

REFUGEE MENTORING PROGRAM 2009

- A Mentoring Guide for Volunteers

Ruby Madan

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Ruby Madan

Refugee Mentoring Program Project Coordinator

ruby.madan@scc.nsw.edu.au

Tel: 61 2 8752 7533

Fax: 61 2 8752 7500

Sydney Community College Inc.

PO Box 247

LEICHHARDT NSW 2040

Tel: 61 2 8752 7555

Fax: 61 2 8752 7500

Web www.sydneycommunitycollege.com.au

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Congratulations on your decision to become a volunteer mentor for the Refugee Mentoring Program (RMP). This guide will provide you with some insight into what mentoring entails, and into the benefits it will bring to you, the refugees who take part in the program and the broader community.

Refugees in Australia

Australia is one of 144 countries that have ratified the International Refugee Convention and Protocol. According to the Convention, a refugee is someone who has left his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return '**owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion**'.

Australia has accepted responsibility and a moral duty to help those in distress. When refugees first flee their home countries, the international community tries to find a durable solution, including repatriation where possible, relocation to a neighbouring country, or resettlement in a third country such as Australia. Refugees do not necessarily have a choice in deciding which country will be their new home.

What is the Refugee Mentoring Program?

The Refugee Mentoring Program is a NSW (DET/AMES) government funded project that has been created to assist refugees to resettle in their new home. The program aims to support refugees by helping them overcome barriers such as cultural differences, inadequate English language skills, a lack of local experience and knowledge about local job seeking processes. It is hoped that as a result of the mentoring partnership, refugees will gain better knowledge and understanding of job seeking processes and workplace culture in Australia, along with access to networks, enabling them to find employment. Our program links refugees to a mentor in a partnership that we trust will become a source of confidence and encouragement for refugees, enabling them to conquer some of the obstacles they face, achieve their professional goals and feel more settled and valued as members of our community.

Refugees participating in the program need mentors from a variety of industries and interests, who can offer them some insight into the Australian job market, industry bodies, networks, and share their knowledge and experience. Mentors can provide insight and practical support in a wide range of areas. The simple act of spending time with someone new to Australia can make things much easier for them. Whether it is local facilities, social and cultural rituals, doctors' clinics, parks, pubs or public transport, there is a lot of assumed knowledge that long term residents take for granted, which refugees need to learn.

After inviting refugees to come and resettle among us, the next step is to help them to build their lives here. The **Refugee Mentoring Program** is one such initiative and we hope to link people, create forums for learning and sharing, support newcomers to Australia find their place, and change negative public perceptions.

Refugees and Special Humanitarian Entrants (SHP) in Australia

In 2007–08 a total of 13,014 visas were granted, of which 10,799 visas were granted to refugees not yet in Australia and 2,215 visas were granted to refugees already living here.

In the offshore visa component, grants to people from **Africa** comprised 30.48 per cent; from the **Middle East** and **South West Asia** comprised 35.25 per cent; and from the **Asia/Pacific region** comprised 33.67 per cent.

A small percentage of grants were also made to people from Europe and the Americas.

2008–09 Program

In May 2008, the Federal Government announced an increase in the Humanitarian Program to 13,500 places for 2008–09. The Refugee category will be increased to 6,500 places based upon a one-off increase of 500 places. These additional places have been set aside for the resettlement of Iraqis in recognition of their critical resettlement needs. The remaining 7,000 places will be made available under the SHP category and for onshore needs.

The offshore regional composition of the Humanitarian Program will be evenly distributed in 2008–09. Africa, the Middle East and Asia will remain as priority regions and each region will be allocated a 33 per cent intake, with the remaining one per cent allocated for contingencies.

Settlement assistance

Specialised settlement assistance programs are available to assist eligible Humanitarian Program entrants to settle into the Australian community.

Humanitarian Program grants by category 2003–04 to 2007–08

Category	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Refugee	4 134	5 511	6 022	6 003	6 004
Special Humanitarian	8 927	6 755	6 836	5 275	5 026
Onshore Protection	788	895	1 272	1 701	1 900
Temporary Humanitarian Concern	2	17	14	38	84
	13 851	13 178	14 144	13 017	13 014
Offshore resettlement program grants by region 2002–03 to 2006–07					
Region	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Europe	354	20	55	50	59
Middle East & SW Asia	2 867	3 174	4 335	3 126	3 807
Africa	8 353	8 486	7 100	5 695	3 291
Asia	221	415	1 260	2 315	3 636
America	7	1	8	0	6
Total	11 802	12 096	12 758	11 186	10 799

2007–08 Offshore Visa Grants by Top Ten Countries of Birth

Burma/ Myanmar	Iraq	Afghanistan	Sudan	Liberia	Cong o (DRC)	Burundi	Iran	Sierra Leone	Sri Lanka
2 961	2215	1 185	1 158	410	348	303	302	267	243

Some Background Knowledge about Refugees

Refugees are displaced people who have been forced to leave their homelands through no choice of their own. They have suffered persecution, war and other conflicts, ethnic and religious vilification, loss of family and community members and are survivors of trauma and torture.

Refugees come from many countries, with refugee movements constantly changing in response to events around the world. In the post-war period, people fleeing Communist Eastern Europe constituted a large proportion of the world's refugees. In the 1960s and 70s, many refugees were fleeing political turmoil in Central and South America and Africa. In the latter part of this period and into the 1980s, there were large numbers of refugees from conflicts in Indo-China. Following the end of the Cold War, refugee flows resulted from a series of conflicts, including those in the Balkans, Asia and Africa. The United Nations currently provides protection and assistance to refugees from over 50 different countries.

Politicians in recent years and the media are responsible for fuelling public misconception about 'queue jumpers' and creating a divide amongst our multicultural communities rather than build bridges through education and awareness and promote harmony.

“ ... I probably thought of refugees as a category, rather than individuals, but I have realised that people are pretty similar, no matter what country they come from. I would tell anyone thinking of becoming a mentor, to definitely do it. It can really open your eyes to new cultures.” Laura, a mentor

The Value of Mentoring Partnerships

Mentoring is the oldest form of human learning and is a method which is more broadly based and intuitive than coaching. It focuses on developing capabilities rather than specific skills and is ideally, of mutual benefit to both participants. Engaging in this relationship provides:

- Mutual influence and learning.
- A confidential, non-threatening sounding board for ideas, questions and concerns.
- An opportunity to give/seek information, personal insight, support and guidance.
- A chance to receive feedback.

The story of Mentor

*The story of Mentor comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. When Odysseus, King of Ithaca, went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted the care of his household to Mentor, who served as teacher and overseer of Odysseus's son, Telemachus.*

*In time, the word *Mentor* became synonymous with trusted adviser, friend, teacher and wise person.*

Mentoring can improve the skills, knowledge and job prospects of an individual. It is a process in which the more experienced members of a particular group offer support, advice and assistance to the less experienced.

Why Become a Mentor?

Many people want to help out in their communities but don't because they can't find the time or they are not sure how they can help. The Refugee Mentoring Program is organised so that mentoring partnerships can develop according to the needs and personalities of the individuals involved, while also operating within a formal structure that provides ongoing support for all the participants.

Mentoring can be of benefit to anyone because it increases skills, promotes flexibility, enhances morale and generates enthusiasm. It can also provide insight into other cultures, give networking opportunities and improve confidence. Mentoring helps the participants to strengthen their adaptability, creativity and insight. The power of mentoring derives from its spirit of volunteerism and generosity. Confidentiality is key to the success of the mentoring relationship, and it is crucial to maintain trust.

“I became a mentor because it was a flexible way to make a difference to society but also an individual ... it has been an inspiring, humbling and unique experience which has made me stronger as a person. It is very liberating to just do something for the sake of it and not for material gain.” Paul a mentor

What is Required of Mentors?

A mentor is a person who will listen and give information, advice and support.

A mentor may:

- Support a transition and help assimilation into a new environment.
- Act as a source of information and insight.
- Give advice on career development or strategies for achieving professional goals.
- Teach specific skills if appropriate.
- Facilitate self-directed learning.

” ... I believe that everyone should have the chance to get on in life. Refugees are here through circumstances and not through choice. I could not imagine having to leave my home and my family because of political reasons. Mentoring is very enjoyable and rewarding. There is a mutual respect between mentor and mentee and upon this respect friendships are built. Cultural differences do not hinder the relationship, they are the soil in which the relationship grows. ... I have learned a lot about myself and my capabilities. People from all walks of life can get involved and they should.” David, a mentor

Integration is a very personal process. Refugees will have varied goals and expectations of their mentoring relationships. Mentoring partners may focus on social integration, goal centred activities or a combination of both. Building relationships based on individual needs and offering one to one tailored support enhances successful outcomes for individuals.

Cultural Diversity

Culture involves beliefs, values, norms and social practices. *Beliefs* refer to the basic understanding of a group of people about what the world is like. *Values* refer to what a group of people define as good and bad or what it regards as important. *Norms* refer to rules for appropriate behaviour, which provide the expectations people have of one another and of themselves. *Social practices* are the predictable behaviour patterns that members of a group typically follow.

Shared interpretations about beliefs, values and norms affect the behaviours of large groups of people. In other words, the social practices that characterise a culture give people guidelines about what things mean, what is considered important and what is considered to be acceptable or unacceptable. Therefore, culture establishes predictability in human interactions.

Cultures teach their members the “preferred” ways to respond to the world, which are often labeled as “natural” or “appropriate.” People, perceive their own experiences, shaped by their own cultural forces, as natural, human and universal.

Following are some social definitions for you to reflect on:

Integration: When an individual or group retains its cultural identity while seeking to maintain harmonious relationships with other cultures, integration occurs.

Marginalisation: When individuals or groups neither retain their cultural heritage, nor maintain positive contacts with other groups, marginalisation occurs.

Intercultural Transformation: "... a view of things that is larger than any one cultural perspective." The process of being intercultural is a process of growth beyond one's original cultural conditioning... it is a consequence of extensive communication experiences and the subsequent internal transformation of one's cultural identity. It is a cognitive structure that enables a broadened and deepened understanding of human conditions and cultural differences and a view of things that are larger than any one cultural perspective.

CULTURE connections

"It could be perhaps, because I am neither engineer nor musician. Because I am neither Asian nor European. Because I am not any one thing. The reality is I am a mongrel. I live on bridges. I've earned my place on them, stand comfortably when I'm on one, content when in between. I've spent a lifetime contemplating my mother and father, studying their differences. I count both their cultures as my own. But I'm happy to be who I am, strung between two identities shuttling from one to another, switching from barn to brain. I am the product of people who launched from one land to another, who slipped into their own skins, lived by other rules – yet never put their own cultures behind them." Marie Arana

What Mentoring is *Not*

Mentoring does *not* involve:

- One person dominating, directing or controlling another's decisions.
- Becoming dependant or reliant on someone else.
- Using or taking unfair advantage of someone.
- Gaining favours or having expectations of returns or any form of profit.
- Working outside of the system,

and while friendship may develop as a natural consequence of a mentoring partnership, it is not the primary goal of the relationship.

Aims and Desired outcomes

Many members of our refugee communities have been in Australia for a relatively short period of time. Though they may be qualified and experienced in their specific industries, they lack the knowledge and experience of working in Australia. Mentoring requirements for refugees may be wide ranging; from the need for industry specific knowledge to providing guidance to establish a career plan, develop strategies to reach goals, write resumes and prepare for interviews. The RMP aims to help members of refugee communities to enter the Australian workforce, pursue further education and/or vocational training, as well as achieve greater levels of comfort in their social integration.

“In Afghanistan, job vacancies are not advertised. Here it is more challenging, you are examined and compared to other applicants. Selling yourself is not seen so positively in my culture. But here it’s a requirement.” “The most important thing was someone saying ‘You can do this’,” he says of being mentored. “I didn’t have anyone else to tell me that.” Asad (an Afghan refugee)

Refugees can make an important economic contribution by creating new business ventures and jobs, filling labour market gaps and helping improve productivity. Both refugee resettlement and general migration have been recognised as critical factors in the economic success of a number of industrialised countries.

Your Role as a Mentor

... is to share your experience, knowledge and understanding; to provide mentees with useful information ranging from job seeking processes, Australian work practices and employment responsibilities as well as opportunities and industry networks and make regular face to face contact as well as email and call your mentee. Please also provide regular feedback to the RMP coordinator.

In setting a vision or a particular direction for the person you're assisting, you are encouraged to listen to your mentee partner and work with them to develop their own options. It should be a consultative process.

Simple things that we, as established Australians, take for granted in our day to day working lives may be a great obstacle or cause for distress for newcomers joining our communities.

These may include:

- Knowledge of organisations in a particular industry
- Knowledge of local language and industry jargon
- Recruitment processes / writing job applications – addressing selection criteria
- Interview techniques
- Cultural differences and raising awareness (eg. Australian humour and use of slang)
- Management hierarchies and (where appropriate) a lack of formality
- Industry networks / professional bodies
- Phone/email etiquette
- Vocational training
- Professional development opportunities
- Socialising in and out of the workplace

As a volunteer mentor, it is in your interest to make yourself familiar with the cultural background of the refugee you work with. This will help you to understand

why Australian ways may seem strange for them and assist you with your explanations about local cultural and social norms.

Think about your current or previous work environment. Try to list a few common expressions that you or a colleague would use on a daily basis. Below are a few examples to start you off:

- She'll be right
- No worries
- You right?
- Do you need a hand?
- BBQ at my place, bring a plate

Consider how this might come across as strange to a person who has a high level of English language skills, but has not had much exposure to Australian English. These sayings would most likely even sound strange to a migrant from Britain or America.

Such small misunderstandings can cause embarrassment and confusion. In many cultures, there is a huge emphasis placed on 'saving face'. This means that people would rather hide the fact that they have not understood something and pretend instead that they have, simply to save face for everyone involved.

Please be mindful that your mentee partner may take some time to feel at ease in your company. This is not a reflection on your abilities; rather it is an insight into the difficulties refugees have faced and continue to do so. From their previous experience, they may have issues with trust and especially with figures in authority. They may not like being asked too many questions, close physical proximity or making eye contact.

Listening and Observing Skills

It is important to develop and use good listening techniques when your mentee participant has an issue, opportunity or problem, using listening skills, open questioning skills as well as observing the person's body language and signals they may be giving through non verbal communication.

In general, nonverbal communication comprises as much as 80 percent of the average face-to-face interaction.

The largest part of the meaning of any message comes through nonverbal communication channels, which include such things as gestures, posture, facial expression, etc. It is behavior other than spoken or written communication that creates or represents meaning. Some indicators to observe would include the following examples:

Body language - facial expressions, body tension, gestures, touch, body position, angulations.

Tell tale signs - flushing, tearing, sweating, respiratory rate, sighs, dry mouth, voice tone, rhythm, volume, emphasis, pitch, and rate of speech.

The following chart provides some further ideas on observing your mentee's non verbal communication and also how you might create a comfortable and encouraging environment for them to be able to express themselves.

Action
<p>1. Focus attention.</p> <p><i>Don't interrupt or complete what they are saying for them.</i></p>
<p>2. Use encouragers</p> <p><i>e.g. nod, smile, "Yes", "Uh-huh", "I see"</i></p> <p><i>These encourage without interrupting.</i></p>
<p>3. Watch for body language</p> <p><i>e.g. person may have arms crossed indicating they are defensive, they may agree but frown. Also remember, however, that body language varies across cultures so if someone does not look you in the eyes it may be a sign of respect, and not distrust or shiftiness.</i></p>
<p>4. Listen for tone of voice</p> <p><i>They may be talking fast, or angrily, or defensively. Tone can convey an important message about a person's state of mind.</i></p>
<p>5. Use mirroring skills</p> <p><i>Mirror their posture, tone and speed to begin with. This is a powerful technique to establish rapport.</i></p>
<p>6. Use open questioning skills to guide and probe</p> <p><i>Don't ask questions that have a yes or no answer; use questions to encourage your mentoring partner explore their own ideas rather than be guided by your questions.</i></p>

The Mentoring Process

The First Meeting

Things to do: Make contact with your learner and agree on a time, date and place to meet. We suggest you meet in a public place such as a library, cafe or park. Prior to the first meeting, take some time to look at your mentee's profile and cultural background.

- Discuss goals, expectations and needs of your mentee. Try to identify gaps in their knowledge of Australian society, culture, public facilities and their interests in study or professional industries.
- Read through the Mentoring Agreement and ensure that you both have a mutual understanding of availability and suitable means and hours of contact.
- Establish a friendly and supportive relationship.

You might also want to organise to take with you some paper, pens and any general documents or information relevant to their professional interests.

At the first meeting, exchange information about your work experience and background. This will help to build up a relationship. By the end of the first meeting, ideally, your mentee ought to feel that you are there to support and not judge them. After the meeting, please contact the RMP Project Coordinator to advise about the outcome and to submit your mentoring agreement.

Don't forget to start filling out your session feedback forms. These reports are to be submitted to the RMP Coordinator during the course of the mentoring partnership and again at the completion of mentoring.

Tips and Ideas for Mentoring

- Encourage Mentees to keep a diary or journal of meetings and discussions
- Let the mentee share something with you that they have an interest in or knowledge about. It can be anything, for example, a cultural celebration. Allowing the mentee to be the expert shows genuine interest, and gives the mentee a sense of competence and self-worth.
- Work on skills the mentee wants to improve and use the Mentoring Agreement to map out a plan for your partnership.
- Assist the mentee with writing their resume, tailor it to emphasise skills and qualifications that are recognised and well regarded in the mentee's chosen field.
- Assist the mentee with interview processes. Discuss and rehearse questions that may be asked and prepare them with the best possible answers they can give.
- During the time you spend together with your mentee partner, focus your complete attention on the purpose of your meeting. Try to avoid distractions such as long phone calls.

Your Obligation as a Volunteer Mentor

- It is recommended that you complete the Sydney Community College Online Mentor Training module (available September 2009). It will take approximately 3 hours to complete and can be done at your own convenience.
- Make a commitment that once matched, in consultation with your mentee, you will set goals and develop a plan to pursue them; and maintain the partnership till at least 31 December 2009.
- Ensure that the RMP Coordinator is contacted after the first meeting with the mentee, and the mentoring agreement is submitted.
- Ensure that the session reports are completed after each session, and submitted to the RMP Coordinator at again at the completion of your mentoring partnership.
- Where possible, provide the mentee with useful contacts who may be willing to assist them with information about learning and development opportunities and support them with their career development.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR RESIDENTS FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS

Centrelink page for newly settled Australians

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/settle_index.htm

Australian government migrant home page

<http://www.australia.gov.au/people/migrants>

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

<http://www.immi.gov.au/>

The NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service

<http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/>

The Refugee Council of NSW

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>

Australia for UNHCR

<http://www.australiaforunhcr.org.au/>

Centre for Refugee Research (University of NSW)

<http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/>

Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia

<http://www.fecca.org.au>

Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW

<http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/home>

Ethnic Communities Council of NSW

<http://www.eccnsw.org.au/>

Youth Partnership with Arabic communities

<http://youthpartnership.nsw.gov.au>

NSW Council for Pacific Island Communities

<http://www.communilink.org.au/pacificis>

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association

<http://www.mdaa.org.au/>

Immigration Advice and Rights Centre Sydney

<http://www.iarc.asn.au/>

Bridge for Asylum Seekers

<http://www.asylumseekersfoundation.com/>

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