

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by Sara Maher Churchill Fellow 2006

*Community Adult Education based settlement
programmes for newly arrived African Women
on Humanitarian and Women at Risk Visa's*

An investigation of this model which include mentoring
and social support from Volunteers in New Zealand
Canada, United States, Norway, Denmark



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Dated

Sara Maher

07.08.2007

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Introduction:

African communities have been arriving in Australia for the past twenty years. In approximately the last ten years the Sudanese have settled across Australia. Their presence in Fitzroy has grown steadily since 2003.

Very limited or no education amongst the women of this group is very common. Illiteracy in a first language profoundly impacts on a student's learning ability, as do the effects of trauma due to war and refugee camp experience. Many families are without fathers and with a number of children. FLN has been looking at how best to support this group in their learning. This has included using Volunteers inside the classroom and out and including social support to ward off the effects of isolation.

The range of countries and the organisations visited, reflected an interest in considering a wide variety of programmes. It was hoped that both new ideas and innovative practice in the education of African Women refugees would be discovered and be applicable to both the organisation I work for and other's in Australia.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for this opportunity which was once in a life time. Also to my employer, Fitzroy Learning Network. FLN is a small community-based Neighbourhood House in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Allowing its sole worker for two of its four major programmes, a seven week absence, is indicative of the commitment FLN has to providing the highest possible level of service to the community. My absence undoubtedly strained the other staff (4 full-time, 5 part-time) and I am indebted to them.

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in the planning of this project. The United Nations Association of Australia President, John Langmore and John Gibson, of the Australian Refugee Council. Also Paris Aristotle AM, of the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture, Julian Burnside QC, Sandy Ross and Dr Sal Renshaw, for their support of my application. And to the people I met and organisation I visited: your willingness to spend time discussing and examining your work was greatly appreciated.

Executive Summary

Sara Maher, Fitzroy Learning Network, Refugee Support & Volunteer Co-ordinator, 03 9417 6357, sara@fitzroylearningnetwork.org

Community Adult Education based settlement programmes for newly arrived African Women on Humanitarian and Women at Risk Visa's

Education in this instance is English as a Second Language training (ESL). FLN is a provider of the AMEP programme that offers 510 hours of free ESL tuition, to all refugees and migrants on entry to Australia. The emphasis was not on teaching method or style but what services and programmes community based organisations can provide to assist in their learning and consequently their settlement.

Highlights

Umoja Operation Compassion, Vancouver, Canada; a service for the African community run by all African staff. Women don't go to ESL classes; acquire language very slowly or not at all, due to a lack of any previous education, culture shock and mental health issues due to trauma. This is exacerbated by lack of transport and childcare. The isolation that these two additional issues can create simply feeds into the first concerns, in a destructive circular pattern. Umoja staff stated; the African way is; **To learn by doing.**

Norwegian Directorate of Integration & Diversity, Oslo, Norway; The New Chance programme is individually tailored for two years, to strengthen new comers participation in work, education and society. Intensive support is provided including **3000 hours of language tuition.**

Dissemination & Implementation

This report and its recommendations will be presented for discussion at;

- public presentation at FLN on August 2nd, 2007
- article in Diversified, (DIAC quarterly) Spring, 2007
- article in FLN News

The issue of the 510 hours has been raised at;

- Yarra Settlement Forum with a Representative of Department of Immigration and Citizenship on June
- With the assistant to the Minister of Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Daniel, at the Community Cabinet on June

- Submissions to the DIAC review of the AMEP closed on June 13, 2007

Programme

New Zealand

17.04.07	Wellington	RMS Refugee Resettlement Services	Peter Cotton Director
	Wellington	Ethnic Advisory Council Department of Internal Affairs	Winnifred Mahowa Ethnic Advisor
18.04.07	Auckland	West Auckland ESOL Home Tutors	Zoe Egusquiza Manager
19.04.07	Auckland	Auckland Regional Migrants Service	Anna Fyfe-Rahal Programme Manager

Canada

23.04.07	Vancouver	Umoja Operation Compassion	Edith Kambere, Executive Director
	Vancouver	Mosaic	Sherman Chan Director
24.04.07	Vancouver	Storefront Orientation Services	Alexander Charlton,
25.04.07	Calgary	Calgary Catholic Immigration Service	Fariborz Birjandian Executive Director
	Calgary	Calgary Immigrant Women's Association	Isabel Cascante Programme Manager
27.04.07	Edmonton	Edmonton Immigrant Services Association	Christine Nsaliwa Executive Director
27.04.07	Edmonton	Edmonton Catholic Social Services	Tegist & Franka
27.04.07	Edmonton	Changing Together, A Centre for Immigrant Women	Josephine Pallard Executive Director
27.04.07	Edmonton	Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	Ninfa Castellanos
30.04.07	Regina	SLA Canadian Chapter Regina Sudanese Elder	Awel Deng Regina Akok (phone interviews)
01.04.07	Winnipeg	Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council	Mary Dolin Executive Director
	Winnipeg	Respect for Refugees	Marc Shaeffer,
02.04.07	Winnipeg	Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council	Wanda Yamamoto Volunteer Co-ordinator
03.05.07 - 09.05.07		Enforced break to due illness	
10.05.07	Ottawa	Mennonite Central Committee	Sandra Elgersma Domestic Policy Analyst

11.05.07	Montreal	Canadian Council for Refugees	Meissoon Azzaria, Settlement Policy Director
21.05.07	Toronto	FJC Refugee Centre	Loly Rico Director (Phone interview)
22.05.07	Fort Erie	Fort Erie Multicultural Centre	Jennifer Hay Manager of Language Programmes

United States

14.05.07- 18.05.07	New York	United Nations Australian Mission to UN	NGO's Committee Ambassador Robert Hill
23.05.07	Fort Erie	Casa El Norte	Lyn Hannigan Sister Maureen Quinn

Norway

25.05.07	Oslo	Directorate of Intergration & Diversity	Sidsel Ronning, Senior Advisor
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Denmark

28.05.07	Copenhagen	Danish Immigration Service	Morten Bo Laursen Head of Communication
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Changes in my itinerary were made to accommodate a period of illness. Also, a number of arrangements that had been confirmed were cancelled when the person, for various reasons, was not available at the arranged time. There were also many suggestions made during meetings of useful contacts but rarely the time to accommodate. Travelling with a hotmail e-mail account proved to be extremely problematic. Often hotmail is junked. This at times made it impossible to make or confirm arrangements. It became clear early on that a mobile phone would have proven the more useful tool. Also in the time between submitting my application and departing, I effectively dropped the WAR Visa part of the project. This was due to the difficulty is establishing contact with services specific to this group.



John Peters ,Carlos Vialord, Marta Kalita & Sara Maher, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Winnipeg, Canada, April 24, 2007

Main Body

Fitzroy Learning Network is a Neighbourhood House, in the oldest of Melbourne's inner city suburbs. It's vision is one of strengthening community by providing education, support in a welcoming environment. It provides the AMEP programme and when woman finish this they can stay on and continue to study ESL with Centrelink approval. In the countries I visited there was considerable difference in how much language tuition is provided and in the time allocated for that tuition. Canada and New Zealand have unlimited access. Norway is provides six times the amount of training. For this project Humanitarian and WAR visa holders were focused upon as they do not have settlement workers provided on arrival, unlike the holder of the 200 Refugee visa who receive a worker as part of the IHSS programme. Consequently through their Refugee Support Programme, FLN provides considerable settlement support concurrent with the AMEP programme. Students of many cultural backgrounds, particularly those of the pre-literate African groups, complete their hours having acquired just the fundamentals of English as a second language. Grassroots organisations like FLN struggle with funding to provide and devise programmes to assist this group, i.e. the Belonging in Australia Project operates in Fitzroy by a four agency collaboration. A three year project funded by the Department of Victorian Communities seeks to provide a wider support in and around the ESL programmes for newly arrived families.

In my role as Refugee Support Worker and Volunteer Co-ordinator, I have been in a position to consider what is most helpful for these students. I have found myself asking what adaptations could be made to better support them. How can we better deliver programmes? What knowledge do we lack in terms of assisting these women to learn? All aspects of FLN's work are supported by a one hundred and seventy strong volunteer support base. In co-ordinating the Volunteer programme, I am in position to see gaps in service and develop ways of providing networks to newly arrived families that combine education and social support.

New Zealand

Summary

I looked to New Zealand due to its geographical closeness, their Refugee intake relative to its population and the training it provides to Volunteers. New Zealand takes up to 750 UNHCR refugees per year. It is worth

noting that a third of refugees that settle in New Zealand, relocate to Australia.

Education

The issues of travel distance and lack of accessible and affordable Childcare is impacting on students being able to attend ESL classes in New Zealand, as it is in Australia.

It was felt that dividing groups into literate and preliterate groups would be more appropriate for learning. Research conducted in Auckland had found that having bilingual teachers or teachers aid made a considerable difference in a class of Somali women but was not so successful with Ethiopians.

Volunteers

New Zealand is utilising Volunteers in the settlement Refugees, be they UNHCR or former asylum seekers. The RMS Volunteer programme provides 17 hours training and they then become part of a small team that work with the refugee family for a minimum of six months. Home tutoring Volunteers are given nationally accredited training. The recruitment of Volunteers is annually becoming more difficult in the bigger cities. This is mainly to do with travelling distances between the Volunteer and refugees. Rental markets in inner cities have changed forcing low income families to outer suburbs further from Volunteer support bases

Ideas for Australian settings

- Training for Volunteers in the refugee sector that can be recognised as a formal qualification. This is currently the case for Volunteers who do additional work for the 6 week AMES home tutoring training, but not for other positions.
- Assess the benefit of using bilingual teachers and or teacher aids for pre-literate classes

Canada

Summary

I chose Canada as it is generally understood to be most similar to Australia in terms of Refugee intake and settlement. In fact I found this to not to be the case. Canada is the world's second largest country, Australia is the sixth. Canada's population is 32 million; Australia's is over 20 million. Canada takes roughly 6000 UNHCR refugees and allow

around 3000 others to be sponsored into the country, although this figure may rise or fall dependant on how many applications are successful. Australia takes 13,000 per annum. Additionally figures for asylum seekers and family reunion vary considerably for both countries.

Settlement programmes vary from province to province and services that I visited contrasted greatly in size and resources. For example, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society has 150 employees, 800 volunteers and is a one stop service with ESL programmes (called LINC everywhere but Vancouver) childcare, employment training and preparation, a residential reception house for newly arrived, with on sight health care.

Umoja Compassion Society in Vancouver, a service for African families run by seven part-time African staff, provides parenting programmes and outreach, ESL conversation groups & sewing with very few resources and limited space. Their emphasis is on the building of confidence through regular participation and activity to counter the effects of trauma and culture shock. Hopefully this will allow women to attend classes but believe class structure should be changed from the formal Western style to one that is activity based.

Education

Despite the considerable contrasts between the services I visited there I found similar patterns of difficulty as in Australia and New Zealand, in terms of providing education for newly arrived African women.

Access; problems with Childcare and or transport, effects of trauma and isolation affecting confidence and participation. Some provinces also had waiting lists to get into a LINC class. Alberta was the only province who had the unusual problem of lack of attendance due to high employment. Due to a booming economy, even basic wage positions were being paid up to twice the usual amount. With employment so readily available, women were delaying ESL training. The Pebbles in the Sand programme had run since 1999. A mobile programme for pre-literate women who have multiple barriers to learning. The programme is taken to the women, space is hired, on a transport route, childcare provided on site and runs for 14 weeks, three times a year. Classes are very hands on and visual. It is most successful for those who have a goal. For older women it is more social but there is a success rate of 25% - meaning students go onto to further education. This programme confirms what Umoja staff in Vancouver stated and was repeated by Awel Deng and Regina Akok, leaders of the Sudanese in the Saskatchewan towns of Saskatoon and Regina and Aurelio Madut Danto, Winnipeg settlement counsellor;

Women, particularly older women, learn through activity rather than theory and all learn better if they have a goal.

Volunteers

The Volunteer HOST Programme is mandatory across the country. Host's do much of the orientation of newly arrived and are trained according to the requirements of the latest group arriving. The issue of family's with no language skill has recently been addressed by some funding to train Host's to also tutor in ESL at home. Although in Vancouver the Volunteers that provide support in ESL classes are trained teachers. Generally Volunteers are increasingly harder to find. One organisation had begun recruiting in the retirement sector. Mostly Volunteers are students who are only able to offer a short term commitment.



Dr Christina Nsaliwa, Executive Director, Edmonton Immigrant Service, Josephine Pallard, Executive Director, Changing Together, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, April 27, 2007

Ideas for Australian settings

- Activity based classes for pre-literate women
- Identify women isolated by lack of transport and/or childcare and provide a programme that is located centrally to them.

Norway

Summary

My interest in Norway lay in its difference to Australia as opposed to the similarities of Canada. New Zealand and Norway are very similar in population and in some parts of its geography. My meeting with Sidsel Ronning, Senior Advisor with the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity in Oslo significantly altered my view on this project and made me consider a different perspective. That is; while the work of grass roots organisations is invaluable too settlement, it is really only significant changes in Government policy – the ‘top down’. that would most significantly alter the difficulties this group is facing. Norway’s commitment to working with members of society that are welfare dependent (despite the cost) and the creating a society where everybody participates based on their ability, really left a lasting impression. Settlement is provided by municipalities and overseen by the Directorate. NGO’s are not involved other than the Red Cross, who provide Volunteer Refugee Guides. They have many more Volunteers than are used. Norway receives 1500 UNHCR refugees per annum and all receive a 50 hour orientation upon arrival. Unemployment is at 2% in Norway but it is 6% in the refugee population. The ‘New Chance’ Programme provides two years intensive support. It is expensive initially but they are committed to the long term results, which show that the programme pays off. Current results showed that 53% of those enrolled were employed or studying before the end of two years. There is gender equality in terms of who is participating and ten thousand have enrolled so far. There is a philosophical basis behind the Introduction Act, (legislated in 2004), which set up the ‘New Chance’ programme. The Scarlet Thread – if you pick it up and follow it, it will lead you home. The Act is designed to mobilize and qualify the potential workforce of Norway and help people to become financially self-reliant.

Education

Three thousand hours of Norwegian language tuition with intensive support, i.e. if student stops attending they are followed up.

Ideas for Australian setting

- Increase ESL tuition to levels commensurate to Norway’s 3000 hours



Sidsel Ronning, Senior Advisor,
Norwegian Directorate of Integration & Diversity. Oslo, Norway, May 24 2007

Denmark

Summary

In a meeting with Morten Bo Laursen, Head of Communications for the Danish Immigration Centre, I was able to see the wide variation in policy between two Scandinavian countries and Australia. With a population of approximately 5 & 1/2 million, Denmark takes 500 UNHCR refugees per annum. They are time limited for the first seven years. If the situation in their country of origin improves or they holiday there, or they have committed a serious crime, they could be returned. It happens rarely but does happen. The Danish Immigration Service decides in which Municipality the newly arrived lives although they take into consideration their educational and employment needs. They need to live in the designated area for three years and comply with the integration programme designed for their Education and Employment or they may lose their benefits. The Danish Refugee Council is actively involved in settlement. There are six language centres with day, evening and on line classes and students can attend for a three year period. In terms of hours this would be similar to Norway. In 1999 Denmark was the first in the world to introduce an Integration Act. In 2005, 'A New Chance for Everyone' was launched the emphasis was on enhancing integration to avoid Neighbourhood ghettoisation and combat and prevent crime.

Citizenship is available if you have worked for three years, followed your programme and passed the Danish Language test. It is likely to be between seven and ten years before you can become a citizen. The issue of immigration in Denmark seems to be very much a political 'hot potato', much more so than its nearest neighbours.

Education

- The three year period given to those newly arrived to learn Danish is roughly similar to the hours that Norway provides

Ideas for Australia

- Adjust ESL tuition time commensurate to Denmark

United States

Summary

My visit to the United Nations in New York was adjunct to the project but added to it by considering the work of NGO's and their role in providing Education as a fundamental human right. It was important to be aware of the critical input of NGO's on a global level.

The Committee on NGO's is a standing committee of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Any NGO can apply to the Committee who sit to consider applications for special consultative status, quadrennial reports and monitor consultative relationships. The UN's mandate is to build and maintain peace, relieve suffering and promote Human Rights. ECOSOC is specifically to promote international economic, cultural and educational co-operation and encourage universal respect for human rights. The UN's work is done at the grass roots level through NGO's and they gain credibility, influence and ECOSOC funding.

Ideas for Australian settings

-It would be of mutual benefit for Australian NGO's to be working in association with the UN, particularly those working in the refugee sector. This would reinforce the ideals of building and maintaining peace, the relief of suffering and the promotion of Human Rights. These are fundamentally the concerns of all social justice based organisations and to be affiliated with the UN would to be part of a global network of like minded organisations.

Conclusions

Australia is very generous in its annual intake of refugees, but the essential element in this settlement process – the hours provided for language training is clearly inadequate. This concern is not new or unknown but its remedy and the serious, long term consequences have certainly become clearer by undertaking this Fellowship. The process of social integration requires adequate resource mobilisation.

It is worth noting that this issue has been brought to the table for discussion by a Federal interdepartmental panel. The tender for the AMEP and other ESL programmes has been delayed until 2008. The Opposition has stated on its website that there would be an increase in ESL tuition for certain groups if they were to succeed in the coming election.

Recommendations

-Services that are providing education to newly arrived African women could look to utilise the 'learn by doing approach'. Emphasising activity based exercises rather than the traditional & formal Western style classroom method.

-The use of bi-lingual teachers and/or teacher aids for pre-literate students.

-Women who are isolated due to lack of childcare and transport are provided for with a mobile programme taken into the area, located on a public transport system and providing on sight childcare.

- That the 510 hours tuition provided by AMEP programme be increased to a level that acknowledges the time required by pre-literate groups to learn English as a second language.

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