disrupted education and employment (Taylor and Stanovic 2005:6). The lasting impact of experiencing or witnessing rape, murder, torture and imprisonment in their countries of origin ((Broadbent, Caciattolo and Carpenter, 2007:585) and high levels of anxiety about having family members still living in danger impact on the well-being of refugees (Taylor and Stanovic, 2005:7). Older refugees may be “resistant to approaching public authorities for assistance due to their experiences in exile, or of discrimination in their country of settlement” (Saunders, 2004, cited in Connelly et al 2006:12). They may also feel insecure due to a loss of social status, difficulty in contributing financially and lacking social networks (Connelly et al, 2006). In her book on East Timorese refugees, Wise (2006) documents the displacement that many refugees feel; the different lifestyle of the host country, a lack of familiar food, rituals and special occasions, and language displacement.

There is a growing body of research that asserts that the effects of torture impact differently on refugee groups. Tibetan Buddhists exhibit fewer symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. It is thought that characteristics of their faith may ‘cushion’ the impact of this trauma. In addition, to social and material support, cultural and religious resources also lessen the psychological anguish experienced as a result of trauma. In their study with 769 Tibetan refugees arriving in Dharamsala, India, many of whom had been imprisoned in Tibet and had experienced torture, Sachs and Rosenfeld (2008:200-201), sought to identify the coping strategies and psychological distress of these refugees. Their methodology involved structured interviews, self report measures and a ‘daily coping assessment’, with three religious items added to it in consultation with the Tibetan director of a centre for Tibetan torture victims. The three items included "meditation, seeking divinations from lamas/performing special prayers/visiting temples, and considering the
trauma as a result of karma. The researchers found that the three religious strategies were the most frequently sanctioned coping items used by 90% of the sample in comparison to non-religious items which were endorsed by only 70% of the sample. Despite the hardships reported by the participants, there were low levels of psychological distress with only 77 of the participants demonstrating clinical depression and only one study participant having clinically significant PTSD (Sachs and Rosenfeld, 2008: 206). The authors caution, however, that while Tibetans may be particularly resilient due to their coping strategies, such as, making an effort “to view others’ suffering as more severe than their own”, they still suffer severe distress warranting both psychological and political intervention (Sachs and Rosenfeld, 2008:207).

According to Sachs and Rosenfeld (2008) measuring the extent of the psychological affects resulting from pre-migration trauma is difficult as this distress is frequently compounded by post migration factors. Many studies demonstrate that the material, social and cultural deprivations of being a refugee significantly contribute towards psychological distress (Sachs and Rosenfeld, 2008:200).

**Inadequate Services**

In many cases generic services are often inadequate in terms of meeting the needs of refugees. A number of identified shortcomings include; a lack of culturally appropriate services, a lack of knowledge among authorities and service providers with regard to the needs of refugees and experience in working with refugees; a lack of flexibility; a lack of interpreters; a lack of consultation with refugees and a lack of appropriate accommodation choices leading to sub standard housing (Spencer, 2004). The adequate resourcing, planning and execution of services are essential for the establishment of good community relationships (Spencer, 2004:7, Couch, 2007: 38).

**Community Attitudes**

A paucity of information about refugees among community members and biased media reports can create anxiety among residents of host communities about refugees which can in some cases lead to hostility and violence towards refugees (Spencer 2004). Negative stereotyping about a particular group of refugees can lead to that group having a diminished and devaluated status (Valtonen, 2004:90). Local authorities and agencies need to prepare host communities for the arrival of refugees. Many refugees experience the isolation and lack of community links which they have when trying to settle into new communities as alienating and depressing (Ager and Strang, 2004). Developing a mentoring scheme is an effective way of facilitating the engagement of individual refugees with the broader community allowing for the development of networks and bonds and the improvement of perceptions about refugees (Spencer, 2004:7) Rudiger (2004:4) notes that “as a policy goal, good community relations between new migrants and receiving communities can be assumed to exist when people feel safe and secure in the absence of overt tensions, are included in community life and can benefit and contribute on an equal basis, display respectful attitudes towards one another are able to interact and cooperate positively, and share a stake in their local polity based on a sense of trust and belonging” (see also Ager and Strang, 2004).

**Learning the ropes**

Spencer (2004) provides examples of how a lack of knowledge of how the system works impacts on the successful settlement of refugees. A lack of knowledge on how to access accommodation, a lack of knowledge about how the school system works or the role of GP’s all hinder the ability of refugees to settle.

**Housing**

Connelly et al (2006) highlight the recognition of the critical role of housing in refugee integration. Safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation is essential for the successful resettlement of refugees, yet the housing experiences of refugees are often characterised by instability and temporariness involving hostels,
short term rental agreements and staying with friends and family whose circumstances may change. Refugees face threats of homelessness, racist discrimination from landlords and other residents and uncertainty around re-housing decisions (Phillips, 2004:22 in Spencer ed.). Some large refugee families live in small over-crowded accommodation being supported through one income or on social security benefits (Wise, 2006:51). Connelly et al’s (2006) literature review on the needs of older refugees demonstrates the refugees may have problems in dealing with private landlords as well as housing associations, ranging from communication difficulties to racist intimidation and therefore tend to rely on informal supports or cultural organisations that are trusted and speak their language. Furthermore, refugees are disproportionately represented in poor housing due to lower income and poverty.

*Education*

While schools play a very important role in improving the lives of refugee pupils and are perceived by pupils and families as providing a safe, supportive and stable role in what are often insecure and unstable lives (Warren, 2004:75 [Spencer ed]), refugee children face barriers which undermine their ability to achieve good education outcomes. These include; frequent moves due to being placed in short term housing; health problems associated with sub standard housing conditions; a lack of resources such as, computer and internet access at home; a lack of English proficiency and experiences of racism and bullying at school being taught by teachers who rarely have training or experience in teaching refugee children (Warren, 2004:75-76 [Spencer ed], Taylor, 2004:13, RCOA, 2007). Many also come from situations where their schooling has been intermittent or they have had no schooling at all (RCOA, 2007, Warren, 2004:75-76 [Spencer ed], Taylor, 2004:13). Barriers to accessing educational opportunities for [older] refugees include domestic caring responsibilities, lack of literacy in their first language, insufficient confidence and mobility restrictions(Connelly et al, 2006).

*The Labour Market*

Aside from the very important economic function of being employed, employment also provides emotional security, improved self esteem, often the opportunity to improve English language proficiency and the context where one can develop bonds with others. While the labour market experience of refugees is diverse, the data on refugee employment suggests that refugees experience high levels of unemployment, underemployment and working in jobs that are well below their skills levels regardless of previous work experience and education (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007:2, Somerville and Wintour, 2004:37-41 [Spencer ed], Connelly et al 2006 Valtonen 2004). Some of the factors which affect the employability of refugees include English proficiency, length of residence, age, gender, social and community networks, poverty and employer discrimination (Somerville and Wintour, 2004:37-41 [Spencer ed]) Human capital barriers to employment include a lack of appropriate skills including language, cultural differences and the psychology of being a refugee (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002, cited in Connelly et al 2006:24). External barriers include legal status, non-recognition of overseas qualifications, lack of information and childcare facilities, discrimination and racism. In both the UK and Australia, researchers ( Bloch 2002, cited in Connelly et al, 2006, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007:2) have found that many refugees in the UK have high skills which were not recognised or were mismatched in relation to the labour market sector with many refugees accepting ‘occupational down adjustment’. Refugees often do not feel that they are in a position to pick and choose employment and feel that they must take whatever is offered to them as they often have families to support and relatives overseas who need their help. After several years working in jobs below their skills levels, their skills degenerate and the likelihood of them reaching their previous level becomes even more unlikely (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007:14). In their study of three groups of refugees, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007:18) found that having no local experience and Australian references also inhibited the refugees’ chances of finding appropriate employment. Qualitative data carried out by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007:18 in Australia suggested that many refugees experienced discrimination during the job search, job interview and in the workplace. Some found that, once potential
employers saw them, their applications were rejected because they looked visibly different and had accents (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007:18).

Language proficiency

A lack of proficiency in English undermines the ability of refugees to access services (Spencer, 2004). Literature on [older] refugees indicates that a lack of English language is a barrier to information, services and integration (sense of belonging, perhaps is a more appropriate term). It enables refugees to be more self-reliant and confident in using public services, transport and community spaces. It reduces isolation as interaction with other people becomes easier (Connelly et al, 2006). With little English, refugees experience difficulties with filling in forms, understanding letters from social security etc which leads to anxiety and feelings of powerlessness (Wise, 2006:56).

Gender & Family

According to Connelly et al (2006) the role of family networks is being challenged in literature on refugee communities due to changing family structures over time to intergenerational conflicts and the oppressive role of family bonds for women in some instances. The role of family networks in overstated and over-dependent on in place of much needed services (particularly health care).

Spencer (2004) notes that integration is a contested term and in the context of her edited review was used to refer to the two-way process of adaptation by both migrant and host society that enables the migrant to prosper and move towards achieving equality of access, participation and outcomes.

Mentoring

Much of the mentoring literature focuses on youth mentoring, particularly socially disadvantaged young people (for example, Philip and Hendry, 1996; Colley, 2002, 2004; Hartley, 2004; Rhodes and Dubois, 2006) or mentoring in the context of the workplace (for example Cranwell-Ward et al, 2004; Devos, 2005). There is a lack of literature on, and research into, mentoring for migrants or refugees in the context of community social inclusion.

Mentoring is used to describe various programs and relationships, whether formal or informal, which aim to build the skills or well-being of a mentee through the input and/or assistance of another person who has more skills, experience and knowledge, a mentor (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 10). The crucial component of mentoring is the trusting relationship that develops between the mentor and the mentee (MacCullum and Beltman, 1999, cited in Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 10). At the heart of mentoring lies ‘an affirmative of human relationships and the capacity to enable those involved to learn and grow’ (Youth Mentoring Network, 2007).

The origin of the term ‘mentor’ can be traced back to Greek mythology in which Mentor was the faithful companion of Odysseus, King of Ithaca, who, when the King set off for the Trojan wars, was put in charge of the household. He was responsible for ensuring the King’s son was raised to be a fit person to succeed his father. Therefore Mentor had to be parent figure, teacher, role model, counsellor, advisor, challenger and encourager (Carruthers, 1993 cited in Department for Victorian Communities, 2006; Kester, 2008). This use of the myth however is strongly critiqued by Colley (2004). She argues that the myth is deployed to suggest that mentoring dates back thousands of years as an innately human practice, and to define the mentor’s role in highly emotive terms. We should thus beware the use of ancient myths to legitimate practices in our own socio-historical context as myths encourage us to celebrate the status quo not to act on the basis of critical consciousness (Barthes, 1972 cited in Colley, 2004). Colley suggests that the foundation of the mentoring relationship is presented as the loving devotion of the mentor to the mentees needs. Nonetheless, volunteer
mentors do experience feelings of satisfaction from making a difference and opportunities to reflect on their own lives, goals, aspirations and ways of working with others. Through their involvement in mentoring, mentors can also build new skills through training, meet new people and add variety to their work and life experiences (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 12).

Keys to **effective mentoring** include:

- Clear vision, purpose and values
- The involvement of an experienced co-ordinator who can support both mentors and mentees
- Collaboration with relevant agencies and community groups
- Well documented policies and procedures
- Screening of mentors (through advertising, interviewing, reference checks and police checks)
- Orientation and training
- Effective matching processes
- Protocols on confidentiality, security and conflict of interest
- Mentors need to be informed about the potential emotional and financial costs of establishing a relationship with the mentee
- Ongoing support and supervision
- Length of match
- Managed closure
- Evaluation processes

(Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 15-17, RCOA, 2005).

**Challenges of Mentoring**

The Refugee Council of Australia (2005) claims that there needs to be an awareness of the unequal power relationship between the mentor and mentee. The mentor is advantaged due to his/her understanding of Australian cultural norms and also has possible financial advantage over the refugee. It is important that the mentor/mentee relationship does not become paternalistic or patronising and that no abuse of power takes place. If mentoring programs are not managed effectively and do not have well-defined protocols, debriefing and exit strategies, they may reinforce the refugees’ feelings of powerlessness and dislocation rather than alleviate them (RCOA, 2005). The mentee needs to be viewed as an active agent who helps to shape the mentoring process (Darling et al 2006).

While focused on the challenges of youth mentoring programs, the two major challenges mentioned by the Australian Institute of family studies are relevant to refugee mentoring programs. Firstly, it is important to recognise the complexities of mentoring relationships and secondly, to be aware of the conditions under which they are most likely to thrive (Hartley, 2004). The Mentor must be skilled at navigating cultural and personal boundaries (Aldrige, 2008).
Value of Mentoring

While standard service provision is important in aiding the settlement process of refugees, the mentoring relationship is special in that its most essential principle is focused on building trust and closeness (Yeh, Ching, Okubo, 2007:736). Refugees often claim that their biggest barriers to feeling at home in their new countries is a lack of trusting relationships. There is much evidence to suggest that mentoring programs are effective in facilitating an individual connection with the wider community by helping in the development of links and also through improving perceptions about refugees (Spencer, 2004:11). Mentoring can be a powerful aid in the settlement of refugees who gain practical knowledge and help through the development of personal relationships (RCOA, 2005). The mentor and the wider community also benefit through gaining knowledge about the complexity of the refugee situation and the difficulties which refugees face with regard to settling into their host communities. This awareness can lead to a greater social understanding and social acceptance among members of the host community and can lessen hostility and contempt for refugees (RCOA, 2005). Evaluation of mentoring programs have suggested that they are successful in encouraging dialogue, building trust and encouraging social connection (Spencer, 2004:11).

Refugee Mentoring Programs

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that mentoring and volunteering schemes are effective methods for facilitating individuals’ engagement with wider community life by developing linkages and improving perceptions (Rudiger, 2004). Feeling a sense of connectedness is imperative to feeling socially included (Taylor and Stanovic 2004:4). Mentoring for refugees aids in the development of social networks and English language and has the potential to increase education and training and employment opportunities and also help refugees to understand and learn cultural customs and norms. Refugees often claim that their biggest barrier to feeling at home in their new countries is a sense of isolation, not knowing who to ask and a paucity of trusting relationships. Mentoring can be a powerful aid in the settlement of refugees who gain practical knowledge and help through the development of personal relationships (RCOA, 2005). The benefits of a one on one relationship developed in mentoring programs can go beyond the mutual understanding and respect between mentor and mentee and it has much wider community implications. This section outlines the operation of a number of refugee mentoring programs which resemble the program being evaluated.

Time Together (UK)

Time Together is a nationwide UK scheme which matches refugees in one on one mentoring relationships with local volunteer mentors. Mentors support, encourage and motivate their mentees as they seek to achieve goals in language, employment, education and socio-cultural integration. Mentors and mentees commit to spending a minimum of five hours per month together for a period of one year. The aim is to help mentees settle into a new life in the UK and to enable mentors to gain a better understanding of the lives of refugees and to build bridges between communities. The program was established by TimeBank in 2002 in response to a Government White Paper that recommended the provision of mentoring schemes to help refugees integrate into the UK. In 2005 TimeBank received funding from the Home Office and HM Treasury Invest to Save Budget to expand Time Together nationwide. There are now twenty-four projects operating throughout the UK, managed and supported by a central team based at TimeBank and delivered on the ground by a coordinator and line-manager in a local partner organisation. The program was independently evaluated in 2007 and it was concluded that Time Together is highly successful in facilitating the integration of refugee mentees into the UK and in three-quarters of cases (30 mentoring pairs across six locations were evaluated), mentors successfully enhanced integration in terms of offering practical help and advice relevant to everyday life, building confidence, and contributing to English language development (Esterhuizen and Murphy, 2007: 3-4).
MERCY WORKS INC. MERCY REFUGEE SERVICES (AUSTRALIA)
Under its DIAC funded Community Links project, Mercy Refugee Service recruits, trains and supports volunteers to assist refugees and humanitarian entrants to settle in Sydney. They aim to support refugees who are particularly vulnerable (such as those who do not have strong community linkages, who are suffering ongoing trauma, who do have limited English, women and children and those who have very large families). Volunteers complete an 18 hour training program (usually run twice a year), held over a full weekend and two weekday evenings. Volunteers are assigned to a refugee family or individual according to gender, language, and location as appropriate and usually visit once a week for a period of nine months, depending on the refugee’s needs. Volunteers are required to report back to the project coordinator on all activities undertaken to assist the client. They also have regular contact with the project coordinator through a formal monthly reporting system, ongoing phone and email support and volunteer meetings and training seminars. Volunteers assist refugees by: helping them learn to use public transport services, contact and negotiate with real estate agents, seek employment, practice English, access services such as Centrelink, health and education. They also assist in building refugee’s social networks and community participation and engagement (Mercy Works Inc. 2008).

YNOMRAH (HARMONY) SUDANESE REFUGEE MENTORING PROGRAM PILOT, TASMANIA
The aim of this program, developed by the Duke of Edinburgh Tasmanian Award Authority in Hobart in September 2004, was to create a ‘buddy’ system to encourage friendships and networks and to aid with the cultural orientation of newly arrived Sudanese youth. There were 12 mentors and 20 Sudanese youth. While seven local Sudanese community leaders who were informed and consulted at each stage in the development of the project, the project experienced several difficulties: The relationship between the mentors and mentees was tainted due to the military background of the mentors; there were tensions between the mentors and mentees as the mentees did not always turn up for their appointment with the mentors and the activities which were chosen, such as bush hunting at night, were inappropriate for refugees who had experienced trauma and torture in their countries of origin

MEN’S HEALTH PILOT MENTORING PROGRAM, NSW REFUGEE HEALTH SERVICE, SYDNEY
This program which is still in the process of being developed has a focus addressing the mental and physical health issues of refugee men. This program will focus on addressing the holistic health of these men and will use Australian born male mentors from a range of backgrounds. The NSW refugee health Service will collaborate with Mercy Refugee Service with regard to choosing the volunteers and they will assist in creating an awareness of the issues which refugee men face. Mentoring has been chosen as the best way of addressing these men’s needs due to the recognition, that as a result of either a lack of training or a lack of resources, mainstream agencies are not able to address the needs of refugee men.

SUNDALOG PROJECT INC, CARLTON, MELBOURNE
This program was instigated by a number of students in Trinity College at the University of Melbourne as a result of Trinity theological School providing homework assistance for Sudanese students. From the outset consultation was carried out with local Sudanese communities in Melbourne. The project was aimed at families who had not arrived recently and involved 40 volunteers and 12 mentors. Mentors were matched in pairs with five different families. The mentors visited the families each week and completed assignments with them that were aimed at informing them about cultural and political aspects of Australian society. Some of the subjects covered were communication, finance and budgeting and general organisation. Some of the problems associated with this project were that the material covered was too advanced for the entrants and also that more time was needed to bond with the families.
Unity Program, Victoria

Women from the Cook Islander local migrant community approached the City of Kingston Council about mentoring women living in the area who were from newly emerging African communities. They felt that they could empathise with the cultural dislocation these women were experiencing and were eager to give them support. The program focused on bringing the two groups of women together around a shared activity. After an initial unsuccessful activity, the group, due to the emerging communities interest in learning to sew and do haberdashery, decided to create a unity quilt. The program benefited from an interpreter, a sewing instructor and childcare. The women met once a week and worked together on a quilt using traditional motifs from their backgrounds. Part of the reason that the pilot program was a great success was because the council employed a generalist community worker from a well respected Sudanese family and she provided good cross-cultural mediation and ensured the participation of the women from her community. The program continues to run, has been documented in a report and has won a DIMIA national strength in diversity award.
CHAPTER 4

MENTOR TRAINING COURSE

Mentors must complete a seven week training course offered by Northern Beaches College of the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE. It is co-facilitated by Phillipa Bellemore, an experienced TAFE community services teacher and Dorjee Dadul, a well-respected member of the Tibetan community in Dee Why (and recipient of the 2007 Community Relations Commission Community Services Award, highly commended and Warringah Council’s 2008 Citizen of the Year). The course runs for three and a half hours per week on Thursday mornings, at the Northern Beaches College of TAFE. Mentors therefore receive a total of 24 and a half hours training. The course covers the role of the mentor and focuses on communication, interpersonal skills, values, ethics and community referral skills. Upon completion, mentors ‘graduate’ and receive a certification of completion.

COURSE CONTENT

The learning outcomes for the Mentoring in the Community course are:

1. Define the role, tasks and responsibilities of a mentor, and develop a job description for the mentor role
2. Identify the need and external factors affecting the client group, including educational, employment, legal, welfare and health issues and develop strategies to access and/or referral to relevant agencies
3. Define the boundaries and limitations of the mentor role within the specific community context
4. Identify and demonstrate effective interpersonal skills required for the mentor role
5. Understand and demonstrate appropriate Values and Ethics for the mentor role, with an emphasis on strategies for ensuring clients’ confidentiality
6. Understand the rules, regulations and procedures and operations of the organization(s) which may have an impact on the mentor/client relationship
7. Establish a Mentor Committee or Mentor Support Group (optional)

The assessment for the course is Achieved Competency or Not Yet Competent. Participants are required to complete the following assessment tasks during class times:

1. Develop a volunteer job description
2. Assist in developing a group code of conduct for the program
3. Participate in class role-plays of mentoring and listening and communication exercises
4. Develop a local resource portfolio of local community services and contacts

(Bellemore and Dadul, 2008)
In this program, all mentors were women; predominately middle aged or older, working part-time or semi-retired. Most are married with children and brought with them a diverse range of skills and experiences including, nursing, teaching, business, administration and travel. The program coordinator acknowledged the intelligence and experience of this particular group of mentors.

“*The groups made some insightful observations about being a mentor and their hopes about it. Interesting that one group said that they hope to share the information about Tibet with their family. This is an intelligent and cultured group who are pretty skilled.*” (Staff reflections, Week 1)

Initially there were fifteen potential mentors in the class. However, two people withdrew from the program (one in the final weeks of the course and one after completion of the course) due to personal reasons. Although ideally all mentors would participate in every week of the course, the reality was the numbers fluctuated (see Table 1). Mentors were also expected to commit to attending the six compulsory debriefing sessions (held for two hours once a fortnight) and a minimum twelve week mentoring relationship. However due to the characteristics of the mentor profile (predominantly retired/semi-retired, middle-class), a number had extended overseas holidays planned during this time. This impacted on full participation in the course, debriefing, the mentoring relationship and the research process for the evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Class size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonetheless, program staff praised the quality of the mentors in this particular group and commented especially on the evolving group dynamic. This dynamic will be further discussed in chapter 7.

“*Most of the participants seem to really enjoy being there. I train lots of people, and this is by far the most successful group I’ve run, I think, and part of it’s that they want to be there...*” (Staff, focus group)
Speaker 2: “And they really are a fabulous group. It’s an absolutely fabulous program.”

Speaker 1: “They’re fabulous people.”

Speaker 2: “They’re very bonded together.”

Speaker 1: “They are. I compare them...They’re much more mature, they’re much more world-wise.”

Speaker 2: “They’ve got a lot of life experience under their belt.”

Speaker 1: “And as a group, they’re very sophisticated.”

(Staff, focus group)

All of the mentors surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that the training course was helpful and sufficient.

“The training was extremely helpful and practical.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“Excellent training sessions – a good balance of information from speakers and Dorjee and Phillipa.” (Mentor, survey comment)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | - Welcome, introduction, learning outcomes  
      - What is a mentor?  
      - The Tibetan community in Dee Why |
| 2    | - TibetanGreetings  
      - Goals of mentoring  
      - Stereotyping  
      - Tibetan and Australian culture  
      - Speaker from the Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS |
| 3    | - Experience of past mentors – guest speaker  
      - Attributes of good mentors  
      - Speaker from Centrelink |
| 4    | - Boundaries  
      - Code of Conduct  
      - Listening skills  
      - Australian customs and slang  
      - English language issues – Speaker ESOL Head Teacher, TAFE |
| 5    | - Review  
      - Cross-cultural skills  
      - What TAFE offers  
      - Tenancy Rights  
      - Speaker from Manly Community Centre |
| 6    | - Speakers from MigrantLink (interpreting services, settlement and community services)  
      - Speaker from STARTTS - Dealing with torture and trauma  
      - Matching lunch with Tibetan mentees |
| 7    | - Mentor job description  
      - Referral  
      - Mentor self-care and survival |
Table 2 outlines the proposed structure of the course. However given the nature of the course it did not adhere strictly to this timetable. Flexibility was required, particularly given the Olympic Torch relay protest, recent events in Tibet and their impact on the Tibetan community (and also the mentors). These events also impacted on the process of matching mentors and mentees, which will be discussed further in Chapter five. Furthermore, due to initial holdups in the process of recruitment of potential mentors, the course started a week later than originally intended. This thus meant that the two week TAFE holiday period interrupted the flow of the course. The holiday fell between weeks six and seven of the course (following the matching lunch with the Tibetans).

Given that this is the third time the program has run, the experience of the past courses influenced the content of each week. For example, case studies were included to help mentors understand the types of issues they may be confronted with.

“And we ran case studies this time, which we didn’t do last time, so we had case studies about, “What would you do if...?” The same with services. “What would you do if?” (Staff, focus group)

Throughout the course mentors participated in a number of group discussions and activities (see next page for examples). In the second week of the course Australian and Tibetan culture was discussed and mentors were asked to bring to class an item which to them represented ‘Australian culture’. The range of items brought along was very interesting and included things such as BBQ tongs, swimming goggles, Indigenous artworks, a copy of the Australian Women’s Weekly, a Max Dupain photograph, a program from a performance of ‘Snugglepot and Cuddlepie’, a jar of Vegemite, a pair of Ugg boots, and a boomerang. This exercise highlighted that Tibetan culture, like Australian culture, is diverse.

Another interesting activity also conducted in Week 2 was on stereotyping, also referred to as the ‘potato exercise’. Mentors were asked to select a potato from a basket, to give it a name and draw a picture of their potato, and return it to the basket. Later, following a discussion about how people are stereotyped, they were asked to find ‘their’ potato. This exercise demonstrated how romanticised notions of ‘the Tibetans’ can lead to stereotyping individual Tibetans in particular idealised characteristics. This exercise was identified by mentors as being helpful in challenging what they thought about the potential mentees.

Mentor: “I remember the exercise on stereotypes. That was really interesting.”

Interviewer: “Why did you find that exercise so useful?”

Mentor: “It made you think in a different way. It actually changed the way I thought about Tibetans.”

(Mentor, first focus group)
TIBETAN MENTORING IN THE COMMUNITY

CASE STUDY – HOW DO I KNOW WHAT A MENTEE NEEDS?
You have just been matched with your mentee Yishi. She is shy but seems very interested in being a part of the mentoring program. Her English is limited and she studies at TAFE three days per week. She is very interested in improving her English and meeting Australian people.

You have already met and exchanged some information at the mentoring lunches. You are excited about being part of the Tibetan mentoring program and keen to be an effective mentor. It’s your first meeting today and you would like to speak to her about mentoring and what she would like to do in your session.

IN SMALL GROUPS:

- How will you explain mentoring and your role?
- Given that many mentees will have limited English how might you find out about what activities the mentee would like to do?

READ THROUGH THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS AND DISCUSS WAYS OF AVOIDING MISCOMMUNICATION

CHOOSING ACTIVITIES
Mentor: Hi, lovely to see you. Would you like to go for a walk on the beach next week or have a picnic at Manly Dam?

Mentee: Yes

ORGANISING A MEETING PLACE
Mentor: So we will meet next week at TAFE at 12.30 on Thursday, OK – you understanding?

Mentee: Yes.

(The following week the mentee is nowhere to be seen at the ‘agreed’ time.)
A Mentor Job Description was written by the Program Coordinator, Phillipa Bellemore. In week seven of the course, mentors were asked to read the two page job description and sign a statement of understanding to indicate that they were clear about what their duties, responsibilities and rights as a mentor with the program entailed. This description outlined the following:

- **Role of the mentor** - form an ongoing, voluntary and mutually beneficial relationship with a Tibetan mentee

- **Activities of mentors** – discussion of Australian and Tibetan customs and culture; discussion of educational opportunities; assistance in applying for jobs

- **Responsibilities of mentors** – engage in regular (weekly or fortnightly) contact with their mentee; attend training and debriefing sessions; be punctual, reliable and follow through on commitments made; ensure mentee confidentiality; make a minimum six months commitment to the program; set boundaries and engage in appropriate activities; empower their mentee to develop their own skills and networks; follow the Code of Ethics; be culturally appropriate and sensitive.

- **Rights of mentors** – receive ongoing training and support; be given clear guidelines on expectations of the program; refer situations beyond expertise to Program Coordinator or appropriate community service; be valued and acknowledge by TAFE program staff; to have commitment from the mentee to the relationship; to be informed of mentee absences; debriefing and counselling support if required; to withdraw from program if required; to engage in mentoring in a place they are comfortable; to be given feedback where appropriate.

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** – attendance at 80% minimum of training program and debriefing sessions; ongoing attendance at group mentor meetings; positive feedback from mentees; mentoring relationship to be a minimum of six months of meetings

- **Reporting structure** – report to Program Coordinator

- **Grievances and complaints** – report to Program Coordinator in the first instance

- **Insurance cover** – mentors meeting on TAFE premises are covered under TAFE’s accident insurance policy. Outings outside of TAFE, including car trips, are not covered by TAFE insurance

- **Enquiries** – email or phone Program Coordinator
A Tibetan Mentoring Code of Conduct was developed by TAFE Outreach specifically for the program in March 2008. The aim of the Code of Conduct is to “ensure that mentors are clear about their boundaries and responsibilities as mentors on the Tibetan Mentoring Program”. It was developed because whilst “participation in this program is voluntary there are still expectations about conduct that need to be made explicit” (TAFE Outreach, 2008). Mentors were also required to read this document and sign a statement of agreement (in week six of the course). The issues covered in this code include:

- Respect, confidentiality and privacy
- Mentor self-care (being mindful of time spent with mentee)
- Appropriate mentoring activities
- Respect for cultural difference and appropriate discussion
- Money and gifts (Do not loan/give money or other items)
- Referral (to appropriate services or professionals when required)
- Children (Do not babysit or be alone with mentee’s children)
- Support (debriefing and seeking advice)

The Mentor Job Description and the Code of Conduct were developed for this program based on the experience of previous programs in which expectations and boundaries were not always clear.

Speaker 1: “But this group’s pretty – like they’re interested but they’re focused, and that’s why I noticed that even the people who have got – there’s a couple of mentees who have got huge problems, but the mentors are actually keeping appropriate boundaries, and that actually has been something to this one [program]. We’ve put a lot more boundaries, code of conduct...

Speaker 2: “...The role of the mentor, the code of conduct; we’ve put much more into that, and more emphasis on that this time around.”

(Staff, focus group)

However, despite the implementation of these, difficulties and challenges surrounding boundary issues continue to be an issue for this program as is discussed later in this report.
CO-FACILITATION

The co-facilitation model of the course is one of the key strengths of the program. Phillipa’s knowledge of mentoring combined with Dorjee’s insights into the Tibetan community provided participants with an informative and enriching experience. The co-facilitation model was identified by program staff as one of the key strengths of the course.

“I asked Dorjee to briefly introduce himself and 45 minutes later he was going strong. I looked around the group and they were mesmerised by his story...that’s what they were really wanting to hear. It’s East meets West in the training room...the program is so enriched by Dorjee’s presence and my slight discomfort at time about following the plan is totally outweighed by the experience and wisdom he brings.” (Staff reflections, week 2)

“I think the strength of the program is having a co-facilitation model. I think it’s just invaluable to have Dorjee there every week. He can share the cultural stuff, and people can ask questions.” (Staff, focus group)

Likewise, mentor course participants also thought the co-facilitation model worked well and they gained much from both Phillipa and Dorjee.

“I thought it [co-facilitation] worked really well, because I had never met a Tibetan before and the way he [Dorjee] was able to explain the things that were going on in the country, it was right from the horse’s mouth, so to speak. It was very, very beneficial, and it certainly got me into reading a lot on Tibet, and really getting a greater understanding of the people that we’re dealing with.” (Mentor, first focus group)

“Phillipa is the most wonderful facilitator.” “She’s excellent. Very well-paced. She keeps everything quietly under control!” (Mentor, first focus group)

“Phillipa has been excellent and has taken a caring role as well as being dedicated. Dorjee has been integral to the program’s success.” (Mentor, survey comment)
All mentors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that as mentors they received adequate support and assistance from the program staff.

“Phillipa was an excellent teacher – always kept us on track and reminded us of our “role as a mentor” and to keep within those margins. Offered her support at anytime we may have needed her. Dorjee was always friendly, relaxed very informative and encouraging and told us many wonderful stories. He was always positive even though a lot of stories were sad.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“Have definitely not felt at all on my own. Always felt there is someone to consult, bounce ideas off etc...” (Mentor, survey comment)

“It is great to know we can call on the program staff if needed. They have been very helpful.” (Mentor, survey comment)

The incorporation of guest speakers most weeks was also one of the highlights of the course for both staff and mentors. On this course speakers were from the Multicultural Health Service, NSCCAHS, a mentor from the previous program, Centrelink, TAFE ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), Manly Community Centre, and STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors). There were also speakers from Migrantlink including a Tibetan bilingual worker.
“I think the speakers are a really, really positive part of this, but there isn’t room for everybody.” (Staff, focus group)

“What I think was useful, as a presenter, is to be able to come in and meet with the group, because I know it makes it much easier for them to contact you if they do need information. But one of the challenges is that you’re presenting information that’s quite detailed and confusing, and you’re presenting it before they even know that they need it…” (Staff, focus group)

For the mentors, the opportunity to meet workers in the field of refugee resettlement was very valuable, particularly as they then felt that they had someone to contact if they needed assistance during the mentoring relationship.

“It was great having the guest speakers come and meet them face to face, having a card and then because once you’ve met them, it’s just great.” (Mentor, second focus group)

Speaker 1: “I think some of the speakers have been brilliant.”

Speaker 2: “And some of them came – the health lady came along to the picnic as well…So we actually saw her interacting with our mentees as well, so it wasn’t like a one-way thing.”

(Mentors, second focus group)
The speakers were also helpful in reiterating to the mentors that their role as a mentor is important and that they are needed in the community.

Speaker: “And they [the guest speakers] made us feel that we really could add something, as well, through doing this course and matching up with someone. That it wasn’t all being looked after. There were plenty of things we could help people with.”

Speaker: “So we really could be useful. We really were necessary.”

(Mentors, first focus group)
The contributions from the guest speakers have also been important for ensuring that mentors know where they can find information and resources to support their mentee. All but one mentor surveyed agreed that they have been easily able to find information and resources to support their mentee.
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Although mentor feedback about the course was overwhelmingly positive, there were some suggestions for improvements.

Some mentors indicated that they would like to know more about the TAFE English classes most of the mentees attend as the goal of many of the Tibetan mentees is to improve their English skills. The head teacher from the TAFE’s ESOL division did come and speak to the group; however this was a general overview of what is provided. Mentors indicated that they would like more detailed information about the class content to enable them to assist more with English.

“I would like to know little bit more about the English classes, what they’re doing, because what I’ve seen so far, I’ve been a bit surprised at some of the things they’re doing. Maybe just a talk about the actual – what they learn at the different levels.”

“It would be good to meet maybe one or two of the teachers, if it’s possible.”

(Mentors, second focus group)

Another suggestion was to incorporate more experiences of Tibetans who have settled in the area. The opportunity to hear Tibetan voices was highly valued.

“I think it would have been good to hear from more Tibetan people who have settled or possibly been in a mentor relationship. A little bit more balanced, maybe.” (Mentor, first focus group)

Some further information about Tibetan Buddhism would also have been appreciated. In fact the program staff themselves acknowledged that perhaps this should have been included in the course module.

“And maybe a little bit about Tibetan Buddhism. I knew about it because I’d done a course, but for people who don’t know about Tibetan Buddhism, it might have been useful to – I don’t know how you would do that, because most of the monks and things don’t speak very good English (laughs), but it just might have been interesting for people to, don’t you think?” (Mentor, second focus group)
Debriefing

The debriefing process component of the program is very valuable for the mentors. There are six fortnightly compulsory debriefing sessions lead by the course facilitators which mentors are expected to attend. All mentors benefit from the opportunity to discuss their mentoring relationships with fellow mentors and also to provide continuity to the group dynamic and friendships that developed throughout the course.

“This is more like “training on the job”, so it’s very useful.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I think to just finish the course and then that would be it, it would be harder.” (Mentor, second focus group)

“I really look forward to them [the debrief sessions], because it’s a chance to get together, and it’s interesting to hear everybody’s experiences, so I’ve really enjoyed them.” (Mentor, second focus group)

The chance to catch up with fellow mentors was one of the most important aspects for mentors. Several friendships developed within the group (and will be discussed further in chapter seven).

“Extremely helpful to sort out any problems and hear how everyone else is doing. Also to catch up with each other and encourage group outings.” (Mentor, survey comment)
Eight out of the nine mentors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the debriefing sessions have been helpful.

![Bar chart showing the level of agreement with debriefing sessions being helpful]

**Speaker:** I think it’s a long-term commitment we’ve all made. It’s not short-term. I think that’s an important issue.

**Speaker 5:** Last week, after the actual [debrief]...at the end, we all had tea and we were here for about half an hour. We weren’t [sitting] in a semi-circle, and there was a lot of interaction, and actually I think, although we’ve done the formal bit of saying what we’ve done first, I think actually throwing us into a room to nut things out between us would be an addition to what we’re getting now, in the way it’s structured.

**Speaker 1:** I actually think it’s quite invaluable to try and keep that going, even if we had once a month, the first Thursday of every month, at someone’s house...just the mentors, not really the mentees, for us to exchange ideas and help each other along the way.”

(Mentors, second focus group)

Following the final formal debrief, the mentors as a group did decide to continue to meet regularly on a monthly basis at each others’ homes. This group dynamic seems to be something unique to this particular group of mentors. Such a strong bond has not been established in past programs. However in the past, mentors groups have been much more diverse (in terms of gender, age and life experience). The similarities in gender, age and class in this group has enabled a strong group dynamic to develop.
CHAPTER 5

MATCHING PROCESS

According to the literature on mentoring a well-planned matching process confirms the roles, responsibilities and expectations of both mentor and mentee and increases the likelihood of a successful relationship. Hence, key elements of matching include: a well defined criteria for matching; personal profiles of mentors and mentees to inform the match; clearly defined and articulated matching processes; and an understanding and agreement by all stakeholders of the terms and conditions of program participation. Furthermore it is suggested that the match is monitored and supported to assist, motivate and guide the relationship. This also enables opportunities for feedback and assists risk management procedures (Department for Victorian Communities; Youth Mentoring Network, 2007).

For the Tibetan Mentoring Program, the process of matching mentors and mentees has proven to be a complex and difficult task. A standard procedure for matching has yet to be implemented, with each of the three programs trialling different approaches. For the first program, matches were arranged by the Tibetan Community Health Worker, following meetings between mentors and mentees. In the second program, matches occurred more organically, however during the meetings a ringing bell was employed as a signal to remind mentors to circulate and talk to all of the Tibetans.

For this third program the matching took place after only one lunch time meeting between the mentors and the potential mentees. Two meetings were to take place, with the first to occur during the fourth week of the course. However this first meeting was cancelled due to the unfortunate events in Tibet and the protests surrounding the Olympic Torch relay (which many Tibetans travelled to Canberra for). The mentors and mentees met as a group for the first time during a lunch (after the class of week six of the course) on April 10. Perhaps unfortunately in the class directly before this meeting, mentors were visited by a psychologist from STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) who spoke to them about the torture and trauma experienced by many Tibetan refugees. Not only did this mean that this important session was somewhat rushed; the sombre nature of the discussion matter was probably not a good note on which to end before meeting the potential mentees.

In the weeks prior to the meeting the mentors experienced feelings of excitement, nervousness and apprehension. All were very eager to meet the Tibetans that they had been hearing so much about during the course. Much preparation went into the lunchtime meeting, with the mentors bringing plates of food including salads, quiches, and cakes and desserts. During the class the week before there was discussion about who would bring what, what were culturally sensitive and appropriate foods to provide etcetera. Mentors also brainstormed ideas of what to talk about with the Tibetans (see page44). Throughout the course Dorjee taught them some Tibetan words and phrases, including Tashi Delek (a greeting wishing wealth, happiness and good health) and helped them to pronounce common Tibetan names. Mentors also brought photos of their families, maps of Tibet, travel guide books and Australiana calendars to stimulate and aid discussion.
DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR WHEN YOU FIRST MEET THE TIBETAN MENTEES

Hello, my name is...
What is your name?
How do you say your name?
When did you come to Australia?
How did you get to Australia? From India, Nepal?
Have you come from India? Did you live in Dharamasala?
Where do you live?
Who do you live with? e.g. alone, other people, children
How long have you been in Dee Why? (months, years)
Do you have family?
Do you have family or friends in Dee Why?
Do you work now? Prompt: nursing home, kitchen
What work did you do in Tibet? Or were you a monk or a nun in Tibet?
Did you study in Tibet?
Where is your home in Tibet? Look at a map
How did you get here today – bus, walking?
Have you seen the Dalai Lama?
Will you see His Holiness, the Dalai Lama when he comes to Australia in June?
Are you learning English at TAFE? What is your teacher’s name?
Can you swim? Do you like going to the beach?
Do you like Australian food? What kinds of Australian food do you like?
What is your favourite Tibetan food?

Good idea to

- Bring a photo or pictures to assist conversation e.g. photo of family, Dalai Lama
- Use maps or books like Lonely Planet

Remember:

- Simple, language, a smile, ‘Tashi Delek’ and a good heart will take you a long way!
- Pauses and silences are OK You may need to repeat or rephrase your question
Whilst the mentors were well prepared for the meeting, it became apparent that many of the potential mentees were not sure exactly why they were attending and, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, this confusion over the mentoring program continued for some. For the mentees, this matching lunch was their first encounter with the program, beyond agreeing to being involved. Further, although several matches were made during this meeting there were several factors which made the process rather awkward and uncomfortable, as identified by the mentors, who often compared the experience of the process to shopping or speed-dating during the first focus group.

**Speaker 1:** “Am I ‘buying’ someone, or are they ‘buying’ me? And I found for me – and I’m reasonably confident – I found that quite difficult, and I didn’t feel comfortable.”

**Speaker 4:** “I did feel a bit of pressure on that. That you connected with somebody. It felt a bit like a speed-dating thing. (laughter)”

(Mentors, first focus group)

The issue of matching also came up during discussion in the second focus group held with the mentors when asked about whether they thought any aspect of the program needs to be improved. It was obvious that the process was quite uncomfortable for some, as this exchange demonstrates.

**Speaker 1:** *In the meeting – like, that lunch we had, I think there was...I did feel pressure that you either connect with somebody or...it was a bit like speed-dating! (laughs)*

**Speaker 2:** Yes. It was awful. Horrible.

**Speaker 3:** It wasn’t quite comfortable, was it? No.

**Speaker 1:** No. It might have been nice to have had one or two informal meetings before the matching happened. I don’t know how others felt.

**Speaker 4:** But did it work in the end?

**Speaker 1:** It did work. It was fine, yes.

**Speaker 2:** But you felt like you had to find someone! I felt a little bit uncomfortable.

**Speaker 5:** You didn’t want to be stood up! (laughs)

**Speaker 3:** Nobody likes me!”

(Mentors, second focus group)
Of the nine mentors surveyed only one agreed that the matching process was effective and comfortable. Three disagreed with the statement and the rest neither agreed nor disagreed.

The program staff acknowledge that matching mentors and mentees is difficult and that they are unsure as to which is the most effective way to proceed with the process. One of their key concerns is mentors being too selective in whom they are matched with, for example, requesting that they only want to be matched with a woman or refusing to be matched with mentees with very limited English.

**Interviewer:** I just wanted to talk briefly about the matching process. Does everyone think that kind of went comfortably? Do you think people were matched up well? Or thinking that it maybe it could have been done better? Or it worked really well this time, but perhaps it didn’t the first time?

**Speaker 1:** You know, I’m really interested and if anyone’s got some ideas...it’s a terribly difficult process. It’s like an arranged marriage, to me! (laughs) ... There’s a few issues around, which I found a bit disappointing, with some of the mentors who said they didn’t want to be matched with men. They wanted to be matched with nuns. I was a bit disappointed about that. I thought it was a bit rigid. And some people also, on that matching lunch, some people kind of beelined to the person they wanted to be with, and never left them! ... And then it just, there was one person which, again, I found really sad, that no-one wanted to...because his English wasn’t great, a couple of people just said, “No, I don’t want to.” It wasn’t even a gender issue. They just said, “No”...

But it’s terribly hard, too, isn’t it. I mean, you think...you look at someone and you think they’ve got a kind face or something, but you really have no idea whether people are compatible.” (Staff, focus group)
This selectiveness is demonstrated in one mentor’s suggestion for improving the matching process.

“More thought could be given to the matching process of mentees and mentors. Could the mentors fill out a form and mention their strengths, what they’d like to contribute to the relationship, how much time they’d like to invest and their own personality and the type of personality (plus male/female) they get on best with. I know this is not an exact science by it might screen out mismatches.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Another issue which arose during the matching process was competing for particular mentees. As noted by program staff, some mentors made a ‘beeline’ for the Tibetan they ‘wanted’. Although mentors were requested to circulate around the room to ensure that they spoke to all the potential mentees, in several instances this did not occur. Monks and nuns were a popular ‘choice’. For those mentors who did in fact try to talk to all the mentees, the process was not easy.

“Not comfortable for me being in a confined space with complete strangers and a degree of ‘competiveness’ arose from the circumstances. This could be reviewed for its effectiveness.” (Mentor, survey comment)

However, other mentors felt uncomfortable with ‘selecting’ a mentee, recognizing that as a volunteer mentor they were there to assist someone in need, not choose who to help based on personal preferences or their own needs and desires.

“I didn’t want to make a “choice”. It felt too personal and selective. I was there as a volunteer mentor.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Mentors themselves made some possible suggestions for improving the process including organising several meetings;

 “[The matching] could have been done earlier and also with two or three meetings and not just one.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Mentors and mentees providing information about themselves as a way to ensure suitable matches;

“Maybe the background of both mentors and mentees could have been more explored before the “matching” process to avoid disappointment of people either pulling out of the process or having mentees maybe not suited to them.” (Mentor, survey comment)
And, the involvement of a third party to facilitate the matching process;

“Effective in several cases but not comfortable. Would be better not at lunch as it was hard to talk and eat. There was some pressure to find a mentee and not enough time to talk to everyone. An extra meeting would have been better and just a morning tea. Possibly some introductions on both sides by a third party would be good.” (Mentor, survey comment)

The researchers’ recommendations for improving the matching process are discussed further in Chapter 10.

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS
Like any relationship, the relationship between mentors and mentees naturally develop in different ways depending on the personalities of the individuals involved. Whilst some mentors spoke of having an “instant connection” with their mentees, for others the relationships develop gradually over time. Further, the frequency of contact between mentor and mentee and also the English skills of the mentee impact on the nature of the relationships developing (as is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

“I actually felt a bond when we met. Maybe I was looking for something. I spoke to quite a few Tibetans on that day, and I did feel that there was some connection there, so it’s grown on that, I think.” (Mentor, second focus group)

“We are friendly but still a little formal.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I feel very comfortable with them and I feel that they feel very comfortable with us. Like, there’s definitely a friendship there, even though we don’t know a lot about each other. We’ve just got that friendship.” (Mentor, second focus group)

“...people, have different relationships...Some people bring people home, and have done it from the first meeting; they've taken people home. Other people have never taken anybody home...” (Staff, focus group)
Seven out of nine mentors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they had developed a good relationship with their mentee. The other two neither agreed nor disagreed.
“I am really excited that we have got on so well and although conversation is limited we have learnt so much about each other and are now very comfortable.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I feel quite comfortable and I think they do too. Any misunderstandings are usually laughed about.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Eight out of nine mentors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they would like their relationship with their mentee to continue beyond the advertised required twelve week minimum.

Thus despite the fact that the matching process could be pinpointed as the main weakness of the program, matches appear to be successful to an extent nonetheless, with mentors and mentees establishing ‘family bonds’ (see Chapters 6 and 7 for further discussion).

“I look forward to seeing my mentee “grow” and develop their life here in terms of language skills, job skills and local cultural awareness.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“We have started a family bond.” (Mentor survey comment)
It is hoped that throughout the mentoring relationship that mentors introduce mentees to not only their family members but also their friends to enable mentees networks with ‘Australian friends’ to expand and grow.

“I spoke to someone from the House of Sacred Space, and she said to me that so many refugees say to her that they don’t meet Australians and that they’ve never been to an Australian home for a meal, and I know that most of the mentors take the mentee home and meet the family. What I’d like to see more of is actually meeting friends, but I know some of that’s happening... The thing is, friendships take time. It will be in the long-term, we’ll see whether this really has worked.” (Staff, focus group)

As this program staff member identifies, the real indicator of effectiveness for the program and the relationships established will be in the long-term. One of the key aims of the program is to enable the Tibetans to feel a sense of belonging in the local community and to meet more Australians. While difficult to measure these indicators of success will develop over the course of the mentoring relationship and it is only after a length of time that this will be evident. Many mentors and mentees from the previous two courses in 2007 are still meeting.
CHAPTER 6

MENTEE EXPERIENCE

The Tibetan refugees who participated in this program are described as ‘mentees’ in this section of the report, although this is a somewhat awkward term.

The Tibetan mentees ranged in age from late 20s to mid 50s, approximately half of whom were women and half men. All were relatively recently arrived refugees who had come to Australia via Dharamsala in India. Many had undertaken the arduous trek on foot across the Himalayas to escape Tibet before arriving, and in some cases spending a number of years, in Dharamsala where His Holiness the Dalai Lama is based. Many had spent lengthy periods in detention by Chinese authorities before fleeing Tibet, and had significant torture and trauma experiences as a result (cf: Sachs & Rosenfeld 2008). Most had left family and friends back in Tibet; their persecution a constant source of worry and the possibility of contact with them was very limited. Only two of the mentees had managed to bring children and family with them to Australia.

I didn’t meet my family for almost 11 years and I need my parents love and care. ...it is hard to contact with them. When I was in India I used to send letter once a year because if I send letter by post they will not get my letter. So I used to send letter through hand of some relatives who were going back.

Among the participants were a small number of Tibetan Buddhist nuns, who were a particularly popular choice for mentors during the matching process.

EXPECTATIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRAM INTENTIONS

A key finding is that the mentees had very little understanding in the beginning—and in a number of cases by the end—of the intentions of the program, and what they might possibly get out of it. Those with better English language skills were more likely to have a sense of what the program might offer them, whereas those with little or more basic English appeared quite unsure as to what the program was about. A number were under the impression that the program was an extension of their English language classes they also attended at TAFE.

None had a detailed understanding of what ‘mentoring’ involved and what it meant to be a ‘mentee’. They predominantly understood the program as intended to match them with an Australian ‘friend’, who would help them with English and help them learn about living in Australia. Those with little or no English for the most part saw the program in terms of offering an opportunity to practice and improve their English.
One thing ... is that the mentees themselves, as a group, I think it has not been properly explained, because OK, we recruit the mentees... and then there's a meeting of the mentors and mentees, have a lunch (laughs) and then just go about, and they have no, probably, advice on what actually is mentoring, but individually maybe one or two knows about it, but the majority of them don't know.

The second, almost universal theme to emerge in terms of participant hopes and expectations from the program was a strong desire to share Tibetan culture, particularly Tibetan Buddhism with the wider Australian community.

One of the things that I think about this mentoring program is to learn about the Australian history and Australian culture through my mentor, but at the same time to be able to express the Tibetan culture and also Tibetan history, so the way I see it, it's a bridge between two cultures and hopefully some of the culture groups can sort of transfer from each other...and I think it's great that this program is helping two nationalities get closer to each other...

Particularly among the very new arrivals and those with low, but not absent English skills, there was also an interest in learning about Australian culture, and everyday practical living skills.

I'm hopeful that we will be able to learn what one of the ladies mentioned, about the mentor teaching the bus route. All those small things, and then the language, and when we pass through that bridge I hope that we could pass what we have learnt in our traditional Tibetan way of education.

This limited understanding of the concept of mentoring was due to the fact that mentees were not provided with any detailed briefing or training prior to participating in the program. Unlike the mentors who undertook seven weeks of pre-mentoring training, followed by fortnightly debriefing sessions during the mentoring phase, the Tibetan mentee's first encounter with the program was the matching session (discussed in previous chapter).

The outcome seemed to be that the mentees were unsure of and a bit shy about what kinds of things they might their ask mentors for help with and this had two consequences: 1) In some cases it resulted in boundary issues for the mentor, where the mentee sought advice on complex matters beyond the mentor’s capacity to assist (such as immigration advice), and 2) In other cases, a more limited experience of the program in that the mentees very much relied upon the mentors to guide the experience and anticipate what kinds of mentoring might be helpful. As one of the program staff said:
(We are talking about) people who have just landed in Australia recently and who have got no experience themselves of a formal mentor program … they are very appreciative and very grateful, but I guess they’re waiting for somebody to tell them what it’s all about…

Translating the concept of ‘mentor’ was a challenge for program staff. Mentoring is a Western concept with quite specific meanings. However the Tibetans primarily understood the mentor as somewhere between ‘teacher’ and ‘friend’. These were the Tibetan terms used to describe the relationship. A number of the mentees used the expression ‘mum’ to describe their mentors, however this is to be understood in a cultural framework where ‘mum’ is used commonly for elders for whom one has a sense of connection, care, and respect. As the Tibetan Community Health Worker explains:

Well, generally, when somebody addresses somebody who is older than you, “Mum” is a sign of respect, you know? “Mum”, in Tibetan Buddhism, means the kindness of Mum. Treating everybody like a mother treating their children, so “Mum” is … love or respect towards that person.


**BENEFITS**

That said, all participants were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of the program and would recommend it to others.

> Interpreter: *They enjoyed, they said! (laughs) And not only them, but in the future, whoever comes from any part of the world, new people, they say it’s good to have this program. It helps a lot.*

It appeared that the participants—with only two or three exceptions (related to lack of English skills, and in one case, the low frequency of contact with the mentor)—gradually found their own mode of interaction with their mentors and the benefits and specific experiences evolved organically.

> *Because in my experience, people never seem to “get it” until they’re in it for a while, I’m not personally too worried, because I didn’t expect them to get it, to be honest. I mean, I think you can do things to try and explain things clearly to people, but I think the language is a huge barrier and there’s abstract terms here that are huge barriers.* (Program staff)

In the small Likhert Scale survey we conducted with the Tibetan participants, **100%** ‘strongly agreed’ with the statements ‘**Overall, I think this is a valuable program**’, and ‘**I would recommend this program to other newly arrived Tibetans**’. All participants ended their interview with statements of thanks and gratitude for the program, which indicates that the scheme is certainly worthwhile and valued by those involved.

The benefits identified by mentees were:

- The opportunity to practice English in a ‘natural’ setting with a native speaker
- An enhanced feeling of ‘connectedness’ in Australia, beyond the Tibetan community
- A feeling of safety and security from having someone to call in times of need or advice
- Visits to new places and new experiences
- The opportunity to learn more about Australian life and culture
- The opportunity to share Tibetan culture and Buddhism with Australians
She’s my “mum”. She’s like a second mum. It’s been a great relationship so far, and I’m pretty sure that it would be a very positive relationship. And it’s been fantastic learning, especially the English words and how to use those, and I’ve also been to some new places and been able to see the places the local Australian people go to. And also some of the culture and tradition of the Australian people.

However a key challenge in evaluating the program has been to unravel what improvements in the mentee’s wellbeing can be attributed to their relationship with their mentors, and which are linked to the natural progression of settlement. Participants themselves were largely unsure, however all felt they benefited from the program in a general sense that is perhaps hard to measure.

Tibetan community worker: At the moment, what the mentees are experiencing is something which is a completely new concept to them, and as you said, the mentoring in Tibet is a completely different system than we have, and they just now (have) mentors as like a friend, someone who will guide them through local customs, and things like that, which they find very useful, and at the same time, as mentioned earlier, this is giving them an opportunity where they can practice their English.

Even though, initially, they are very drawn-back and a bit hesitant, slowly they’re sort of coming out of the shell, and they’re getting a bit bolder and can voice their opinions. So they’re very, very appreciative, not only in a sense that there are issues they are facing and they can ask them how to go about it, and things like that, with the mentors, so the mentors are able to help them by connecting to the various services, and they find that very useful.

Feeling more settled and connected

The mentoring literature emphasises wellbeing as an important outcome of community mentoring programs. Psycho-social outcomes such as increased self esteem, coping abilities, a reduction in anxiety and depression, and enhanced self concept are components of ‘wellbeing’. However for refugee communities, a slightly less individualised framework is also warranted as experiences of displacement involve the broader community context. That is, the impacts of displacement involve feelings of being isolated from the community and familiar care networks, experiences of cultural and practical disorientation, and so on. There are studies that show that post-traumatic stress is often ignited, or at least exacerbated in the exile situation once the refugee begins to negotiate the complex and painful path of settlement (cf: Sachs & Rosenfeld 2008). This broader definition of wellbeing we have clustered under the heading ‘feeling settled and connected’. A general sense of wellbeing, feeling more settled or connected was certainly reported as resulting from participation in the program.
Interpreter: He said because it was special, not just the place, but the people who he knew, the teachers, because in Australia they don’t have anyone here, no family and no friends, so when someone took him to a place like this he said it just makes you calm and peaceful, every place is special but this bush place is extra special.

All participants valued, and placed a great deal of importance on the fact that many Tibetans had settled in the Dee Why area. Having other Tibetans around meant that there were co-ethnics with whom they shared a language, religion and cultural understanding, and with whom they could share resources and knowledge, and draw on for support. Most reported that this reduced their sense of isolation in Australia in many ways, but in particular it provides a sense of security and familiarity in a situation of new settlement and lessens the sense of cultural and language dislocation. For this reason, none of the participants saw the mentoring program as replacing what they draw from their own community. However all participants were strongly of the view that it was important and helpful for them to get to know long time Australians in the local area, to help them feel connected to broader Australian society and way of life.

Program leader: What I think it is is, for me – and this is what my hope is – is that the mentor is taking the mentee on a journey, a shared journey, towards belonging in this community. That’s what I want to see. So when I hear...somebody rang me yesterday and said they met the mentee three times during the week – twice was intentional, but one was just at school, and she introduced that person to some other parents, and she said, “I think she’s feeling more comfortable coming to the school.” And then she met her flatmate and had taken her to a playgroup, and to me that’s – it’s about connectedness, to me. But they’re the sort of things, things that I’d call “social inclusion”. Those sorts of things. They’re hard concepts to explain to people.

In this, the program can certainly be said to have been effective. Of the 11 Tibetan mentees surveyed, 6 strongly agreed with the statement that ‘with the help of my mentor, I have met more Australians than I would have otherwise’, while the remaining 5 agreed. Those with more limited English were more likely to strongly agree with this statement.

Without my mentor I don’t think I would have met any Australians!
Many of the mentees had been introduced to friends and family of their mentor, and invited along to family dinners, or to other events in the community.

| Her mentor, she spent some time with her...with her family. Her mentor and her family, they spent time together down at the beach...her mentor’s daughter and her boyfriend, and their families. They had time together. |

In another example one mentor took her mentee along when she collected her children from the local school, and used this as an opportunity to introduce her mentee to other mothers at the school gate. Here, one of the program workers reflects on how important these community based connections can be:

| I guess that woman ringing me today, that really made me feel great: that there are people going to the school feeling like they can walk in those gates and not feel terrible, which is the experience for a lot of new immigrants going to a school – feeling like an outsider. To think that mentor is helping ... (her) to walk in those gates and to have people smiling and knowing your name, I think...some of it’s this really small stuff...(that’s important) |

Feeling less isolated as a direct result of participation in the mentor program was less easy for the participants to directly attribute to the program. However even on this question, the trend strongly suggested some benefit. Of those surveyed, 2 strongly agreed with the statement that ‘as a result of participating in this program, I feel less isolated and better able to participate in Australian society’, while a further 5 agreed. Two were neutral on this point, while the remaining 2 strongly disagreed. Of these individuals, one already had very high functioning English and did not feel particularly isolated to begin with. The remaining three were those with almost no English skills at all, and had had relatively few contact visits with their mentors. Although the sample is small, this does suggest that on the question of ‘feeling less isolated’, greater benefit tends to come to those with some means of communication with their mentor and who have had enough contact visits to build up a relationship with their mentor and have a range of experiences over time.

It also came through quite strongly—particularly with the female mentees—how meaningful it was to have someone to call a friend in Australia when separated from one’s own family.

| She’s my “mum”. She’s like a second mum. It’s been a great relationship so far, and I’m pretty sure that it would be a very positive relationship (in the future). |

53
This woman spoke of her mentor as almost a replacement ‘mother’ who she felt loved and cared for her. Another described her mentor as in a small way, filling the gap left by absent family.

*For me, so far it’s been a wonderful experience. All my family is in India, and it’s been wonderful having my mentor sort of filling a small amount of that gap.*

This sense of connectedness, stemming from feelings of friendship and support was a strong trend through all the participants and seemed to produce in the mentees a feeling of ‘ontological security’, of feeling safe and secure in a way that was particularly important to them at this stage in their journey as refugees. Sociologist Anthony Giddens notion of ‘ontological security’, can be described as the ‘confidence or trust we have in the world around us both in terms of the things and the people with which we share our lives, and hence which provide stability and a continuity to our identity’ (Giddens 1990 cited in Noble 2005). As Noble points out, this trust is more sensual and affective than it is cognitive, grounded in the routines and spaces of daily existence (Silverstone 1994: 5-6). It is a stable mental state derived from a sense of order and continuity in regard to an individual’s experiences, found in experiencing positive and stable emotions, and by avoiding chaos and anxiety (Giddens 1991; Elias, 1985).

*Interpreter: When you come to new places like this, and if you have these sorts of things – there are plenty of Tibetans, but everyone’s busy, they’re working, they’re starting their life. With the mentor program, because they’re so helpful and you just feel like there’s someone, if you have trouble, you can call them, it makes you feel really safe and comfortable.*

Almost all the mentees interviewed spoke of a feeling of ‘comfort’ in knowing they always had someone to call should they need anything, particularly someone to call in terms of helping navigate through the complexities of daily life in a new country. Everyday things such as understanding what is in an official letter, how to put the garbage out, who to speak to at Centrelink and so forth. Mentees experience this as a having someone to help reduce the chaos and uncertainty that would otherwise permeate these early days of settlement.

*Yes, I think it’s very valuable, because at least if you have some problem, you can call someone. There’s a lot of other Tibetans all over the world, they don’t have this program, they don’t have these sorts of things. ..(My mentor would always say) “If you need something, (call) without hesitation”*
However it wasn’t so much receiving the help that produced this feeling, although it was important. Instead, it was simply the feeling that there was someone there for them who they could trust. This was explained in terms of feeling ‘comfortable’, and making participants feel less lonely in Australia.

She says it’s comfortable, anything – because of her mentor, her friend, she says she’s more comfortable. If she has a problem, she can ring and ask her. She says it’s very comfortable.

Interpreter: She said it’s a very good program, and good for him too. He says, “I don’t feel lonely, at least I can call someone there,” and he feels a little bit – good.

The survey part of the study asked participants whether their mentoring experienced helped them feel more at home in Australia. Perhaps not unexpectedly, this question aroused mixed feelings. While 6 of the 11 agreed with the statement ‘As a result of my participation in this program I feel more at home in Australia’, the remainder were neutral on the point. The comments they made about this question were much more telling. For a refugee ‘home’ is always the homeland, and has a special meaning. There was much discussion about this point – most said they feel safe and comfortable, but did not want to describe this as feeling ‘at home’ here in Australia as this was somehow a betrayal of their connection to their homeland.

Interpreter: Home is there, but they say it’s very safe and comfortable (here). They all feel safe and free here, happy, but home is... when they talk about “home”, it’s special...

**IMPROVING ENGLISH**

Although the program was not intended to replicate English classes, the opportunity to practice and learn more English with a native speaker was universally one of the most valued aspects of the program for the Tibetan mentees. Unsurprisingly, there is widespread consensus in the literature on migrant and refugee settlement that the ability to speak the language of the host nation is a key contributing component to effective settlement, enhanced life opportunities, and a general sense of wellbeing (cf Beiser and Hou 2001).

Interpreter: (laughs) She said, “I just want to learn English!” I said, “Move out from Dee Why!” (laughter) Because everywhere you go, you see Tibetans and you speak Tibetan!

As the quote above suggests, participants felt that while it was extremely important for them to be around co-ethnics with whom they share a language and culture, the downside of living in an area with such a large Tibetan community was that there were few situations where they were forced to speak English on a day to day level. Most felt that this inhibited their ability to learn the new language and therefore one of the key benefits of the program was that mentees were forced to speak English in a one on one situation with their mentor.
Mentors helped the Tibetans with their English in a range of ways, from more formal exercises in learning names of things and places, and correcting written work such as emails or diaries, through to a more informal experiential process where the mentee was forced to speak English over the course of a day.

Especially with my mentor, my English has improved...I understand my mentor. She checks my emails and sends them back to me. That’s very nice. This really helps me. Especially talking on the telephone...It’s improving slowly.

In other instances, mentors would help mentees to read official letters that had arrived for them and to help them understand forms and other complex documents.

An important aspect of learning the language of the host society is that it helps the migrant or refugee build a kind of word map which helps in navigating daily life.

Interpreter: He took them to different places to teach them, this place is called this one, that place is called that one...

This goes beyond simply being able to speak, read and write and the practical capacities this affords. Raymond Williams has insightfully pointed out that we learn to see a thing by learning to describe it (Williams 1965:39).

And also, my mentor gave me a map, an Australian map. She showed me the map and she described for me. ...Yes, it’s a very good idea. When we went to the city, she showed me on the map which street. “This is York Street, this is Macquarie Street...” she showed me! (laughter)

Belonging to a place, having a sense of it in all its dimensions, requires the ability to make meaning of ‘things’. In learning about places and how to describe them, an individual is able to build up a kind of mental and sensual map of the world around them. It creates a sense of familiarity and order amidst chaos.

She helped me with my English language, yes. When we went to the beach and she taught me and showed me all the different names of things, and also the tree, they have a kind of tree, and I had to learn the parts of the tree, the spelling, they had a lot of trees, the kinds of trees. That sort of thing
One participant spoke excitedly of the first time he felt brave enough to call his mentor himself as until then he had always waited till the mentor called him. Another participant spoke excitedly at feeling brave enough now to answer the telephone when a non-Tibetan called.

He said, in the beginning, as soon as someone on the phone spoke English, he hung up the phone! These days he can say hello! (laughter)

These are simple things but are important in that the ability to communicate in English links individuals into a wider social network beyond the Tibetan community, and again, this can produce a sense of security and comfort.

**NEW EXPERIENCES, NEW PLACES**

Possibly the most important aspect of the program was the range of new experiences the mentees were exposed to and the new places they visited. It was these outings that the mentees seemed to most enjoy about the program. Each mentee was provided with a single use disposable camera as part of the study to document new people they met, experiences they had and places they went with the mentors. Mentees were then asked to discuss their photographs during the interviews at the end of the study. The mentees were full of joy and excitement recounting the outings they had documented in the photographs.

Interpreter: This is her and her husband. They went to Olympic Park. They had a really good time. They got flowers for His Holiness. It was a beautiful place, a beautiful day. They really enjoyed that day. And this is the photo of the mentor’s house. ...this is her and her husband. They had dinner. She went to dinner at their house and they met with their sons. They all had a dinner together. This is the husband. Citizenship Day, and the husband and wife there. They both met there for him. A very special day for her. This is at Olympic Park, with all the friends. Everyone dressed up in Tibetan dress. They had a beautiful day.
There were quite a number of ‘first’ experiences. Particularly popular were visits to mentors homes, especially involving the mentor’s family. The Tibetans appeared to very much enjoy seeing how Australian families live, and for most, this was the first time to visit an Australian home. They also enjoyed trying new foods, and in some cases had the opportunity to bring some Tibetan food along to share.

Interpreter: *This is a photo at (his mentor’s) house. She took them to her house, and after that they took the kids to play soccer. He said that it was nice. He enjoyed it...they had a day at her place. They had a meal there. He said that day was very exciting for him because it was the first time he’d been in an Australian’s house, and having their food...their culture, food, and how they lived, whatever. He said he had a good time that day. ... it was also first time he has seen soccer. He says he’s seen it on TV many times, but live it was the first time....He says that was a fun day. At Dee Why Beach, they had a barbeque, yes, first time. He said he was very excited. The beach, having a barbeque... He said he felt very good.*

As the participant above highlights, often these outings included new experiences that long-time Australians take for granted. In this case, his mentor took him to see her children play soccer at the local football oval. Again, this was another ‘first’ for this participant who until then had only ever seen soccer on television. It introduced him to an important aspect of community life in Australia, Saturday morning children’s sport, and his mentor was able to explain to him how this works and what an important part of life it is for many Australian families.
The ‘everyday’ outings to sport or the local shopping centre were enjoyed as much as the more grand expeditions to the city or harbour. Participants enjoyed learning new and unexpected things.

Interpreter: She took him to Manly, they had a really nice day, but a rainy day. …and they went to a café. He said it was the first time in a café, sitting like this, and they had a cup of coffee and cakes.
The young woman below was very animated when she showed us the photograph of her drinking coffee at the local shopping centre with her mentor. She seemed especially enchanted by the decoration on the top of the cappuccino foam, something she had never seen before.

**Mentee:** Dee Why beach... climbed up a mountain... then we went window shopping at Warriewood...

**Interpreter:** She went to her house, looked around, but they didn’t have a meal there. After that, they went to the shopping centre. She’d been to other coffee shops, but this was the first one she’d ever seen decoration on the top (of the coffee)!
Another recounted with laughter discovering with his mentor that the dog and cat food aisle in supermarket was in fact food for dogs and cats, rather than cans full of dog and cat meat for human consumption.

The young woman below was taken to a local nursing and retirement home by her mentor to show her how some elderly people are cared for in Australia. The mentee found it a very interesting experience as her ideas about nursing homes were based upon experiences in India. These kinds of experiences are valuable in that they can dispel myths that some migrant communities may have about a lack of care and respect for the elderly in western societies. It was also a valuable experience as a number of Tibetans have accessed employment opportunities in the aged care sector.

Interpreter: They just went and looked around the nursing home. In India, they have a nursing home, but it's not like here. It's very different. But here, it's the first time she'd (been to one). That day she took her to her house, showed her around her house, and then after that they went to a shopping centre. She showed her all the shopping centre, have a cup of tea...after that, they took her to the nursing home, looked around the nursing home.
Probably the most popular outings were those involving outdoor activities. Visits to the beach, days on the harbour, BBQs, picnics, and bushwalking seemed to really enliven the participants who would become quite animated in recounting how they felt on these outings. They typically used expressions such as ‘this was a very special day’, or ‘this was a beautiful day’ and during the interview their demeanour in recounting these days was one of peace and happiness.

Interpreter: They’ve been a few times to Dee Why Beach, but this day was a very special day, and they went a few times together. They walked around the beach, but only the two of them together. No-one took a photo of them together! (laughter) They had a good time. He said this was a special day for him, with this family and his mentor and everyone together.

Visits to natural settings seemed to have quite profound calming effects upon a number of mentees. The most popular settings were the harbour, walks in the bush around the Kurringai National park and harbour-side bushwalks, and the beach.
Mid-way through the mentoring program the group held a BBQ in the beachside park in Dee Why. All the mentors, mentees and many friends attended. Without exception the mentees recounted this day as particularly enjoyable and special. Those with little English especially enjoyed it as they had other Tibetans around who could interpret for them when speaking with their mentors. They also particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet with the families of mentors and to include their own families in a relaxed and informal setting.
Finally, experiencing these new places helps the mentees to feel more confident to visit a range of new places themselves.

**Practical Skills**

The acquisition of practical living skills and knowledge was a key aim of the program. The mentees reported a number of areas where they had learnt new skills from their mentors. The types of skills and assistance sought ranged right across the spectrum. Examples include seeking assistance locating and applying for housing, moving house, reading and explaining letters and other documents, assistance in how to go about arranging an interpreter for appointments, help with transport to appointments, and help in seeking employment.

The above extract from an interview with program workers gives some sense of the wide scope of assistance sought. What is interesting here is how the network of mentors actually represents a rich resource that other mentors/mentees and program staff can draw upon. In this instance, one of the other mentors was a nurse educator and able to advise on how to access employment and/or training in this area. This highlights the fact that the benefits flow not just between mentee and mentor, but between and amongst the entire group. This suggests that active maintenance of the mentor network itself is a key component of success.

Skills such as accessing the library were also acquired. A number of participants mentioned the local library as a very special place for them. Many of the mentees had been taken to the library by their mentors and recounted how pleased they were when their mentors helped them set up a library card, and how to search for and borrow books.
Practical skills such as this are not uni-dimensional. That is, they often lead to or open up other spheres of social activity, leisure or competence. For example, the interviewee below has discovered she very much enjoys relaxing on the beach reading. She was one of the mentee’s who had been introduced to the library by her mentor and now borrows books independently. She was also taken to the beach by her mentor. She now enjoys reading and sitting on the beach alone.
The beach has become a popular destination for the Tibetan community. One mentee expressed her excitement at the fact her mentor had promised to teach her to swim come summer. Again, this will open up a whole new set of social experiences and possibilities for her.

**Interpreter:** *She likes to go to the beach, but she doesn’t swim. She just goes there and lies down – just sit on the sand and read a book (from the library)*

*I love to go to the beach. I don’t swim, but just to go down to the beach and take photos...I’m going to learn how to swim! Yes, the mentor told me she will teach me.*
Other practical skills may seem mundane, but are important for negotiating life in a city like Sydney. Simple skills such as learning how to catch a bus, work out public transport, rules for crossing the road, rules about traffic lights (especially pedestrian crossings) are all important but often new and confusing things to learn.

_She said she also learnt a lot from her, very useful and helpful, because she taught her a lot of things, the traffic light system, how it works, how to catch all the public transport, the streets and everything... All the public transport, the trains, buses, all the streetlights, how the system works...very helpful and useful._

Surprisingly, a number of mentees mentioned learning about crossing the road and traffic lights from the mentor.

**Mentee:** And also, we parked further away, and she taught me that when there’s a red light...she taught me this is very important. And when the light is green, you cross...

Other examples raised by the mentees included learning the everyday social norms of negotiating life in suburban Australia. This included codes of behaviour around ‘good neighbouring’, such as waving in the morning, keeping the noise down and so on. Another reported learning about sorting rubbish into recycling bins, and when and how to put the rubbish out for collection.

_Interpreter:_ They learn a lot, but she says it’s hard to remember. They learnt all the small things. How to respect their neighbours. A lot of other stuff.

**TRAUMA ISSUES**

Beyond practical skills and experiencing new places, there were a number of instances where the mentees reported a general feeling of enhanced wellbeing resulting from their relationship with their mentors. During the interviews, the mentees expressed this as helping to reduce their internal emotional stress. This can be attributed to the whole cluster of benefits outlined above, as well as a general sense of being cared for and having friendship outside of the Tibetan community.

_Having a mentor relaxes the emotional stress, the internal stress, through the mentor, and hopefully we could spread the message of non-violence and peace._

Interestingly the places visited seemed to have a profound impact for many participants. Over the last twenty years or so, the notion of therapeutic landscape has been used to describe the ways in which places become
implicated in processes of healing or health enhancement (Conradson 2005: 337), and literature in social work and psychology especially points to the therapeutic qualities of natural landscape for those with mental illnesses or dementia. For example, Ulrich (1979) has investigated the influence of visual landscapes on emotional states and found that stressed individuals feel significantly better after exposure to natural scenes (Parry Jones & Li 1990). Nearly all the participants reported a sense of wellbeing from outdoor activities especially involving water (harbour, beach) or bush walks. They would become animated and their pleasure recounting these days was quite palpable.

Interpreter: ...she has still a little bit of problem because when she was in prison in Tibet they tortured her a lot, that’s where she got her hearing problem. When she goes in public sometimes she doesn’t know if people are talking to her or not. A little bit confusing.

Interpreter: Her teacher took them on the Sydney ferry ... and then she saw the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and a big open harbour. She said her mind just relaxed— everything was just beautiful and exciting. ... She said that if she only had that one day it would be enough for her. She says she has no-one here, no family, no friends, but that day she didn’t feel lonely at all. And she says that that day was like a magic day. You can see, with the blue sky!

The extract above is quite profound. The mentee speaking is a Tibetan nun who had suffered torture and a decade long imprisonment by Chinese authorities. She had partially lost her hearing as a result, and was known to be very withdrawn. She barely spoke during the interview (in which two other Tibetans were
present). She was clearly dealing with some significant trauma issues. However when she began showing us the photographs of her day on the harbour on the Manly Ferry her demeanour went from withdrawn to positively glowing, exuding a sense of calm happiness in describing her pleasant memories of that day. You could see that it was a visceral, almost palpable sense of joy for her as she searched for words to describe her feelings. Later, it was reported back to me that when she was on the harbour ferry she had begun to sing or hum, presumably a Buddhist chant. Given that she is a Buddhist nun, it is not too much of a stretch of imagination to argue that the warm blue sky, the smell of the harbour and the beauty of the natural setting helped induce in her some kind of calming meditative state, and that this seems to have had a therapeutic effect for her. This combined with the social connection and sense of care she received from her mentor and mentor’s family that day made her describe it as a ‘magic’ day.
Another of the Tibetan’s showed a photograph of himself meditating on a rock during one of the bushwalks he was taken on by his mentor. He too spoke of the feeling of wellbeing the natural setting induced in him, and which drew him to want to sit and meditate amidst that environment.

These experiences accord with research by Sachs & Rosenberg (2008) which interviewed more than 700 Tibetan refugees in the refugee reception centre in Dharamsala to ascertain the levels of post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression among this population. They found levels significantly lower than other refugee groups, attributed to coping strategies drawing on Tibetan Buddhism involving religious practices such as prayer and meditation.
OVERALL BENEFIT....

The interview extract below gives a nice overview of the benefits experienced by mentees. In this case they range from the practical, to enjoying new places, people, food, and experiences. And in turn the mentee describes the overall outcome for her as learning that she is now in a free country, which she describes as ‘you can fly like a bird’.

One night, she and her husband went to her house and we had a very good night, dinner.

Interpreter: They had spaghetti bolognise that night! This was the first time she had been in an Australian house. The food is different. They had different food. All their family were nice people.

Interviewer: The things that you’ve learnt from your mentor...is there anything you now know that you didn’t know before?

Interpreter: She says she got a lot benefit from her (mentor). She teaches things she never heard before, and she said it’s a free country, you’ve got the right to many things...you can take all the things you get, and learn whatever you can......it’s not like in Tibet. Here, you don’t have to be under anyone, you don’t have to be worried or scared about anything. It’s a big, free country. You can fly like a bird!

The benefits of the program need to be considered as a cluster of effects and experiences which together combine to enhance the mentee’s ability to engage fully with the wider community and achieve settlement ends. For example, something as simple as learning to borrow a book from the library can open up a whole set of resources in terms of books, link the person into social activities organised through the library, or as one mentee mentioned, allows her to sit on the beach and relax with a good book! Viewed in this interconnected way, it is possible to see how this opening up of networks and experiences can begin to be experienced as a sense of freedom for newly arrived refugees.
CHALLENGES

Despite the overwhelmingly positive views mentees had of the mentoring program, it was not entirely without its challenges. The two most significant were language barriers, and variation in frequency of contact with mentor.

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

It is worth quoting from a number of interviews in this section as the issue of language barrier came up in all of the interviews with Tibetan mentees. It was almost universally agreed amongst the mentees that not having some English language skills reduced the depth of benefits gained from participation in the program. One key impact for those with little or no English was a sense of frustration at not being able to communicate, and in particular, not having the language skills to ask the questions they would like to ask and seek the kind of assistance needed.

**Interpreter:** ...he says she is a very nice and kind lady, and he wants to talk to her so much, but with the language there are some things, whenever he saw her he said, “I wish I can ask her this and that…”

Further, these participants expressed a sense of frustration that much of what the mentor was teaching was beyond their grasp. It also made it more difficult to make more complex arrangements with mentors, particularly over the telephone.
In many cases, the mentee was embarrassed to tell the mentor when they did not understand what was going on. Often this meant that the mentor was unaware that the mentee had not understood information and advice provided and on the mentee’s part, much of what is communicated is simply missed.

This communication barrier in turn had a significant impact on the quality of relationship developed between mentor and mentee. Those in the program with some English skills had developed more depth to their relationship with their mentor and also gained a wider range of new skills and had a wider range of experiences. Those with little English expressed frustration that they were not able to communicate their full range of feelings to their mentor. They spoke of ‘having so much to say’ but not having the words to do so. In a couple of cases, mentors felt that they had not established a bond with their mentee, but upon interviewing the mentees concerned, it turned out that these mentees felt a great deal of affection and attachment for the mentors, but were simply unable to express it. There is scope for introducing during the training phase some simple tools for both mentees and mentors to employ to communicate feelings, without the need for language skills. That is, the development of an ‘alternative’ language to express things such as uneasiness or gratitude.

For this cohort the greatest benefit of the program was the opportunity to practice the English they were learning in their TAFE classes. They also enjoyed the new places and experiences, especially the kinds of experiences that did not rely on language to be made meaningful. The most popular outing for this group was the group picnic held in the middle of the program attended by all the mentors, mentees and their families. What was most popular about this day was that Tibetans with more advanced language skills were able to interpret for those with little or no English thus enabling a richer variety of communication between mentor and mentee on the day. The presence of food and children also ‘took the pressure off’ from more intense and difficult one on one exchanges.
Those without much English nonetheless valued the program very highly and wished to continue their involvement. They had some suggestions for handing the language barrier which they thought may improve or enhance their overall experience. The most obvious (although perhaps less realistic) suggestion was that mentors be taught some more Tibetan. Mentors learnt basic greetings and so forth, while some relied on phrase books which seemed a great help. However mentees felt that it would be helpful for mentors to learn some phrases that would have practical application in their relationship with mentees, such as how to invite a mentee or make certain kinds of arrangements.

**Interpreter:** *He says, the main thing is that whatever you want to do, the first thing is to learn English. Once you’ve got English, other things come. But without English, he says, no matter whatever you start, he still doesn’t understand…*

**Interpreter:** *The mentors need to learn some Tibetan language. Because the main thing is that when they’re teaching them, understanding is most important… So all the new ones like her, they need a little bit of Tibetan because without it there’s no point. They just go there and all you can hear is wa-wa-wah…they don’t know what they’re (hearing)...they need the Tibetan so they can explain some things…*

Despite the difficulties posed by language barrier issues it should be emphasised that even those with very little English did gain from their relationship with their mentors. We suggest that the benefits and impacts of the program need to be seen as existing on a spectrum; that is – the ‘success’ of the program needs to be judged differently for someone with no English skills, compared to someone with fluent English. Both will gain from the program but in different ways.

**FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS WITH MENTOR**

The second key issue raised was the frequency of meetings with mentors. There was great variation in levels of contact among the group participating in the study. Often this had to do with conflicting schedules and difficulties finding mutually convenient times to meet. It should also be noted that the Dalai Lama’s visit and the protest events surrounding the Olympic Torch Relay fell within the mentoring period this time around and meant that many of the Tibetan participants were otherwise engaged for several weeks during the mentor relationship. Those who had more frequent contact with their mentors certainly reported much greater levels of satisfaction with their experience, and the range of experiences and new knowledge sets and skills gained appears much enhanced.

**Interpreter:** *She didn’t have much time with her. Has only met with her three times.*

**Mentee:** *It was four days, and I have class on three days, work, (laughs) and she is busy on the weekend, too!*
This is particularly an issue for mentees with little English for the reasons outlined above. These mentees felt very much as though they were starting behind and that more regular meetings would have sped up their language development skills which would in turn open up their capacity to absorb other kinds of knew knowledge and networks that this program can offer.

Mentees who had little English needed to have a higher frequency of contact with their mentors. Unfortunately in some cases it appeared that those with little English seemed to have been matched with mentors who had less availability for meetings. With the language barrier, it was very difficult to establish any kind of meaningful relationship without some frequency of contact – probably twice per week if possible. Importantly, it is often those mentees with little English who are not yet working who have the time for more frequent meetings.

**INTRODUCTION TO SERVICES**

Perhaps surprisingly, the mentees interviewed for this study did not place much emphasis on being introduced to new services through the mentoring program. This may partly be due to the fact that they did not identify the myriad forms of practical help given by mentors as ‘being introduced to services’. Practical help rendered includes helping to complete forms and read letters, and advice on which services to call to deal with a range of problems.
Participants had reportedly sought help in a range of areas, from seeking housing, to applying for benefits, and sorting out immigration matters such as applying to bring a family member to Australia. Indeed, the Tibetan program worker reported that there were some boundary issues that came with this territory with mentees feeling like their mentors ‘could fix anything’.

That said, most of the Tibetans interviewed felt that they had other avenues through which to seek this kind of assistance and in particular singled out the Tibetan community (volunteer) worker as someone who could and would help them connect to services. Most felt that this would be their first port of call for most forms of assistance.
CHAPTER 7
MENTOR EXPERIENCE

This chapter discusses the experiences of the mentoring program from the mentors’ perspective including their motivations for becoming a mentor, their expectations of the program, challenges confronted and benefits received. All mentors are women, predominately middle-aged and most are married with children. Their employment statuses included working part-time, semi-retired, or full-time home duties.

MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING
Mentors’ motivations for participating in the program varied. For some it was to help people and to give something back to the community. For these mentors, their own family experiences as migrants and refugees influenced their decision to become a mentor.

“For me I was shown warmth when we came as immigrants, and being able to do that for someone else.” (Mentor, first focus group)

“...and I live in Dee Why, where a lot of Tibetans congregate, and I think it’s just, as a parent, wanting to reach out...and also my father was a refugee...I feel very strongly that refugees contribute in a very valid way to our society, so yeah, I wanted to help.” (Mentor, first focus group)

Others saw the program as an opportunity to use their wealth of skills and life experiences, including employment experiences. Mentors currently or formerly in ‘helping professions’ such as teaching and nursing were well represented. This mentor works in a local nursing home and had met Tibetans working there.

“I got involved in the program because I was working with Tibetans, and I thought it would give me more of an understanding about where they were coming from in the workplace, and to support them within their work environment.” (Mentor, first focus group)
Others felt they simply wanted to help refugees and had been waiting for such an opportunity.

“I’d always said I wanted to do something to help refugees, but I’d never, I sort of danced around it, and never actually quite got to it, and then one night I heard Tenpa talk, and we met some refugees and they said that there would be an opportunity to do this, and I followed it, I’m here. There’s lots of things in my life that have kind of led me to it.” (Mentor, first focus group)

Several mentors mentioned that they were interested in, had travelled to, or felt a connection with Tibet. It appears that the ‘romanticised’ notion of Tibet and the Tibetan people was a major influence in reasons for mentor involvement with the program.

“I lived in India for a few years, so I had a number of Tibetan friends, and when I came back here I thought it would be nice if we’d had that sort of connection here – not knowing about the community in Dee Why. But it was only that a friend of mine told me about this program. I thought that it would be great to do.” (Mentor, first focus group)

“I travelled to Tibet last year, and I thought the people were just wonderful, and when I read about it in the paper [local newspaper, the Manly Daily], it just jumped out at me and I thought, “I want to do something like that”. I was looking for something to do in my spare time, so, I think it’s going to be a very rewarding journey.” (Mentor, first focus group)

This mentor highlights how she finally had the time to become involved once she had retired.

“I’ve always had this interest in Tibet, and actually went there and just realised that the people seem to be so, they seem to have this special quality, and although I’d been to the country and I’d read lots of books about it, I hadn’t really had much contact with Tibetans, and I finished work last year, had some free time, and I saw this notice and I thought “Yeah! That’s fantastic!” And it seemed just to fall into place that that was a really good thing for me to be able to do.” (Mentor, first focus group)
Some mentors had friends who had been involved with past programs and they were hoping for similar rewarding experiences, including friendship and involvement with the local Tibetan community.

“A friend of mine did the course last year and she’s found it quite enlightening. She really enjoyed it. That’s why I decided I’d join the group, and see what I could get out of it.” (Mentor, first focus group)

“I heard from a friend who did last year’s course, and just thought that what she’d got out of it, and what they’d got out of it, together, I thought was lovely and I wanted to have that sort of relationship.” (Mentor, first focus group)
Despite most mentors indicating in the survey that they understood the aims of the program and their mentor role (see chart), comments made in both the survey and focus groups suggest that a clear understanding of what the ‘mentor’ role entailed and what was expected of them was not common. This lack of knowledge parallels with the experiences with the mentees (discussed in the previous chapter), who were also unsure in their understandings of the program.

\[
\text{Understanding of aims and mentor role}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Strongly disagree} & \quad 0 \\
\text{Disagree} & \quad 0 \\
\text{Neutral} & \quad 0 \\
\text{Agree} & \quad 0 \\
\text{Strongly agree} & \quad 6
\end{align*}
\]

“I understand “mentoring” but did not know the specific needs.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I had a fairly good idea of the aim of the program but wasn’t entirely sure of the role of the mentor.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I really didn’t have much idea, as it turned out. Only a very generally impression of what would happen.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Mentor’s expectations of the program were explored during the first focus group, where it became clear that their expectations of the program and what mentees might expect of them also varied, as the following extract from the discussion illustrates.
Interviewer: “…what kind of expectations did you have of the mentoring relationship? I know some of you have started [mentoring] already, but when you initially got involved, what kind of hopes and expectations did you have? What did you hope to be able to help the Tibetans with?”

Speaker 1: “Well, for me, it was particularly, I think, with language. To enable the mentee to find his or her place in our society and to be able to get a job worthy of their skills.”

Speaker 2: “To help them settle. To give them a connection with the Australian way of life. It’s fine that they come and they mix with their own community, but how Australians live and everything is very different, so it’s very good for them to mix with people outside their community as well.”

Speaker 3: I think, for me, and knowing a little bit from my friend, I think I just thought, “I’ll go along and learn how, what and why, and just do whatever I see as it goes along”. I don’t think I had a lot of expectations of what I could do…”

Speaker 6: I have to say that I had no expectations when I looked into this, but having travelled quite a bit having dealt with a lot of cultures with a language problem in my working life, to try and just find normality of where to go to the doctor and where to go to buy things, and where to do stuff, I’m assuming that is would be that sort of supportive role that we would be offering...so that they don’t lose their culture, but within Australian laws and context and that sort of stuff…”

Speaker 7: “I just wanted to feel useful. Just be useful! For whatever. I didn’t know what would be needed, but I just thought I must have something that I could do for somebody else.”

Speaker 9: “…I was just thinking of a friendship in the Tibetan community…it would add another dimension to my life, and hopefully be useful to them.”

(Mentors, first focus group)

In the above, mentors indicate that they hoped to be able to assist their Tibetan mentees with a variety of things, including improving their English language skills, to help them find a sense of belonging in the local community, support in finding their way and local friendship. The exchange also highlights that participation was not merely based on being able to help someone; mentors were also aware they could potentially benefit from participating in the program, enhancing their own lives as well as those of the mentees. This dual benefit is discussed further later in this chapter.
Whilst uncertainty about the role of a ‘mentor’ was common, this did not hinder participation. As this mentor indicates, being enthusiastic and eager to help are key ingredients to becoming an effective and successful mentor.

“I have never done mentoring or volunteering before so didn’t know what was involved but was enthusiastic about learning and helping in the community.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Others still acknowledged the nature of the program and the mentoring relationship as a ‘journey’ in which the requirements and expectations would be revealed as part of a natural progression.

“I was not concerned [about not understanding] as the program unfolded the mentor role as being a kind of journey.” (Mentor survey comment)

A complete understanding of the role was not necessary, so long as mentors were willing to appreciate the journey and be flexible in their approach. In the second focus group mentors were asked what advice they would give to people considering becoming a mentor with the program. Overall, they agreed that mentors need to: have the time available; be flexible; keep an open mind; be committed to a long-term relationship, and; not have preconceived ideas about the nature of the relationship with the mentee. The following piece of advice from one mentor exemplifies this consensus.

“Don’t have any preconceived ideas. I actually saw myself with a female when I was thinking about this whole thing. I never saw myself with a male mentee, for some reason, and I have a male mentee now. So, don’t have any preconceived ideas about what you’re going to do, or what might happen. It’s all different.” (Mentor, second focus group)

**ACTIVITIES**

During the training course, mentors were asked to list some activities that they might find useful to do with their mentee. These lists were compiled and a master list distributed (see page 98).

The types of activities that mentors actually did with their mentees varied, depending on the needs of the mentee, the skills and experience of the mentor, and the personality dynamic between the two. As many of the mentees require assistance with English, activities generally revolved around improving their English skills (written and particularly spoken), including trips to the library and meeting at TAFE.

“I’m in a slightly different situation [from other mentors] in that I stay behind at TAFE and help her with her English...I guess she was motivated to begin with, but more proactive [now] in that she has initiated wanting to do writing...and also to ask for extra lessons...” (Mentor, second focus group)
Some mentors took their mentees on day outings to new places, for example ferry trips from Manly to Circular Quay and the city, and to the National Park at North Head. The importance of these outings for the Tibetans was discussed in Chapter 6. The simple act of going for a walk together was appreciated by many, both mentors and mentees, for the pleasure of the experience and the opportunities presented to practice English.

Speaker 2: “We found walking was very good, and they were very interested, and they especially love – or seem to enjoy – walking by the beach and watching the ocean and the waves come in crashing on the rocks.”

Speaker 4: “And there’s always something to talk about. When you’re out and about, just walking.”

Speaker 5: “Yes. Explaining shop windows, or –”

Speaker 6: “There’s so much. You’re not having to think all the time.”

Speaker 4: “I find it much easier to be out and about rather than sort of sitting at home doing the English! We do a bit of that.

Speaker 2: “I think it would be really, with the mentees who have no English, I think it would be really difficult to stay in that small environment. I think the visual thing is really helpful.”

(Mentors, second focus group)
### Activities:
**Here are some free or low cost activities you might like to do with your mentee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practise English</td>
<td>Walk on the beach</td>
<td>Bushwalking</td>
<td>Picnic at Manly Dam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit a temple</td>
<td>Visit a church</td>
<td>Have coffee/tea and chat</td>
<td>Cook a low cost meal or snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit a supermarket and practise English names for food and check out and compare for best prices</td>
<td>Visit a museum</td>
<td>Visit an art gallery</td>
<td>Catch a bus to Palm Beach and walk on the beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly a kite</td>
<td>Attend a football, soccer or netball match</td>
<td>Go through some books on Tibet or about the Dalai Lama</td>
<td>Join with some other mentors/mentees and go on an excursion such as the zoo, Koala Park, Bondi Beach, Opera House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain some Australian customs or rituals</td>
<td>Catch a train to the Blue Mountains and go for a bushwalk and picnic</td>
<td>Share some photos of your family and places you have visited with your mentee</td>
<td>Discuss Buddhism and the teachings of His Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk around the library (TAFE and local) Look at books on Tibet or books/magazines in Tibetan</td>
<td>Have BYO lunch outside the TAFE canteen</td>
<td>Catch a bus to Manly and then a ferry to the city and have an ice cream at Circular Quay</td>
<td>Visit Oceanworld Manly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play cards and simple games</td>
<td>Throw a Frisbee or go bowling</td>
<td>Have a BBQ at park under Roseville Bridge (if you both eat meat) or have a picnic and walk</td>
<td>Walk on North Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take your dog for a walk</td>
<td>Do some craft together e.g. sewing, knitting</td>
<td>Read through Manly Daily e.g. stories, work</td>
<td>Visit a garden e.g. Wildflower garden or plant some vegetables/flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a meal at TAFE – cheap lunches or dinners – check with Administration (may inspire booking into hospitality course!)</td>
<td>Visit a weekend market</td>
<td>Working on a scrapbook</td>
<td>Discuss local government elections and politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted in the literature, mentoring relationships may present many challenges. The main challenges confronting mentors in this program were:

- Language barriers
- Logistical difficulties (arranging meetings and/or suitable activities)
- Uncertainty about mentees expectations
- Lack of feedback from mentees
- Boundary issues

This comment from one mentor exemplifies the complex and multifaceted nature of these challenges:

“Small challenges in cultural differences. Large challenge in English conversation (but getting better all the time). I have to be careful not to spend too much time thinking about the mentees!” (Mentor, survey comment)

**LANGUAGE BARRIER AND LOGISTICAL DIFFICULTIES**

With the low level English skills of many of the Tibetan mentees, the language barrier has been one of the greatest challenges for both mentors and mentees (as was discussed in Chapter 6). Those mentors matched with mentees with limited English were confronted with the challenge of trying to communicate and find out about their mentee.

“...with the English barrier, it’s really difficult for us to have a big conversation and find out what’s happening, where they go and who they meet. We can’t do any of that, so it’s just, like, very small conversations, going out and doing visual things, but not finding a lot out about them, the rest of their week...” (Mentor, second focus group)

The language barrier also created logistical difficulties in organising meeting times and locations. During the debrief sessions, some mentors spoke about the confusion created in initially trying to establish regular meeting times and places. This was also identified as an issue in the focus group and surveys.

“It’s not easy making arrangements but the meetings have gone well.” (Mentor, survey comment)

**Hints:**

- Entertainment Guide has good deals on two for one with ferries, cafes, museums, Koala Park etc
- Take it slowly at first
- Notice what your mentee enjoys and remember that they may feel shy to ask for something
- Go for some group as well as individual excursions
- Tibetans will be looking forward to meeting your family and friends if you feel comfortable with this
- Wherever possible try and do things that the mentee can repeat by themselves or others – e.g. be able to catch a bus by themselves
- Do things that are low cost and repeatable
A language barrier need not be a hindrance to the relationship per se, if both parties are relaxed in the process, as this comment from one mentor demonstrates.

“We find we have lots of laughs, because trying to communicate just doesn’t work, so you throw your arms up and laugh.” (Mentor, second focus group)

However, as noted in Chapter 6, the language and communication barrier had a significant impact on the quality of relationships developed between mentor and mentee, as those with some English skills had developed stronger relationships with their mentors and also gained a wider range of new skills and experiences. Whilst mentors were taught some Tibetan phrases during the training course, this was limited to basic greetings, phrases such as thank you, and words to describe people, such as farmer, monk, nun and nomad. Some mentors used Tibetan phrase books or Tibetan-English dictionaries in an attempt to overcome the language barrier. Yet it must be acknowledged that the language barrier was one of the major challenges facing both mentors and mentees.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT MENTEES’ EXPECTATIONS AND LACK OF FEEDBACK

Feeling unsure about their mentees expectations was a common concern amongst the mentors. On several occasions mentors asked both program staff and researchers about what their mentees had been saying about them in an effort to seek reassurance that they were doing a good ‘job’.

“I was wondering, Kylie, if it was explained to them [the Tibetan mentees] what we’re doing, or what we’re for? In the way that it has been explained to us...because if they’re expecting one thing and we’re expecting another...whether they’ve got the same set of expectations or not, so I’d be interested to know what they’re actually told in their language...” (Mentor, first focus group)

The comment from this mentor illustrates the concerns mentors had (especially in the initial stages of the relationship) over mentee’s expectations of them. Although it was made clear to mentors during the course that Tibetans were unlikely to complain or give feedback about their mentor, a lack of feedback from the mentees on whether they were pleased with their mentor seemed to feed this anxiety. Furthermore, the communication barrier was also a factor here. As noted in Chapter 6, Tibetan mentees expressed frustration at being unable to communicate effectively with their mentor. As this mentor notes, reaching an understanding of each others expectations was difficult in such circumstances without the aid of an interpreter.
Yet despite these concerns, eight of the nine mentors surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they have been able to meet the expectations of their mentees. This perhaps indicates that over time such concerns were alleviated as relationships and mutual understandings developed.

BOUNDARY ISSUES

One of the key concerns of program staff was the issue of ‘boundaries’ and mentors realising where to ‘draw the line’, both in terms of time and emotional resources available to give. This staff concern is discussed in Chapter 8; however some mentors also recognised that this was one of the major challenges.

“I have to be careful to balance my time. When my mentee asks for more time I sometimes have to say no because of my own family responsibilities.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“It was important to take a step back from my involvement to focus. The poor English/literacy skills are a big challenge.” (Mentor, survey comment)
The need to balance their time wisely was an issue which became apparent very early on in the mentoring relationship, as this exchange between the mentors during the first focus group illustrates.

Speaker 10: “I’m surprised by how many times I find myself thinking about them [the Tibetans] already! (laughs)

Speaker 8: “Yes, me too!”

Speaker 10: “It’s amazing. It creeps into my life all the time!

Speaker 9: “A lot! I find that, too.”

(Mentors, first focus group)

In any mentoring relationship this is one of the main challenges often confronted. However, given the plight of Tibetan refugees and their histories of torture and trauma, establishing boundaries is an important part of the process. In this instance, so-called boundary issues include political engagement and over-helping (e.g. lending money, immigration issues, buying dinners etc).

Although the political situation of Tibet was not a specific item in the agenda of the course, the issue did arise in group discussions throughout the course, as mentors became more aware and as the plight of Tibet gained increased public attention (due to the unrest in Tibet in March and the protests surrounding the Beijing Olympic Games). The decision was made to provide mentors with access to an email list if they wished to find out more information. All mentors joined this list, and each week they could be heard discussing the latest round of emails to be circulated. However the extent to which mentors became personally involved in the Tibetan political project varied. Some mentors decided to be involved in political protests, supporting the Tibetan cause by signing petitions, writing letters and attending peace rallies and candlelight vigils.

“What we’ve done is link people with… who emails…and some people are going on marches, some people are going on peace rallies, but it’s their choice…Everyone’s got a different relationship. Some people are more political…But actually, I haven’t personally, consciously increased any political content, but I have tried to steer people to where they can go to meet that need.” (Staff, focus group)

Mentor ‘self-care’ was addressed during the first debriefing session. The course facilitators emphasised to mentors that they should not be a ‘rescuer’, a ‘saviour’ or a ‘martyr’. They were counselled to “only give what you can give” and given some advice on how to have a healthy mentoring relationship. This included things such as setting boundaries; saying no when appropriate; listen to what mentees want; not creating a dependency; taking it slowly and remembering that friendships take time to develop. However a challenge for mentors identified by program staff was that of getting too personally involved in the lives of their mentees. Rather than empowering their mentee by encouraging him to do things for himself, in the case outlined below, one mentor over-stepped the boundaries and took upon herself to do things for him (as one would a child).
“Well, I know one of the mentors has been asked to stop being involved – this is the only case I know – has been asked to stop being involved, because she started ringing professionals and talking on behalf of the person without his permission, and I know – because she rang me and she was very upset, but found it hard to understand that what she’d done was actually very inappropriate.” (Staff, focus group)

The above example highlights that there is a fine line between helping someone and taking on their problems, or ‘over-helping’.

There was a wide range of responses when mentors were questioned in the survey about whether they faced challenges as a mentor.

Moreover, during the second focus group, mentors were asked whether they had experienced any awkward moments or instances of tension in the mentoring relationship. The mentors were hard pressed to think of any particular examples, with any slightly awkward moments laughed about. These awkward moments included not liking the tea served to them, feeling uncomfortable about visiting their mentee around lunch (as they did not want to feel like they needed to be served a meal), and cultural customs and not wanting to offend.
In some instances mentors were requested to assist their mentees with rather difficult and complex situations. For example, one mentor helped their mentee and her flatmates find a new rental unit when their previous lease expired. Another mentor was matched with a mentee involved in a complex immigration case. Although ill-equipped to deal with such circumstances, the mentor did their best to help their mentee before stepping back. Yet these examples were not identified by the mentors in the focus group as challenging or awkward. For the researchers this raised the issue of perception; how mentors perceive challenges and boundaries. We found that there appears to be a contradiction between what mentors expressed about perceived challenges (or the lack thereof really) and what staff identified as the challenges and difficulties facing mentors. As the mentors are volunteering their time and skills, perhaps it is a matter of them not actually perceiving so-called challenges. Whilst staff may see certain acts or requests as going above and beyond the call of duty, so to speak, mentors may see it as simply part of their role. The following comment from a discussion held during the second focus group provides some insight into why this perceptual gap may exist.

“But do you think that’s because we’ve come to do this because we want to do it, knowing all those issues that we’re going to have? And the same with them, that they’re open to being part of it...so we’re all open to the relationship, so maybe there aren’t any awkward moments because we’re not looking for them” (Mentor, second focus group)
BENEFITS

As noted in the literature on mentoring through their involvement in mentoring, mentors can build new skills through training, meet new people and add variety to their work and life experiences. This is most certainly the case with the Tibetan Mentoring program, with all mentors surveyed agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had found being a mentor rewarding.
Moreover, their additional comments in the survey reiterate this sentiment.

“Extremely rewarding! I have received so much pleasure from being a mentor and meeting many members of the Tibetan community.”

“The Tibetan people are such a kind, compassionate race – it has been a pleasure for me to participate.”

(Mentors, survey comments)

Overall, the main benefits for the mentors were:

- A sense of satisfaction from helping others
- Learning about Tibetan culture
- Acquisition of new skills and information
- Friendships with other mentors
- Flow-on benefits extending beyond the program

Satisfaction from helping others

Clearly, one of the positive aspects of the program for mentors was a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in being able to help another. All mentors surveyed felt that their mentee had benefited from being involved in the mentoring program.
I think that my mentee has benefited from participating in the program:

“Definitely. His English has improved as well as his self-esteem. At first he was very shy but has become much more confident.”

“Definitely. More relaxed and English and confidence improved a lot.”

“I think it gives my mentee someone to reach out to where familiarity with the way things are done in Australia comes into play.”

One of the key indicators that the mentees were benefiting from the program was an increase in overall confidence in everyday interactions, such as phone calls, shopping, placing orders, and going to the library.

During the second focus group, mentors discussed the ways in which they had been able to help and the types of improvements they had witnessed in their mentees during the mentoring relationship.

“I’ve noticed a big improvement just in phone skills. You know, just saying ‘hello’ and just being able to talk on the phone. I don’t know if that’s just with me, because he’s getting used to talking to me. Even ‘thank you for phoning’ at the end – knowing the process of what you say on the phone, which he didn’t to begin with, because his children would answer the phone and translate...”

“She has started to send me quite a lot of SMS’s, which is good. Telling me where she is, what she’s doing. That she’s thinking of me.”

“I’d have to say confidence. And I’ve taken my little girl to the library and taught her how to use the access of the library, so she now spends a lot of time going up there and borrowing books and reading...we spent about three hours in the library, so she now feels that she can go and get the information herself, and that’s an important thing. It’s given her the confidence to find out what she wants to, because her English is quite good.”

“I’ve found a confidence in being out and about. We had a coffee in Manly, and my mentee ordered the coffee and he wanted to invite me for coffee, so he ordered it himself, until the guy said “What type of coffee would you like” and I said, “two flat whites” so that was OK, but I just found a little bit more confidence in dealing, perhaps, with public situations.”

“But initially she would cover her mouth, she said “Oh my English is really bad”, but now she doesn’t do that anymore. So it was the confidence.”

(Mentors, second focus group)
As these achievements were discussed a real sense of pride in the mentees was evident. Particularly note the language used, for example, ‘my little girl’. Given the age difference between the mentors and mentees, and the maternal nature of the mentors, parent-child type relations were not uncommon, as is discussed later in this chapter.

**LEARNING ABOUT TIBETAN CULTURE**

As indicated in their motivations for participating in the program, some mentors already possessed some knowledge about Tibet and the Tibetan people and culture. Nonetheless, the majority of mentors surveyed agreed that as a result of being a mentor they have learnt about Tibetan culture.

![Bar chart showing the level of agreement among mentors on learning about Tibetan culture.]

"I had never met a Tibetan before and have found their culture extremely interesting." (Mentor, survey comment)

"Maybe it’s part of their culture or whatever, but they do laugh a bit more often than Australians. They just have this natural sort of – laughing, yes. Easygoing." (Mentor, second focus group)

It was not only through their relationship with their mentee that mentors learnt about Tibetan culture. Completion of the training course and the cultural contributions of Dorjee also facilitated learning about Tibetan culture and cross-cultural communication.
“Yes [I have learnt more about Tibetan culture] and look forward to learning more. It was great having Dorjee at each class to really give us the true picture and details of Tibetan life/culture/people.” (Mentor, survey comment)

Furthermore, some mentors even expressed a sense of belonging to the Tibetan community. This was not common to all, due to differential levels of involvement with their mentee and the English competency of their mentee.

Speaker: “It’s added a whole new dimension to my life and also being part of the Tibetan community – that’s how I kind of think of it now, like so many others.”
Interviewer: “You’ve been welcomed in?”
Speaker: “Actually, I feel I belong to something now.”
Speaker: “Yes, I do too.”
Speaker: “I belong! You know? And not just me, it’s my family. My husband and my son.”
Speaker: “I don’t feel like that at all.”
Speaker: “Don’t you?”
Speaker: “No. I don’t feel like that at all.”
Speaker: “No. I don’t.”
Speaker: “Maybe that’s the age and type of mentee you’ve got.” (Mentors, second focus group)

Those mentors who did feel a certain affinity with the Tibetan community also spoke of the significance of notions of community to the Tibetans, expressing dismay that Australian and ‘Western’ society more generally no longer held such attachment to a local community.

“It makes you realise the value of community, and actually what Western civilisation has lost by not having that community.” (Mentor, second focus group)
ACQUISITION OF NEW SKILLS AND INFORMATION

Participating in mentoring programs provide mentors with opportunities to gain knowledge and learn new skills. Seven out of nine mentors surveyed agree that as a result of being a mentor they have learnt new skills, including communication and research skills.

Mentors also found that the program provided them with the opportunity to expand and enhance existing skills.

“Another way of applying coaching and teaching skills already present.”

“Due to my profession and experience I had these skills but it has expanded me in different skills re dealing with a younger age, different sex and culture.”

“I’m developing my teaching skills.”

(Mentors, survey comments)

Mentors surveyed also felt that as a result of the program they had learnt more about the local community, even if it was not ‘their’ local community.

“I am living outside the local community but have certainly learnt a lot about it!” (Mentor, survey comment)
Of particular note was the fact that a large proportion of the mentors were previously unaware of the range of support services and settlement services available to refugees and new migrants.

“Definitely. Surprised there was so many supportive services and people doing wonderful things for new immigrants.”

“And the fine people running the ‘help’ programs in the community”

“I never realised how much is out there for these people.”

“I’ve learnt about the services available to new arrivals.”

(Mentors, survey comments)

Thus the increased awareness of services was a considerable impact of the program for mentees, but also indirectly for mentors. The benefits of a one on one relationship developed in mentoring programs can go beyond the mutual understanding and respect between mentor and mentee to have much wider community implications (Rudiger, 2004). Such is the case with the Tibetan Mentoring Program.
“I think it does make you more compassionate in a wider sense... I left TAFE the other day and there was a lady and she’d just been to an English class, trying to find her way though... so straight away you reach out to them because you know you’re involved with that. Your mind’s thinking about those things because it’s something you’re busy with, so it doesn’t just end with our meetings. You’re open to it everyday.” (Mentor, second focus group)

“And it also puts into perspective the whole thing – you know, we have little problems in our lives, but by and large everything’s going along pretty tickety-boo for most people, and you kind of realize that every little thing you can do to help them [the mentees] is a really big milestone for them. It might seem very small to us, but to them every step up that they can get to help them along the way and build their life here is huge.” (Mentor, second focus group)

Mentors have discovered a new found appreciation of the everyday struggles of refugee settlement; an awareness of the difficulties of learning a new language, finding rewarding employment, accessing health and community services, and negotiating a complex set of cultural practices distinctly different to their own. Participating in the program has opened their eyes to the relative ease of their own lives compared to their mentees.
FRIENDSHIPS WITH OTHER MENTORS
It has previously been noted that the mentors on this program had a particular strong group dynamic.

“...there's a dynamic within the group that's evolving too, so they're making friends with each other and passing on information...They'll be sharing information, sharing tips on places to go, and stuff like that, and they're sometimes starting to go on outings together...” (Staff, focus group)

Another benefit for the mentors was the friendships with other mentors that evolved throughout the course and continued after the formal debriefing sessions of the program. Email addresses were exchanged during the course, and some mentors exchanged telephone numbers. Some mentors have been going on group outings with their mentees. Others regularly keep in touch via email or phone. In the survey, several mentors commented on the valuable friendships with the other women formed as a result of the program.

“I have met many wonderful Tibetans as well as many wonderful women on the course, some of whom I hope to remain friends with.” (Mentor, survey comment)
This support network that evolved has enhanced the experience of mentoring for the mentors. They have bonded quite closely and benefit from the opportunity to honestly discuss their mentoring relationships in a warm and friendly environment. And as this mentor acknowledges, because the group was made up of ‘like-minded’ individuals, who shared common interests and life experiences, the tendency for friendships to develop was increased.

“Another benefit the mentors receive is friendship with other mentors – especially as they tend to be like-minded people.” (Mentor, survey comment)

As was hoped, mentors have introduced mentees to members of their families, including husbands, partners and children. The benefits and value of the program have extended beyond the individual one on one relationship between mentor and mentee, and has made an impact in the lives of these family members.

“My son came for dinner, and he’s the same age, so I think it was also interesting for him to hear the sort of life they had.” (Mentor, second focus group)
Family members have also become involved politically in the Tibetan struggle, for example by attending rallies in Australia and overseas.

“My husband was very interested in following what’s been happening, and my son is also interested in her [mentee], so my son came along for a picnic too…the other interesting thing is, my daughter is [overseas] but I’ve been telling her all about what’s going on and sending her some photos, and she’s going to a rally for Tibet next week, so she’s kind of following it up as well.” (Mentor, second focus group)

It was noted in Chapter 6 that some mentees have found substitute families in the form of their mentors. In addition, due to the age differences between mentors and mentees, some mentors treat their mentees almost like extra children. This mentor compares her relationship with her young female mentee with the experience of raising her two sons, implying that now she has a daughter.

“What I’ve found really interesting is – which is probably entirely different from the rest of you – is that I have two boys, I have two grown-up boys, and I now have a girl! (laughs) It’s really interesting to see how her learning skills, and how she approaches things – because she’s the same age as my boys – very differently from how they approach things.” (Mentor, second focus group)

On Mother’s Day (in early May and not long into the mentoring relationship) some mentors invited their mentees to family lunches and celebrations. For this mentor, the joy of receiving a Mother’s Day card from her mentee was shared with program staff.

“…she [mentor] showed me a Mother’s Day card, and she said, “My mentee wrote me a mother’s day card. I want you to have a look”. And she was so touched.” (Staff, focus group)

It is interesting that not only did some mentees view their mentors as parental figures (see the ‘she’s my mum’ example in Chapter 6), but some of the mentors regarded their mentees as children. Most of the mentors who are mothers have adult children (with the exception of two, who have teenagers and younger children). Given the relatively large age differences between mentors and mentees and this group of mentors, as a whole, possessing very caring and maternal characteristics, perhaps it was inevitable that such parent-child relations would evolve. However such relationships also raise the issue of the power balance involved in mentoring and the need to ensure that mentors are empowering their mentees.
**VALUE OF PROGRAM**

All of the mentors surveyed strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “I would recommend this program to others”.

![Graph showing the distribution of responses indicating strong agreement.]

All of the mentors surveyed strongly agree that this is a valuable program.

![Graph showing the distribution of responses indicating strong agreement.]

Although in initial discussions some mentors were concerned about mentees possibly feeling obligated or a pressure to reciprocate, for example, “if I take them to a restaurant, they might feel obliged to pay”, the mentoring relationship is a two-way process. The value of the program extends to both parties, with benefits for all involved. Just as the Tibetan mentees foresaw in their focus group the program has been a “bridge between two cultures”. Mentors receive just as much as they give as these comments demonstrate.
“Bridge building to avoid isolation on both sides.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“Extremely valuable both to me and my mentee.” (Mentor, survey comment)

“I am learning about her culture, about the process of teaching English and enjoying her friendship.” (Mentor, survey comment)

The program also highlights the importance of micro-interactions, of the seemingly mundane relations and exchanges of everyday life. For a refugee trying to settle into a new community and establish some sense of home and belonging, these are so valuable, as this mentor recognises.

“It makes a difference in people’s lives, just through the simple act of being a friend.” (Mentor, survey comment)

The possibility of applying this program model to other refugee and migrant communities was discussed by mentors throughout the course and debrief sessions and as such they were especially keen to praise the program to researchers. This mentor even envisaged the model being adopted at a national level.

“It would be great in other needy communities and could be adopted nationwide as a model.” (Mentor, survey comment)

It is important to highlight though that such community-based programs should not be seen as an alternative to government support programs and services for newly arrived refugees. Rather, such a model is viewed as supporting (rather than replacing) existing settlement services.
CHAPTER 8

PROGRAM STAFF EXPERIENCE

This chapter explores the mentoring scheme from the perspective of program staff involved with it. The reflections included in this chapter are from two of the TAFE teachers who have been involved with the scheme since its inception; two Tibetan community workers, one of whom was employed to work on the program directly and one who works with the Multicultural Health Service and reflections from staff from the primary funding agency.

Staff members involved with the program were interviewed in a focus group setting, and their reflections sought in bi-monthly steering committee meetings. They were also invited to send their thoughts and reflections by email. The key staff member responsible for the scheme also kept diary reflections.

BENEFITS FOR STAFF

Although obviously demanding for staff involved with the mentoring scheme, they were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the program. Staff felt that it was something ground breaking and unique which was making a genuine difference in the lives of a small but important refugee community living in the local area. The program appeared to be personally and professionally rewarding in a range of ways. This staff member spoke of her weekly class with the mentors as the highlight of her week teaching at TAFE.

I leave this group with my usual thought. I am so lucky to teach on this program. It is the highlight of my week.

CHALLENGES FOR STAFF

The staff were aware of the challenge of explaining to mentees and mentors what mentoring is about. Organisers had been involved in mentoring programs in the past and were aware of the latest literature on mentoring best practice. However this particular program did not fit the typical mentor program profile, which commonly involves either youth based mentoring, or mentoring in an employment situation. There was some discussion amongst staff about how strict a definition of mentoring was required and what kinds of boundaries ought to exist for this particular program. By the end of the course it seems that program staff began to take a more open ended view on this point, suggesting a more organic model somewhere between mentoring and friendship.

Speaker 2: Well, it is happening. I remember (a mentor), from the first group. He’s still taking his...they go to the football and things like that. And at that meeting, I remember Tenpa saying that the Tibetans wanted a friend, and Dorjee used that word again today. Whether the mentor relationship is friendship – I know we’ve had that discussion as well.
A key challenge for staff was boundary maintenance in terms of their own involvement. Staff were enthusiastic about this program and had become quite attached to the Tibetan community. This meant that there were times through the program where staff felt compelled to do work that was unpaid, and beyond the strict parameters of their formal paid job description. This was a particular issue for the two program workers who were the primary contact points for mentors and mentees. They were only employed for minimal hours to work on the project, one for three hours per week and the other for less, and thus the success of the project was reliant on their goodwill.

*As a co-ordinator I am doing my usual struggle of wanting everything to be perfect when I simply haven’t the hours (paid or voluntary) to do everything I want.*

For example, these program workers found themselves dealing with questions and requests for assistance surrounding things such as immigration matters and relationship issues. The Tibetan co-facilitator was working two jobs at the time, and juggling his role on the mentoring program with his unofficial and unpaid role as a leader in the Tibetan community. It was apparent that as a contact point for the mentees he was often called upon to help with issues that fell beyond the scope of the mentoring program itself.

A second set of boundary issues concerned identification with or distress at the situation in Tibet, particularly as this program took place during the time of the Olympic Torch Relay, and the uprising in Lhasa in March 2008 (and subsequent human rights abuses). This series of events was obviously quite traumatic for the Tibetan community as they were concerned for relatives and friends back home, and it reignited old traumatic memories. Program staff were understandably emotionally affected themselves during this period, in some instances possibly experiencing what is known as ‘trauma by proxy’ or secondary traumatisation, often experienced by those who work with trauma survivors with whom they have developed an empathetic relationship (cf: Farrell & Turpin 2003).

*This week I opened one of the pictures of a dead monk in Tibet – ever since I have had dreams and felt real fear and unease as I picture the tanks and buses of police flowing into Tibet without a single journalist or UN advocate.*

It results from a perfectly normal response to working with refugee communities, where program staff begin to identify with and care for individuals with traumatic histories. Sometimes boundary issues begin to make themselves felt where the staff member so empathises with the plight of the refugee they are working with that knowing where to draw the ‘helping’ line becomes difficult.

*But I guess there’s that thing, when you see somebody in so much need, of course your natural reaction is to want to do everything you can. That’s the dilemma.” (Staff, focus group)*
Some studies suggest that a supportive work environment including collegial support for and recognition of the emotional impacts of such work, combined with well co-ordinated program development can ameliorate the impact of secondary trauma and enhance role satisfaction for the professionals involved (see for example Ortlepp & Friedman 2002). This suggests that it is important for the host organisation in such programs to be conscious of the possible impacts on program staff, to ensure that opportunities for collegial support and regular debriefing are present, and organisational supports are in place as required.

I strongly believe one of the best ways to assist the group is to give the mentors the skills of walking alongside not feeling the suffering and sometimes inertia that can attend it. The trauma is the Tibetans not ours and as someone whose name I can't remember said when walking down dark paths it helps to have a supporting hand on the way. It's not our journey nor our role to intrude but just to be there and help where we can. It doesn’t help to take on someone else’s pain.

Further, it is important for program staff to discuss and reflect upon how they might best negotiate some of the issues involved and develop a personal ‘code’ which allows them to separate out their professional and personal involvement with the community in question. The quote above is a very good example of such reflection where the program staff member has reflected in some depth on how she can best use her professional skills to assist the community in a way that also satisfies her emotional, empathetic connection to the Tibetan community.

As discussed earlier, another challenge for program staff has been the current political and human rights situation in Tibet, and how to manage one’s professional role while having some identification with the political cause of the community they are working with.

I feel a conflict between my concern for the Tibetans and my role as an educator in TAFE. TAFE has had some problems with Chinese students complaining about the attention that the Tibetans are receiving. I guess at the end of the day we are educators not activists – at TAFE at least.

It is important for staff to reflect upon this dual role. In this program, staff were actively aware and continued to think through carefully how best to respond.

I have decided to take my own actions that are separate to TAFE – to keep in touch and write letters to politicians and within TAFE to do the very best as a mentoring teacher.

In this case, the program staff member felt that the best way to manage the emotional conflict involved was to separate out her political role from her professional one, and also to self-validate the importance of her role as a TAFE mentoring teacher on the program, reminding herself that this professional work itself has a great deal of value in terms of assisting the community for whom she has come to care.
The initial draft of this report was sent out to the staff for their feedback and one of the staff commented in her feedback that:

Staff had enjoyed the challenges involved in piloting and developing the program and debating the various ethical issues that arose, including issues relating to political content, cross cultural communication, religious and cultural differences including those related to the use of psychology services. They enjoyed the challenges of developing an educational program to meet these needs.

Mentor selection
A concern for program staff has been how to manage the mentor selection process. While in the vast majority of cases the mentors involved with the program turned out to be excellent, staff were very aware that they had a duty of care to the Tibetan mentees not to match up mentors who had psychological issues, or were unsuitable personality types for this kind of work.

We’ve got someone emerging who I think is slightly strange… That’s really difficult, if you intuitively feel someone’s a bit strange but you’ve got nothing to hang it on.

However there appeared to be minimal formal selection criteria (mostly to do with time commitment) and no tools or support available to program staff to identify problem individuals or formal methods for ‘filtering out’. For the most part it appeared to be conducted on ‘instinct’ and gut feeling. This aspect of their role seemed to be an ongoing concern for the program staff. Fortunately however the fairly informal process had, so far, worked to filter out those particularly unsuitable. Nonetheless, program staff may feel slightly more empowered in this role if they had some clearer guidelines and tools to assist in the process.

In addition to police checks, possible tools may include a formal interview, complemented by a tool such as Antonovsky’s sense of coherence questionnaire which assists in evaluating factors such as resilience, trust, and coping abilities. These combined with a clear set of selection guidelines for staff to follow would provide staff with a clearer rationale for selection of particular volunteers.

The place of mentoring amidst other services
The final set of challenges concerns the broader service provision environment within which the mentoring program takes place. Many of the boundary issues (where mentees sought help in areas that were above and beyond what a mentor could assist with) were a direct result of the fact that there is no full time dedicated, funded Tibetan settlement/community worker. The current Tibetan settlement worker is funded to work only one day a week. As the need for assistance is much greater than this, most of the settlement related work is done on a voluntary basis by a few Tibetan community workers or leaders, including the two Tibetan workers associated with the mentoring program. In the absence of a readily accessible settlement service, mentors also turned for advice to staff from TAFE involved with the program, the Multicultural Health Service and the volunteer coordinator of the Multicultural Service at the Manly Community Centre creating additional demands on these workers.
I think one of the areas that I worry about across all our work in health that we do with the Tibetan community is that most of the Tibetan workers have multiple roles, so that they know Dorjee’s role with the Community Association and at TAFE, and Tenpa’s role as a health worker and interpreter, and also helping TAFE...

On occasions the mentors themselves directly filled the gap in local service provision. In the case below, the lack of interpreters available from the Translating and Interpreting Service (funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship) for face to face visits with General Practitioners meant that mentors were called upon to attend instead.

And mentors being asked to organise interpreters, which has been good, because they’re contacted for advice on how to do that, but they’re also, I think, being placed into difficult situations because it’s hard — well, it’s practically impossible to get a face to face interpreter at a GP appointment, and I know some of them have been asked to go to the GP with their mentees, which is not something we encourage.

Mentors sometimes find it difficult to say ‘no’ to requests for assistance when they are aware that there is nowhere else for the mentee to turn to for help.

Interviewer: And so...how are the mentors going about saying, “No, I can’t help with that.” Is that something they find difficult?

Speaker 3: I think that’s a real problem, actually. Yeah. I think some of them aren’t saying no, and I guess from our point of view, knowing that there’s no community development officer out there, when that person asked about the housing, we kind of encouraged (her) to help the mentee, because how does that person...found housing otherwise....

Speaker 3: I did have one conversation with one mentor who rang (whose mentee needed help that would normally be provided by a service), and in the end it really does come down to...you do things because it’s a crisis situation and there’s no-one else to do it.

Part of the problem seems to be some deficit in the co-ordination of services locally, the absence of a migrant resource centre on the Northern Beaches or a “one stop shop” where newly arrived Tibetan refugees could access a range of settlement, community and welfare related services and the lack of a dedicated Tibetan settlement/community development worker to negotiate the maze of services on behalf of the community.
As this program worker suggested above, the terrain is complex even for those working professionally in the field. This complexity of the local service provision environment makes it difficult for mentees to identify and access appropriate services. It also represents quite a learning curve for the mentors who, while receiving some training during their course on services available, still find it difficult once in the situation to ascertain where best to seek help for the mentee.

Speaker 2: “...It’s just the referral processing. When we advertise for mentors, we say “Would you like to help a Tibetan navigate their way through essential services?” etcetera, and that is part of our program.

Speaker 3: “Thankfully, they don’t know how complicated that is! (laughter)

Often this resulted in telephone calls to the Mentoring program co-ordinator for advice, again a scenario which increased her workload exponentially.

On the positive side, the program’s link with TAFE is a definite positive. Many of the mentees were also enrolled in the TAFE English language program and the synergies between the two were quite clear. The program was also administered out of the Outreach department of TAFE which had a positive impact in that the course and program could be tailored much more specifically to community needs. TAFE also has strong relationships with other organisations that the program can link into.

The great thing about Outreach is it can put together courses to meet community needs. We have very generic modules that can be adapted and changed to meet the needs of a group. We develop various programs based around the needs and this makes us very flexible. We work from the ground up. We can also partner with various organisations.

The TAFE campus also became somewhat of a meeting and gathering point, somewhere the Tibetans felt safe and familiar. Classes and most of the meetings were held on campus. It also meant that the program exists within a strongly reflective framework, where program staff thought a lot about the pedagogical aspects of the scheme.

A second key strength in terms of the broader partnerships involved in this scheme was the role of the steering committee, which included program staff, a Tibetan community leader, and staff from the Multicultural Health Service and the Health Promotion Service, NSCCAHS. The NSCCAHS representatives were very familiar with the Tibetan community and had a great deal of commitment to the mentoring scheme. The committee had very good links and resources to draw upon which ensured that many of the issues with the program were able to be ironed out along the way.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS & SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

TRAINING COURSE & DEBRIEFING

Strengths

- Mentors felt that the content and structure of the training course were appropriate to their needs
- Felt that the case study approach was helpful
- Played a key role in building supportive relationships between the mentor group
- Co-facilitation model was singled out as a particular strength
- Facilitators & mix of guest speakers considered excellent
- Mentors valued opportunity to meet service providers in person when they came as guest speaker
- Debriefing sessions were highly valued and also helped cement the relationship between mentors

Areas for improvement

- Participants felt that it may add value to meet service providers again later in the debriefing stage once they were ‘in the situation’ dealing with their mentees
- Mentors would like to know more about content of TAFE ESOL classes
- Incorporate more Tibetan voices in course to speak from personal experience about settlement challenges
- Incorporate more information on Tibetan Buddhism

APPROPRIATENESS OF MATCHING & MATCHING PROCESS

- Participants were for the most part happy with their ‘match’ and good relationships developed over time
- Mentees found matching session uncomfortable and felt quite shy
- Mentors also found the single matching session uncomfortable. They would have preferred at least two more sessions
- Some mentors expressed interest only in ‘popular’ Tibetans such as nuns
- Potential mentees with little or no English were not sought after by mentors
- Program staff may benefit from more precise mentor selection guidelines to filter out unsuitable mentors
Mentor Experience

- **Motivations varied.** Included ‘wanting to give back’; ‘wanting to help refugees’; learning new skills; concern for Tibetan community; transition from paid work to retirement; transition back to workforce
- Mentors were somewhat *unsure in the beginning of what the ‘mentor’ role entailed.* However this improved with training and experience
- Mentors agreed that key *ingredients for success* were having time available, openness, and commitment to a long term relationship
- Mentors were *unsure about whether they were helping.* Would like more feedback through the mentoring process
- Aware of *boundary issues* and the need to balance time committed to mentee with other life responsibilities
- Mentors found the *language barrier* a challenge in developing the relationship
- Mentor’s gained many *benefits,* including a sense of satisfaction from helping; learning about Tibetan culture; acquisition of new skills; friendship with other mentors
- Mentors particularly valued the *supportive group dynamic* they had established among themselves

Mentee Experience

- Mentees had little *understanding of what the mentoring program* was about and what they might gain from it. Most initially understood it as a forum to help *improve their English*
- Mentees most valued the opportunity to *practice English* in a natural setting
- Mentees initially shy but most gradually built up *trust relationship with mentor*
- Mentees valued opportunity to *share Tibetan culture* with Australians
- Mentees valued opportunity to learn more about *Australian life & culture*
- Valued opportunity to acquire new *practical skills*
- Valued ‘*having someone to call*’ when in need
- Some felt that the mentor ‘stood in’ for missing *family*
- Experienced an enhanced feeling of ‘*connectedness*’ in Australia, beyond the Tibetan community
- Enjoyed opportunities to *visit mentor’s homes* and meet mentor’s family
- Most popular outings were *outdoor activities* such as trips on the harbour, bushwalking visits to the beach, picnics and BBQs
- Mentees also enjoyed ‘*first* experiences’ such as going to a coffee shop or seeing a local soccer match. The library was also popular
- *Spectrum of benefit* according to English language competency. Most obvious advances among those with middling English. Little or no English the benefits were ‘new experiences’, and opportunity to learn a little more English. Those with very good English already had the basic settlement issues in hand, but appreciated the opportunity to have more complex conversations and relationships with Australian mentors
- *Frequency of contact* was an issue. Those with less frequent contact reported fewer benefits
OTHER STRENGTHS

• The program responds directly to community needs, established in response to a consultation forum with the Tibetan community
• A key ingredient for success has been the ongoing commitment of the reference group for the program

OTHER CHALLENGES

• Boundary issues presented themselves for busy staff who had come to care for the Tibetan community
• The wider service provision environment posed a challenge, particularly the lack of a dedicated Tibetan full-time settlement/community development worker
INDICATORS

Tables: Responses on key indicators from Mentee Survey.
Understood aims of program
Introducted to new services
Feels more confident approaching services
More confident accessing employment & education opportunities

Has met more Australians
Would recommend program to other Tibetans
Would like to continue relationship with mentor into future
Overall, thinks valuable program

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
This mentoring program is overwhelmingly a positive one, and highly valued by both mentors and mentees. Mentees in particular were full of praise for the program staff and mentors and emphasised over and over again to the research team how grateful they were to all those involved for establishing the scheme.

A key challenge in evaluating the program has been to unravel what improvements in mentee’s integration stem directly from the mentoring program, and what are a result of a fairly natural progression of settlement. The two obviously are deeply intertwined. However there were clear benefits for the mentees in terms of building networks with the wider Australian community, the opportunity to practice English in a natural social setting; the new experiences and places visited; and new practical skills learnt. It should also be noted that the interviews with mentees took place in Week Ten of the mentoring relationship and thus it is important to recognise that the full spectrum of benefit may not be realised until sometime later. Nonetheless, early signs are that on key objective indicators, advances have been made.

Those advances can be described as enhancing the social capital of the mentees involved. Social capital involves five main themes: networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norms and social agency (Leonard & Onyx 2004: 3). Social capital—defined as ‘social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam 2000: 19)—has been divided into ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ capital. Bonding social capital involves dense ties and relationships of familiarity and trust within a group (Putnam 2000), whereas bridging social capital involves weaker but no less important social ties to and trust of diverse social groups outside the bonded group’s boundaries. Bridging social capital also involves links with civil society and local institutions. According to Putnam, bridging social capital facilitates ‘linkage to external assets and for information diffusion’ (Putnam 2000 22-3).

It can be argued that many of the experiences described by mentees fall into the category of building bridging social capital. For example learning about Australian culture helps to develop a sense of shared norms; while the information diffusion Putnam refers to is obvious in the myriad of everyday information and practical experience mentors provided mentees.

There is increasing evidence that psycho-social effects of trauma experiences (eg Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety) are exacerbated by the various challenges faced in settling into a new country (Sachs and Rosenfeld 2008). This program therefore not only contributes to the settlement process but in turn has the potential to have a positive impact upon the mental health and wellbeing of the mentees involved.

A theme to emerge at several points in this study was how neatly this program fitted within the formal concept of ‘mentoring’. It was generally agreed that while it was certainly a form of mentoring, it was also very much about establishing friendships in the local community. Again, this links to social capital theory in that friendships very much involve processes of reciprocity (cooking one another dinner for example) and trust. In some ways adding friendship to the definition of what this program was about helps to ameliorate some of the power relations involved. As the mentor below explains, friendship at some level recognises that there are mutual benefits involved.
Overall this program fits with (and indeed advances in a number of ways) best practice guidelines in mentoring. As noted there are one or two areas for improvement to bring it into line with the guidelines referred to in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), such as improving the matching and screening process, establishing goals through a formal agreement between mentee and mentor, and preparing mentees for their part in the program.

A mentoring scheme like this would clearly benefit many refugee communities. Indeed, refugee mentoring programs do exist elsewhere and are an increasingly popular strategy to assist integration. It is however fairly obvious that the Tibetan community is a somewhat unique one, and therefore implementing this kind of program with other communities would require careful consideration about modifying the program to take into account the cultural differences involved. The Tibetan community have a certain aura about them, especially due to the profile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the reputation of Tibetan Buddhism as a religion of peace and non-violence. Further, their cause has widespread support in the wider Australian community. In this sense, they are not dissimilar to the East Timorese community who enjoyed similar levels of support from ‘everyday’ Anglo-Australians. Other refugee communities, such as new and emerging groups from Africa and those from places such as Afghanistan and Iraq do not have the same profile. The cultural and religious differences involved would add further challenges. This is not to say that this kind of program would not be successful with those communities—indeed, that has already been proven with other schemes not to be the case. Rather, the point is simply to add a note of caution to those considering this scheme as a model that there would be additional factors to take into consideration in the training, matching, and relationship management process.

A key outcome of this kind of program is that benefits accrue not only to the refugees involved, but to the mentors who in this case are for the most part typical suburban Anglo-Celtic Australians. These kinds of mentoring programs should be seen therefore as not only contributing to refugee settlement, but also as enhancing community cohesion in building important social links between long time Australians and new arrivals.

Finally, a point to end on is that schemes such as this should never be viewed as a replacement for traditional migrant and refugee settlement services. Rather, mentoring should be seen as an essential and valuable addition to the existing service mix and needs to be adequately supported by traditional ethnic community development workers.

Those involved in the development of this program should be commended for their commitment and foresight in attempting something new that responds directly to community needs in creative ways.
CHAPTER 10

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Resource Handbook**
   Recommend the development of a resource handbook for volunteer mentors which covers key settlement issues facing refugees, information and links to services, and other key advice provided in the mentoring course. (see example from US - Transitioning Refugees: Connecting Cultures at the Crossroads [http://www.icenterindy.org/pdf/Transitioning%20Refugees.pdf](http://www.icenterindy.org/pdf/Transitioning%20Refugees.pdf))

2. **Screening process**
   Recommend further research into how screening process for potential mentors might be enhanced. This might include:
   a. A set of guidelines needs to be produced to assist and empower program staff in selecting mentors (e.g.: what to look for in a mentor; what ‘warning signs’ to look for)
   b. An interview process for selection of mentors with two interviewers
   c. Possibly assisted by a basic psych screening tool such as Antonovsky’s Sense of Coherence Questionnaire
   d. Greater focus on ensuring/screening for time commitment/availability to ensure frequency of contact
   e. While the screening process is important, it would need to be carried out sensitively as it is important that it does not deter people who would be very suitable mentors

3. **Matching process**
   Matching process needs further consideration. Possible improvements include:
   a. Ensure the matching process occurs across more than one meeting, possibly three
   b. Suggested structure for the first meeting to split the group into small group tables with, say 3 mentees and 3 potential mentors at each. Each table should have a program staff member in attendance to facilitate discussion and ensure quieter individuals are included. Mentors at each table should then rotate to the next table at a given interval. The second meeting should be informal but circulation should be encouraged
   c. Each mentee and mentor should then put 3 names on a piece of paper indicating their preference for who they would like to be matched with
   d. Program co-ordinators may then undertake the matching process, giving consideration to factors such as: obvious friendships struck up; mutual interests or particular mentee goals (e.g. regarding employment); time availability for mentors/mentees (e.g. work commitments); and the level of English of the mentee – those with less English need mentors with greater time availability

4. **Mentee pre-match training**
   At least one long group session with Mentees is required prior to matching sessions. There is a strong need to address lack of understanding among mentees of mentoring concept and aims of the program. Mentees need more information about what they can get out of the program, what kinds of things they might seek help with, and what the boundaries are for the relationship. This session may also be used to assist mentees to develop structured goals for the program.
5. **Structured goal setting**
   Recommend mentees develop goals in the pre-match session (recommendation 4) with some guidance from the Tibetan co-facilitator. These can then be included in a support agreement (see recommendation 6). Development of new goals and attainment of those set should be discussed between mentor and mentee on an ongoing basis.

6. **Support Agreement**
   Development of a support agreement between mentor and mentee. Contract between mentor and mentee including mentee’s goals. Agreement should set out the hopes and expectations on both sides; the mentee’s goals; and time commitment.

7. **Ongoing support for mentors**
   Establish an email support group and hold monthly or bi-monthly mentor social gatherings of mentors to continue for at least 12 months.

8. **Group meetings for mentees**
   Establish a social gathering for mentees to meet together at given intervals over a six to twelve month period to share experiences gained in the mentoring context.

9. **Feedback for mentors**
   Tibetan worker holds a group meeting with mentees at the halfway point to get their feedback. Use debriefing sessions to provide (anonymous) feedback to mentors on how they are doing and how their mentees are benefiting (or not) from the relationship.

10. **English abilities & mentor matching**
    Consider giving priority to mentees with little or no English to be matched with mentors with greater availability.

11. **Information sharing on ESOL class content**
    Mentors requested to be kept informed in a more detailed way on what was being taught in the ESOL classes. Recommend that the course outline and some course materials be provided to mentors who felt it would be useful to gauge where the mentees are up to in their English language, and possibly to be used as a tool in assisting them with English.

12. **Shared language to express feelings**
    Mentees with little or no English in the program felt frustrated that they could not express their feelings to their mentors. Some mentors, meanwhile, experienced this as a lack of ‘connection’

   a. Recommend that during the training (mentor and mentees) some simple tools to communicate are developed (and understood on both sides). E.g.; cooking a special dish, making a card, or writing a letter. Another possibility is that the ESOL class could set an exercise involving writing a letter to their mentor

   b. The TAFE could organise a basic Tibetan class for people such as mentors linked to Tibetans who speak no English

13. **Mid program joint picnic**
    Mentees all identified the joint picnic as a program highlight. Recommend that this be made a permanent fixture of the program. The relaxed atmosphere is especially effective at including those with less English, and also for introducing participants to friends and families.
14. **Support network for staff**
   Regular debriefing among colleagues working in program is important. Occurs now but needs continued support of host organisation and superiors. Organisation needs to recognize the personal and emotional impacts of staff involvement with this program.

15. **Annual Reunion**
   Recommend establishing an annual reunion for mentors and mentees (such as the picnic) as part of the program with the date set in advance.

16. **Protocol for emergencies**
   Suggest establishing a protocol/contingency plan in place for mentors when faced with emergency requests from mentees. This should include a contact point among mentoring program staff.

17. **Clarify term of commitment**
   There is conflicting material on the time commitment mentors must make. Some material suggests a minimum of twelve weeks, whereas the code of conduct suggests a 6 month commitment. Need to clarify this. Recommend a commitment of 6 months minimum.

18. **Advocate for a full time funded Tibetan Settlement/ Community Development Worker**
   There is a need for more funding to be provided to the existing position to enable the position to provide support and referral services to mentors and case management services for newly arrived Tibetan refugees. This worker could also be the co-ordination point for referring mentors/mentees to services, key contact point for mentees in the program, and play an active role in building up partnerships with other service providers in the area. If placed in an organisation with other community and welfare services a “one stop shop” approach to service provision for Tibetan refugees could be facilitated.

19. **Promotion of program**
   Opportunities for increasing the mentor pool include placing links on Tibetan Community of NSW/Australia Tibet Council website – ‘how you can help’ and more actively promoting the program to the Australian Tibet Society, the Tibet Friendship Group and Dharma Centres.

20. **Apply for further funding**
   Funding opportunities: Department of Immigration Settlement Grants Program; Warringah Council Community and Cultural Grants; Community Relations Commission Grants. Specifically, this funding could be for a mentoring coordinator.


34. Refugee Council of Australia (2005) *Australian Mentoring Programs for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants*


APPENDICES

1. Program Staff – Focus group questions
2. Mentors – First focus group questions
3. Mentors – Second focus group questions
4. Mentors – Survey
5. Mentees – Focus group questions
6. Mentees – Interview questions
7. Mentees – Survey
PROGRAM STAFF - FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Training Program
☐ What are the views of program staff on the content of the training program? What aspects have are useful and well received, and what aspects could be improved?

Matching
☐ Does the group feel that the matching process has worked well? i.e. suitable matches made?
☐ Any issues in the matching process?

General thoughts on the program so far, and past programs
☐ What’s working well in the program
☐ What isn’t working so well, or might be improved
☐ Any particular issues or challenges that have arisen so far, e.g.:
  ○ Emotional
  ○ Practical & logistical e.g. transport, language, meetings
  ○ Boundary issues

☐ How well do mentors and mentees understand the goals and aims of the program?
☐ What are the main issues coming up that the Tibetans want help with? e.g.:
  ○ Accessing services, housing, health, and accommodation, social and personal support?

Personal experience of the organisers
☐ What is the experience of the organisers:
  ○ What has motivated staff to be involved in this program?
  ○ From a personal point of view, what difficulties, if any, have program staff faced? (these might be either practical or emotional issues)
  ○ Are there particular challenges the Tibetan workers face?

Successes & Failures of the program
☐ What are program staff views on the success of this and previous programs in terms of its settlement goal for the Tibetan mentees?
MENTORS – 1ST FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why did you get involved in the program?

2. What are your hopes and expectations for the mentoring relationship? i.e: what kinds of things do you hope to be able to help the Tibetans with?

3. Now you’ve finished the training, to what extent are they clear about your role as a mentor, and what is expected of you? Do you feel you understand the goals and intentions of the program?

4. Was the format and content of information provided during the training helpful?

5. What was your favourite part of the training, or most useful?

6. Was there anything left out of the training that they felt should be included in future?

7. What could have been done better during the training?
MENTORS – 2ND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What have been some of the positive experiences of the mentoring relationship?
   a. In what ways do you think you have helped your mentee? What improvements have you seen?
   b. What have you got from the program personally?

2. What are some of the problems or difficulties you have been confronted with during the mentoring relationship?
   a. Have there been any boundary issues? (mentee asking too much or wanting help with things you’re not qualified to help with, or feeling like you can’t say no... or interpersonal issues...)
   b. Any emotional issues?
   c. Any practical or logistical difficulties? (e.g. transport, meeting times etc)

3. What kinds of activities and meeting places work best for you and your mentee?

4. What are the types of questions that the Tibetans have been asking? What kind of help have they needed?

5. Have you found that you have had to take on an advocacy role?

6. Have there been any awkward moments or moments of tension?

7. Have you received adequate support from program staff? (in terms of emotional and practical support, e.g. finding information and resources)

8. How valuable have the debriefing sessions been for you?

9. Do you think the training provided is appropriate/adequate? Was anything missing?

10. Would you recommend the program to others? Why/why not?

11. Given your experience with the training program and mentoring relationship, what advice would you give to future mentors?
This survey is intended to measure your opinions about your experience being a mentor. For each question please place a cross \( \times \) under the column which indicates how much you agree with the statement on the left. Please also provide additional comment in the right hand column.

### MENTORS - SURVEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>PLEASE COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I volunteered for the program, I understood what its aims were and what the mentor role involved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The training provided during the seven week TAFE course was helpful and sufficient.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The matching process was effective and comfortable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have been able to meet the expectations of my mentee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have developed a good relationship with my mentee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have found the debriefing sessions helpful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>PLEASE COMMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>As a mentor, I have received adequate support and assistance from the program staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I have been able to easily find information and resources to support my mentee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I faced some challenges in being a mentor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I have found being a mentor rewarding.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I think that my mentee has benefited from participating in the program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. As a result of being a mentor I have learnt more about Tibetan culture.

13. As a result of being a mentor I have learnt new skills.

14. As a result of being a mentor I have learnt more about my local community.

15. I would like to continue my relationship with my mentee beyond the end of the program.

16. I would recommend this program to others.

17. Overall, I think this is a valuable program.
Please use this space to comment on/further explain your responses to the above questions or the program in general. We are particularly keen to hear any views you may not have felt comfortable expressing in the group interview – perhaps to do with difficulties you may have faced in the mentoring relationship. Also, do you have any views on the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and how it might be improved?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (Telephone 02 9850 7854, Fax 02 9850 8799 or Email ethics@vc.mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.
MENTEES - FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you hope to get out of participation in the mentoring program?

2. What do you understand about the mentoring program so far? What is it intended to help you with? What kinds of things you may learn?

3. Do you have any concerns so far?

MENTEES – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Were you clear about your role as a mentee? And the mentor’s role? Did you get enough information about the program?

2. What benefits do you think you have got from being mentored?
   a. What new skills and knowledge have you learnt?
   b. Has the program changed your attitudes or feelings about living in Australia?

3. What kind of places did you go? What did you enjoy and find useful, what did you find boring or not useful?
   a. Go through cameras and diaries:
      ‘places I went to’
      ‘places I went with my mentor that I would never have gone to otherwise’
      ‘people I met who I wouldn’t have met otherwise’
      ‘places I feel I belong’
      ‘people or places that make me uncomfortable’
   b. What kinds of activities and meeting places were most enjoyable or useful?

4. What things did you ask your mentor for help with? What did you want to learn? For example about transport, shopping, housing, education etc? Do you think you learnt these things?

5. Are you doing anything differently as a result of your participation?

6. Did you encounter any difficulties during the program?
   a. Were there any awkward moments? Any tensions?
   b. Were there any emotional difficulties in the mentor relationship?
   c. Were there any practical challenges: for example getting transport, difficulty with English making it hard to get to know your mentor; hard to find time for meetings?
d. Were there any boundary issues; for example, did you ever feel like you couldn’t say ‘no’ to your mentor, or they were too pushy or asked questions they shouldn’t? Did you feel empowered in the relationship?

7. What comments do you have about the program’s
   a. Strengths: what were the best parts about the program?
   b. Weaknesses: Some things that could have been done better in the program?
   c. Do you have suggestions for improvements

8. Would you like to continue your relationship with your mentor after the end of the program?

9. Was the matching process comfortable? Do you think your mentor was a good match for you?

10. What did you expect or hope to get out of the program? Has it met your expectations?

11. Did you feel like there was someone (like Dorjee or Tenpa) you could go to if you had problems with the mentoring relationship?

12. How is Tibet and Tibetan culture represented in the program and how appropriate is this?
### Mentees - Survey

This survey is intended to measure your opinions about your experience being mentored. For each question please place a cross $\times$ under the column which indicates how much you agree with the statement on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>When I began the program, I understood what its aims were and what my mentor’s role was.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>With the help of my mentor, I have met more Australians than I would have otherwise.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My mentor has introduced me to new services. (For example, services such as Health services, Migrant Link, Centrelink, Manly Community Centre, Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>As a result of my relationship with my mentor, I now feel more confident about approaching services for help.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I feel more confident about accessing employment and education opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I now feel more confident using public transport.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I now feel more confident going shopping.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I now feel more confident going to the doctor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I am able to speak English better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I visit more public places in the local area (such as the park, beach, or other recreational facilities)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I feel less isolated and better able to participate in Australian society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I feel more at home in Australia.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this program, I have a greater understanding and knowledge of Australian culture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I would like to continue my relationship with my mentor beyond the end of the program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I would recommend this program to other newly arrived Tibetans.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Overall, I think this is a valuable program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

135