Women on the Move

Evaluating a refugee mentoring pilot project

Sharon Bond

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Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

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67 Brunswick Street
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Tel (03) 9483 1183

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Abbreviations

BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
EMC	Ecumenical Migration Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence
GtC	Given the Chance
WoM	Women on the Move

Summary

The Women on the Move (WoM) pilot provided personal and settlement mentoring to refugee women in Hume City in Melbourne's northern suburbs. It was coordinated by staff from the Ecumenical Migration Centre at the Brotherhood of St Laurence and funded by the Scanlon Foundation.

Community services and research conducted in the region indicated that new refugee arrivals faced multiple barriers to settlement and that women particularly were at risk of social isolation, as traditional household and caring responsibilities, and cultural norms meant they spent more time at home. The pilot's primary aim was thus to increase the social connectedness of refugee women in Hume, using mentoring relationships to provide information, increase access to services, self-confidence, independence and community belonging. Other research suggests that for the host community, it is important to build understanding of other cultures and refugee experience and to foster cross-cultural interaction. A further aim was thus to engage and train local volunteers as mentors.

For the pilot, resources and training materials were developed and engagement undertaken with the broader community, with a focus on agencies which might refer refugee participants or assist with the recruitment of volunteer mentors. The evaluation indicated that establishment was resource-intensive and difficult but that toward the end of the pilot, considerable progress had been made in the consolidation of a model with potential for development and expanded delivery.

During 2008 and 2009, some 28 volunteer mentors were matched with 26 refugee participants. Social contact and friendship was a critical need among participants. Settlement and community orientation needs were considerable and included: access to affordable housing, financial counselling and related services; transport, information and access to public places and services; inclusion in social activities; childcare; and English language support, which was seen as a pathway to employment and participation in life in Australia.

The initial model allowed for two mentors per participant, with one ethnolinguistic match and one cross-cultural. Issues of recruitment and retention prompted a shift to one-to-one, cross-cultural mentoring. Challenges for matches related to the differing expectations of mentors and participants, and negotiating the mentoring relationship. A further challenge was that the pilot depended on a part-time coordinator (0.6 EFT) and the goodwill of unpaid volunteers.

Despite these challenges, many of the refugee women interviewed indicated their confidence and independence had increased as a consequence of the support they received. Many mentors similarly believed the pilot had been of benefit, allowing them to practise their communication skills, increase their understanding of the refugee experience and of other cultures. Both participants and mentors recommended WoM to others. Community professionals similarly saw it as providing much-needed support to refugees, taking strain off service delivery organisations, engaging the community and building stronger relationships, and increasing cultural sensitivity.

Evaluation of WoM indicates that the pilot benefited refugee women, volunteers and the broader community, but further refinement and resourcing of the model are required to increase its effectiveness and sustainability.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the development of the WoM model are as follows:

Future program

1. Implement a new personal and settlement mentoring program in 2010 for both new and less recent refugee arrivals suffering forms of social isolation. The program should have a duration of three years to ensure proper establishment and to capitalise on the resources and momentum built by WoM.

Model refinement

2. Rename the model to ensure that its purpose is easily understood and refine it to provide a more individualised response to the circumstances and needs of both refugee women and mentors.

3. Strengthen screening and assessment to ensure that mentors have the capacity and are able to commit, and that participant needs are understood.

4. Identify streams of participation to allow for different types of engagement such as friendship and settlement support, task-specific support or participation in social activities only. This would benefit both participants and mentors. Social activities could be used to help mothers transition their children into early childhood education, childcare and school. Social activities could also be used to engage a broader cross-section of the host community as well as more established CALD community members in volunteering.

5. Explore opportunities to address refugee women's needs by linking with other BSL initiatives such as Money Minded, Parents as Career Transition Supports and Given the Chance.

6. Provide basic training to equip mentors and offer accredited supplementary modules to enable upskilling in areas appropriate to the needs of their match, for example home English tutoring.

7. Strengthen mentor support to ensure that regular reporting and debriefing opportunities are provided, and include a mentor graduation or exit process that includes a feedback mechanism.

8. Supervise refugee support through periodic meetings with professional staff to monitor matches and develop a stronger system of referral and strategic intervention when problems emerge. Issues might include child care, preschool–school transition and the implications for women's social, inclusion, access to English tuition and employment. Engaging family members in some social activities, and holding refugee graduation with an invitation to remain involved as volunteers, is also recommended.

Staff and resources

9. Fund adequate staffing. Ideally this would include three distinct roles: a program coordinator with overall strategic responsibility, a volunteer coordinator charged with recruitment, training and support of mentors, and a refugee settlement worker responsible for participant assessment, establishing referral mechanisms and organising culturally appropriate social activities.

Building capacity, best practice and advocacy

10. Develop outcome measures for a future program, and plan and adequately resource an independent evaluation. A mixed method evaluation is required that provides quantitative data such as survey responses to strengthen qualitative data describing the complexity of the refugee experience or the intrinsic benefits of mentoring. Such an evaluation could also help the case for further funding or policy reform.

11. Establish a network, minimum standards and best practice to build the capacity of community agencies delivering refugee mentoring programs, address quality control issues and strengthen applications to philanthropic, business and government funders.

12. Advocate refugee mentoring programs to government on the basis that they address a service gap and address policy objectives such as engaging women at risk of isolation in the community, offer volunteering opportunities, promote cross-cultural communication and social harmony. The *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* with its 2008 amendment and associated policies provide an opportunity for advocacy.

Mentor (left) with two refugees at Eureka Tower, Melbourne

1 Introduction

This report evaluates Women on the Move (WoM), a personal support and settlement mentoring pilot for refugees in Hume City in Melbourne's northern suburbs. WoM was coordinated by staff at the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) located within the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) and funded by the Scanlon Foundation. Sections 2–5 of this report present the findings and Sections 6–7 discuss these and make recommendations for the further development of the model. First however, it is necessary to provide some context.

Addressing the settlement needs of refugees and their full inclusion in Australia represents an important policy concern, as does maintaining unity and harmony in the context of a culturally diverse society.

This brief literature review examines the documented settlement needs of refugees in Australia, and particularly those of women. In the state of Victoria, multiculturalism legislation seeks to encourage the inclusion of newcomers and to support community engagement initiatives. Mentoring programs are discussed as one way of responding to refugee settlement and integration needs, while also promoting understanding within the host community.

Settlement

Although in per capita terms, in 2009 Australia was ranked 69th for hosting refugees and had 2159 or just 0.3 per cent of all asylum seekers, the nation's contribution to refugee resettlement was more significant, with 11,000 humanitarian entrants welcomed in 2008 (RCA 2009) and some 3500 refugees settling in Victoria each year (DHS 2008).

Access to Australian settlement services varies considerably in policy and practice, and there are very limited resources for applicants who are waiting the determination of their visa.

Refugees who arrive under the Offshore Humanitarian Program and those granted refugee protection onshore (Protection visa subclass 866) may receive assistance under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). Protection visa holders and holders of refugee visas

(subclass 200, 203 and 204) granted under the Offshore Program are entitled to Medicare, the same Centrelink benefits as residents, and to six months intensive support through IHSS such as on-arrival reception, orientation assistance and accommodation, case coordination, information and referral and short-term torture and trauma counselling (DHS 2008, p.74; DIAC 2009).

Special Humanitarian Program participants on visa subclass 202 of the Offshore Program receive less support because they are sponsored by an Australian individual or organisation who have represented to DIAC that they will provide for the new entrant. It is the Australian proposer of the visa holder who will help them settle in Australia and that proposer may be able to seek some assistance (DIAC 2010b). Aside from help locating a rental property, one NSW government report seems to indicate that assistance is limited to information and guidance so that the proposer can themselves meet the entrant's needs. The proposer is then responsible for the entrant's reception and short-term needs (e.g. food, emergency clothing and temporary accommodation), information and orientation. This includes helping the entrant access government services like Centrelink and Medicare, making medical appointments, accessing English, child and adult education, help with shopping and budgeting, and explaining public transport, road rules and how to access emergency services (CRCMN 2006).

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is a government-funded program that provides 510 hours of free English classes to refugees and holders of eligible migrant visas (DIAC 2010a). Some visa holders, such as those with limited schooling, are entitled to an additional 100 hours. While DIAC funds many groups including migrant resource centres to provide further support and capacity building for five years after arrival, assistance is limited and socially isolated women are difficult to engage.

Needs

Given the extreme trauma of the refugee experience, settlement services are inadequate in addressing the needs of refugee arrivals. Refugees have fled from war, violence and the violation of their human rights. They may have suffered torture, the murder of family and friends, loss of homes and possessions; and many have lived in camps. These extreme situations limit access to basics such as medical care and disrupt education and work. The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) observes:

> Upon arrival in Australia, many refugees face the challenges of adapting to a culture and language that is totally unfamiliar to them. They generally arrive with few financial resources and have little or no family support. In the early settlement period, refugees will often experience high rates of unemployment or under-employment, inadequate and/or insecure housing, [and] poverty, in terms of low levels of income and dependency on some form of income support payment (DHS 2005, p.15).

Given the multiple forms of adversity faced by refugees, long-term support is needed. In 2005, a BSL study of the settlement needs of refugees in regional areas found that key factors in refugee social inclusion were the availability of resources, the quality of relationships with the host community and the recognition of refugee rights. Some refugee needs such as access to education / career opportunities and affordable medical care were common to all Australians. Other needs were shared with migrants—for example, language services, help understanding Australian systems and the need for understanding from the host community. However, the research also identified needs specific to refugees, such as recognition of trauma, interrupted education and employment, distinct health needs and assistance addressing anxiety about family overseas. The study concluded that

policies are needed in regional areas to ensure the provision of generous settlement services and support for refugees, particularly in the areas of employment and education, as well as to build local communities' capacity to welcome and include new arrivals (Taylor & Stanovic 2005, p. vi)

Refugee health and wellbeing has been identified as an area for strategic action by the Victorian government. For example, since February 2008 refugees have received priority access to community health services under the Demand Management Framework. Also acknowledged in policy are the distinct social support and health needs of women, which include:

- responsibility for large and extended families, and or arriving as a sole parent
- adjusting to different gender roles, child care and disciplinary practices
- nutritional, reproductive and mental health needs which may not have been addressed in their countries of origin
- experience of physical and sexual assault and vulnerability to domestic violence, particularly in the settlement period due to changes in family or gender roles
- lower levels of education, literacy, and difficulty accessing English language support
- insufficient employment experience, and limited access to material and economic resources
- increased risk of social isolation (DHS 2005, p. 21; DHS 2008, p.47).

A consultation by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) highlighted that in addition to the challenges of limited English, being unable to drive and lack of understanding of the public transport system, women experienced stress associated with supporting other family members. These responsibilities reduced their ability to study English and their economic participation. It was found that 'some women spend several years isolated from the broader community at home engaged in the full-time care of their families and that finding employment after this can be an overwhelming experience'. Noting a lack of acknowledgement by government agencies of these pressures, a number of suggestions were made on how women could be supported. These included: more flexible English language programs, initiatives to support the transition to work, support with workplace issues including discrimination, culturally appropriate child care, support to help families adjust to the different role of women in Australia, healthcare with language support, and measures to restore confidence in government (DIAC 2009a, pp.16–18).

Multiculturalism and social cohesion

Refugee settlement contributes to Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity. In Victoria at the time of the 2006 Census, overseas-born residents represented almost one-quarter of the population and with the second generation made up 44 per cent of the population. One-fifth of the state's population spoke one of over 200 languages other than English at home and almost 70 per cent followed one of over 120 religions (VMC 2008, p.4). Seeking to acknowledge this diversity, Victorian policy states:

> Multiculturalism is a policy designed to manage, foster and celebrate cultural diversity. It recognises the diversity of its different cultures within the context of a society that not only respects its members' rights to their culture, faith and identity, but also increases their range of choices as well as contributing to their development and well-being. This is achieved through equal citizenship, a sense of belonging and tackling material disadvantages among people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background (VMC 2008, p.3).

A considerable body of legislation supports multiculturalism in Victoria: the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*, *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* (and 2008 amendment) and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. In 2009 a new policy document *All of us* was released to consolidate the state's position on multiculturalism and nominate priority strategies for its advancement. Its stated aims are to: advance equality; support cultural, linguistic and religious diversity; boost economic advantage; and foster unity and promote community harmony.

This last objective of fostering unity and harmony is closely related to the notion of social cohesion as defined in earlier research sponsored by the Scanlon Foundation (Markus 2008). Social cohesion was identified in a group or community in which there are 'shared goals and responsibilities and a readiness to cooperate,' and a continuous 'process of achieving social harmony' (p.8). Social cohesion was measured using five domains: belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance and worth. While Australian social cohesion was found to be high, policy challenges included increasing the appreciation of immigrants' contribution to society, and developing understanding of the immigrant experience and settlement issues and the personal impact of discrimination. A further challenge was increasing the participation of new arrivals in community life.

Similarly, a Victorian Multicultural Commission consultation indicated that the social inclusion of CALD groups was diminished by their lack of confidence and experience in dealing with institutions, lack of information, language and other systemic barriers. Concerns were raised about the lack of infrastructure such as ethno-specific community centres and access to both public and private services and facilities. There was considerable support for community language schools, social clubs, women's groups and networks, which were seen as 'an essential ingredient of building confidence in a multicultural society (VMC 2008, p.10). Acknowledging this issue, the *All of us* policy states:

> Members of CALD communities, especially newly arrived communities, can be at risk of not engaging with the broader community. This can potentially result in social exclusion and reduced social cohesion. **The government will encourage community engagement of people from CALD communities** (author's emphasis, VMC 2009, p.28).

As this is a whole-of-government approach, each department is now required to report annually its initiatives to promote multiculturalism and meet the needs of Victoria's CALD communities. The policy identifies priority strategies including:

- Strengthen CALD women's leadership through mentoring programs in partnership with ethno-specific organisations.
- Develop resources that assist services to better understand and address the needs of older women from CALD backgrounds, with a focus on health, aged care, independent living and social connectedness.
- Encourage community engagement of people from CALD communities through volunteering activities (VMC 2009, pp.25 & 29).

Mentoring programs

The value of mentoring programs for the CALD community has been acknowledged. DIAC's report, *Access and equity in government services 2006–2008*, noted that community organisations reported that:

> mentoring and leadership programs are particularly helpful in building self-confidence and social connections. They promote greater awareness of services, and importantly, how to influence the design of services to better suit all women (DIAC 2009a, pp.16–18).

A study of refugee mentoring programs undertaken by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA) defines mentoring as 'a mutually beneficial relationship that involves a more experienced person (or 'mentor') helping a less experienced person (or 'participant') achieve their goals.' The authors observe that:

> Mentoring for refugees and humanitarian entrants can help entrants develop social networks and English language skills, research education and training options, seek employment or understand cultural customs and norms. Entrants often state the biggest barrier to feeling integrated in new communities as 'building trusting relationships', and not knowing 'who to ask' when feeling isolated. (RCA 2005, p.3).

Mentoring models include one-to-one relationships, working in teams with several participants and peer mentoring (NYARS 2008, p.41). Mentoring can involve sharing information, empowering and building the confidence of participants. This can benefit both new arrivals and established or more settled residents who have experienced social and economic exclusion. Furthermore, benefits for mentors and the broader community include an increased awareness of refugee issues, which can lessen negative attitudes and behaviours toward CALD groups.

Types of mentoring program

The RCA study observes that few Australian programs fit a strict definition of refugee mentoring: the distinction between volunteering and mentoring is not always clearly defined or understood, programs often target the broader CALD community rather than the distinct needs of refugees, and mentoring is often just one component of a program. However, four types of mentoring programs were identified (RCA 2005) and a fifth variant was identified through this literature review. Each type is described and illustrated with one or more Victorian examples.

1 Health

Health-focused mentoring programs address physical and mental health needs arising from the refugee experience which can include war, torture, loss, deprivation and time in refugee camps. Under-immunisation of children, exposure to tropical disease, parasitic infection, poor dental health, depression and post traumatic stress disorder are common refugee health concerns. Risk factors vary by gender: for example, male refugees are more likely to have been imprisoned, tortured or made child soldiers. Both the NSW Refugee Health Service in Sydney (Refugee Council of Australia 2005) and the Migrant North West Centre in Melbourne (Deng Tor & Fodia 2006) have implemented men's mentoring programs to reduce social isolation and depression.

2 Art

The arts can be used as a medium to develop self-esteem, address disadvantage and promote cultural understanding, and are the focus of some mentoring programs. Multicultural Arts Victoria coordinates the Emerge Cultural Network, Connect Youth and Visible mentoring programs which assist CALD young people who are aspiring musicians. These programs are run in conjunction with the Emerge Festival which celebrates refugee cultures (Multicultural Arts Victoria 2009). (Women's sewing circles that include a mentoring component may not be classified as arts programs because their primary aims tend to be friendship or employment, rather than creativity.)

3 Employment

Employment-focused mentoring is the most common of the types. These programs address the barriers faced by refugees in gaining employment, which can include lack of language skills, social networks, understanding workplace practices, (recognised) qualifications and local work experience. One example of employment mentoring is the Given the Chance (GtC) program developed and coordinated by EMC. GtC provides refugees with employment training and work placements, identifies education and employment pathways, and includes a mentoring component through which volunteers provide personal support to refugees. A 2008 evaluation found that:

> GtC contributed to strengthening refugee and wider communities in two ways: by helping refugees become more involved in the wider community and by encouraging the wider community to be more inclusive of refugees. Mentoring, work placements, training and employment expanded social networks, and created new and constructive interactions between refugees and others (Mestan 2008, p.vi).

4 Youth programs

Youth mentoring programs have broad foci such as friendship, language support, and help achieving educational goals and finding employment. They may also address intergenerational conflict, isolation, racism and violence. Mentors provide participants with positive relationships with adults, in contrast to some relationships with police, social workers and teachers. One such program is the Young Refugee Mentoring Project operated by Big Brothers Big Sisters and AMES. Delivered in the Chin, Karen and Burmese communities in Melbourne by a cultural liaison officer, the project matches two young refugees with one mentor. Two case studies indicated that: 'Since being matched, both young people have reported feeling more confident in their daily interactions and safer when going out to activities with their mentor, feeling good about having someone they can contact and ask questions' (Fell 2009, p.14).

5 Generalist assistance

Generalist assistance mentoring programs address refugees' broader needs include those relating to language, accessing public transport and information about Australian customs. The WoM model described in this report is one example. Another is Trinity College's Sudalog visitation program, in which mentors do assignments with refugees about finance and budgeting, employment and training, communication, organisation and the Australian context. A further example is Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre's 'My New Aussie Mate', a visitation and settlement support program described by Spectrum's CEO as a 'two-way cultural learning' program that increases multicultural acceptance in the community by exposing Australia-born volunteers to the refugee experience (Carnovale 2008, p.3).

Best practice

A scan of several studies indicates important considerations in the design and implementation of mentoring programs. These include ensuring that:

- programs have a clear purpose and model (e.g. one-to one, group mentoring) which is tailored to meet the needs of participants and their community
- organisational supports and policy are sufficient, for example with respect to mentor screening, training and support, translation and interpretation services, managing expectations and risks, referral information and program exit
- funding is sufficient for the duration of the program

- participants' needs are correctly assessed
- mentors endorse the program objectives and can commit for an agreed period
- matching occurs between people with similar skills and interests, by gender and when requested, ethnicity
- differences in cultural, gender and familial norms are understood, and mentors receive training about the refugee experience
- activities and opportunities to socialise are culturally appropriate
- graduates, less recent arrivals and older community members are given the opportunity to participate and share their success
- programs are evaluated to assess effectiveness, undertake further development, seek new partnerships and funding (DPCD 2006; NYARS 2008; RCA 2009).

Coordinator with mentors and refugees on a rainy day outing at William Ricketts Sanctuary in the Dandenongs

2 Women on the Move rationale and objectives

This section examines the context, rationale, objectives and structure of WoM before describing the evaluation method.

Context

Hume is located 16 kilometres to the north of the Melbourne CBD. It extends from Gladstone Park in the south-west and Jacana and Broadmeadows in the south-east, to Sunbury in the north-west and Craigieburn and Kalkallo in the north-east. In 2008 the population was estimated at 162,000. Compared with Melbourne as a whole, Hume has higher proportions of young people, families with children, home purchasers, and residents who were born in non-English speaking countries and are not fluent in English (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Population characteristics of Hume and Melbourne

Characteristic	Hume	Melbourne
People aged under 18	29%	23%
Families with children	73%	64%
People purchasing their home	46%	35%
Residents born in non-English speaking countries	25%	22%
People who are not fluent in English	18%	14%

Source: Hume City Council 2009a

Some 1149 refugees settled in Hume between 2002 and 2005. A further 978 had settled there by July 2008, representing nine per cent of all Victorian refugee arrivals in that period. The majority of these arrivals, some 859 refugees, were born in Iraq (DHS 2008, pp.77–8).

The settlement of migrants and refugees in the region has posed some challenges. In 2002, a Brotherhood of St Laurence community consultation in the local suburbs of Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park, identified settlement and social cohesion as needs:

> While ethnic diversity is reported as a strength, people from non-English speaking backgrounds moving into the area do have particular needs which appear not to be

> adequately addressed. This presents an added challenge because the people belong to a wide range of language and cultural groups, so members of a single group may be very isolated. With a reported rise in harassment of visibly different ethnic groups, there is also a need to build greater understanding and community links including new ethnic groups (Kelly et al. 2002, p.2).

The consultation also identified a serious risk of social isolation and marginalisation among the parents of young children. One recommendation was that BSL Craigieburn take a 'whole-of-community approach' to addressing the needs of young families and people from non-English speaking backgrounds (Kelly et al. 2002). An EMC needs assessment undertaken in consultation with local refugee women found that the area lacked community outreach programs that addressed the social development issues of refugee women during their settlement in Craigieburn. It identified the need for a 'home visit' program to tackle social isolation during settlement and bring together local women to participate in respectful cultural exchange (EMC 2007 unpub.).

A 2006 EMC study of multiculturalism in Craigieburn funded by the Scanlon Foundation identified lack of opportunity for cross-cultural exchange as a barrier to achieving a more understanding society. Residents overwhelmingly indicated that they would take part in intercultural activities including a program to help orient new arrivals to the community if one were offered (Frape 2006 unpub., p.21). In response to these findings, the Scanlon Foundation funded EMC to conduct a three-year pilot, which became known as Women on the Move. The project eventually operated over 28 months, from September 2007 to December 2009.

Pilot objectives

WoM's practical purpose was to recruit and train local women as mentors who would in turn provide newly arrived refugee women with personal support, help accessing services and integrating into Australian society. A further purpose was to promote social cohesion by increasing community understanding of the issues faced by refugees, and fostering supportive relationships.

The pilot's original objectives were:

1. Increasing the social connectedness of Iraqi and Kurdish[1] refugee women in Craigieburn[2]. WoM aimed to increase new arrivals' information regarding cultural customs and access to local services, as well as enhancing self-confidence, sense of safety, participation and belonging in the wider community.

2. Creating opportunities for positive contribution from local business, community groups and service providers. WoM aimed to gain sponsorship from businesses, educate the community in refugee-specific needs, and build partnerships with other organisations working with refugee women.

3. Building cross-cultural community interaction. WoM aimed to increase volunteer participation, interest and awareness in other cultures, and enhance skills in cross-cultural communication.

[1] This was later expanded to include all refugee women.

[2] This was later expanded to the Hume City region.

Stages

WoM was guided by a reflexive model and went through several stages of development and delivery. Some refinement and adaptation of the model was appropriate because of staff turnover and different skill sets. The stages of implementation, referred to throughout this report, include:

- The Set-up Stage (September 2007–March 2008) involved developing the model and its mode of operation, and engaging the community. The pilot was promoted to a wide range of community groups; local government and community agencies which were engaged to assist with the recruitment of volunteer mentors and the referral of refugee participants. Resources developed included volunteer position descriptions, registration forms, communication journals and training modules.

- Wave 1 (April–December 2008) involved the recruitment and training of volunteer mentors and referral of refugee participants. In this first intake, recruitment difficulties resulted in the pilot catchment area being expanded from the suburb of Craigieburn to Hume. Ethnolinguistic matches were undertaken where possible, with two mentors matched to each participant. A case-management approach was adopted, in which the coordinator supported mentors and participants, and personally brokered services as required. Coordinator 1 moved into another role at EMC at the end of 2008.

- Reflection and Adjustment (February–March 2009) of the model and learnings from Wave 1 occurred as part of Coordinator 2's orientation. The case management approach was viewed as a divergence from the original WoM concept and it was determined that Wave 2 would consolidate the original model by strengthening the role of volunteer mentors and establishing boundaries for the type of assistance offered. Fortnightly (written) reports were collected from mentors to track matches and identify whether they needed additional support. As WoM relied on one part-time coordinator, additional volunteers were engaged to provide administrative support and a mature-age tertiary student (Bachelor of International Community Development) on placement conducted initial home visits with refugees and a study of other mentoring programs in Wave 2.

- Wave 2 (April–December 2009) commenced with the recruitment and training of new volunteer mentors. The now one-to-one matches were guided by mentor availability and personal characteristics rather than ethnolinguistic considerations, resulting in more cross-cultural matches. Social activities were held every six weeks. With the resignation of Coordinator 2 in September, the student who had been on placement with WoM was instated as coordinator for the final three months. This period involved supporting refugee-mentor matches, holding social activities, arranging further training sessions and a thank-you dinner. As the pilot drew to a close, arrangements were made to transfer WoM mentors to the Northern AMEP Home Tutor Program where they could continue to use their skills.

Pilot staffing and structure

The WoM pilot was staffed by a coordinator (0.6 EFT)[3] with supervision by the EMC manager. The coordinator's role was to:

- establish and promote the pilot in Hume, formalise refugee referral and volunteer recruitment mechanisms, develop resources such as training curriculum and systems to manage mentors and supervision
- recruit, train and supervise mentors
- seek referrals of refugee women who would benefit from mentoring and develop information about other refugee services
- match participants and mentors, monitor matches and provide additional support
- coordinate culturally appropriate social activities.

With limited paid staff, volunteer mentors were the mainstay of the pilot. Once trained, their responsibility was to visit the refugee participant they were matched with for 1–2 hours per week to provide friendship, informal life skill training and orientation to the neighbourhood, and referral to other services as appropriate. Their role included encouraging refugee participants to expand their social networks and attending WoM social activities. They were required to report to the coordinator once a fortnight.

Some administrative support was provided by other volunteers who undertook tasks like filing and collecting progress reports from mentors, but this support was available intermittently. A student on placement researched other mentoring programs and undertook some home visits to assess refugee women.

Evaluation

BSL's Research and Policy Centre was engaged by EMC to evaluate the WoM pilot. This evaluation aims to:

- assess the effectiveness of the WoM pilot in building cross-cultural community interaction, increasing the social connectedness of refugee women in Hume area, and establishing opportunities for positive contribution from local business, community groups and service providers
- document the methodology and possible aspects of the pilot for replication
- inform local government, service providers, community groups who may wish to replicate the pilot.

Method

The evaluation commenced with a review of literature on the needs of newly arrived refugees and policy and programs seeking to address those needs (see Introduction).

[3] The time fraction of the coordinator varied between September 2007 and December 2008 but was on average 0.7 EFT. Subsequent coordinators were employed at 0.6 EFT. For simplicity, the position is described as 0.6 EFT throughout this report.

An analysis of secondary data sources was undertaken. This included annual and quarterly WoM reports, administration documents, refugee participant and volunteer registration data and reports, meeting minutes and press cuttings. Primary data was also gathered with approval from the Brotherhood of St Laurence research ethics committee. This qualitative research consisted of structured telephone interviews with the 3 coordinators, 8 volunteers, 7 refugee participants and 5 professional staff from community sector refugee agencies and local government community development and volunteering programs. Interviews were 20–60 minutes in duration, digitally recorded and transcribed. Telephone interpreters were used for most of the refugee participants[4]. Both refugees and mentors were posted a $20 Coles Myer voucher to thank them for contributing.

Analysis and reporting

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo computer software. As a qualitative study involving a limited number of in-depth interviews, findings are reported descriptively rather than numerically. Sample quotes have been used throughout the report to demonstrate the key themes and findings of the interviews. Culturally appropriate pseudonyms have been assigned to the refugee participants and mentors, while community professionals are referred to by their role. Successive WoM coordinators are not named but numbered chronologically from 1–3.

A draft report was sent to the professionals consulted to ensure that interviewee representations were accurate and to obtain feedback. Feedback was also obtained from the WoM coordinators and relevant Brotherhood of St Laurence managers.

[4] Many participant responses came through interpreters. Interpreted third person accounts (‘she felt that …’) have been changed in this report to the first person form, (‘I felt that …’).

Refugee (left) with her mentor

3 The refugee participants and their needs

Profile

Based on data collected on 20 women, some 70 per cent of WoM participants were born in Iraq: some had come to Australia via Iran and a considerable proportion were Chaldean or Assyrian Christians, with three identifying as Shi'ite Muslims and one a Sunni. Others came from Iran, Kuwait, Jordan, Sudan and Turkey. Arabic and Assyrian were the most commonly spoken languages.

Most participants had arrived in Australia during the last three years on humanitarian visas, the most recent in March 2009. Seven held Special Humanitarian Program visas, sponsored by family, and a small number had lived in Australia for a long time; one 7, one 11 and one 15 years. That the last three women were referred to the pilot indicates their social isolation and ongoing settlement issues.

The women ranged in age from 29–57 and had a median age of 43. Life stage, family or household situations varied considerably. Many of the participants were single, separated or widowed and most had between two and four children. Several were pregnant at the time of registration or had babies; others had older children, while one or two had grown-up children. Two participants had no children.

While half had received some tuition in English, pregnancy and very young children reduced their capacity to attend classes. Minimal information was collected on the women's education, but three had attended university studying nursing, law and commerce. Health information was also scant[5] but several women reportedly suffered from psychological illness, with depression the most common.

WoM identified and responded to two main issues or needs of refugee participants:

- lack of social contact and the need for friendship
- settlement needs and community orientation.

[5] Participant referral forms were a minimal 2-page form, which provided limited information given the complexity of refugee needs. While more detailed forms were initially proposed, one of the referring agencies was reluctant to provide so much information to a social program.

A key observation from this evaluation is that refugee women are not a homogeneous group—the lives, needs and expectations of WoM participants varied greatly. In considering differences in participant needs, the important factors were first the extent to which settlement was complete, and the refugee could independently access services, and second the availability of other support networks including extended family, friends and religious or cultural communities. Thus adjustment and support were more critical than time in Australia, and these needs remained for some less recent refugees. The interviews of the participants, their mentors and community professionals illuminate the recurrent issues of social isolation and community orientation to which WoM sought to respond.

Lack of social contact and the need for friendship

WoM participants suffered from social isolation which varied in type, severity and extent. One component of this was a lack of social contact which was identified by community professionals as a significant issue. A few participants reported having extensive support networks of siblings and cousins, who offered practical support and acted as confidants. However, a settlement worker observed that extended family members were often busy with their own study, work, financial and family responsibilities and therefore unable to spend a lot of time with new arrivals. This meant prior relationships could not be resumed, leaving new arrivals feeling disappointed and lonely.

Other women said they did not feel able to confide in the (male) family members who lived nearby. For those who had come to Australia with their husbands and children but had no extended family here, ill health, depression and marital difficulties sometimes exacerbated the isolation they felt. Others had arrived alone or with their children because their husbands had been killed.

For most of the refugees, wider social contact was limited. Some said they were unable to attend English classes because they had babies or very young children. While a few women attended their church or mosque, this was for religious purposes: only one woman said she participated in church social activities.

Many women felt they had no-one to confide in. A basic but important need met by WoM was having someone to talk to. For some, this was a casual discussion about daily events and children, for others it was a more personal interaction that involved sharing their story of becoming refugees, their concerns about family still living overseas, settlement-related worries and aspirations in life.

> *[WoM] is just supporting and you can share with people who understand.* (Taifa, refugee)
>
> *When I moved the area I didn't know anyone I didn't have any support, I didn't have anyone to communicate with so when I became familiar with what the project is doing, the intention and the goals I thought this is very suitable for me. It will improve my language, ladies will socialise and communicate with each other.*
>
> *[On having someone to confide in] it is very hard to find such a person. I live with my husband, things are alright, I have a cousin here, I can be friendly with them and talk but such a person to be open fully to, I think very hard to find such a person.* (Atalya, refugee)
>
> *I talk to [my mentor] and I can open my heart to her.* (Ishtar, refugee)
>
> *We've had a few big issues that we've talked about. The more I got to know her, the more she would open up to me about what happened in Iraq and what happened to her family and sometimes if she was upset she would call me. I felt really privileged to be part of that and happy to be there and offer the support that I could.* (Amy, mentor)

Settlement needs and community orientation

Settlement support and orientation to the local community were identified as needs by all interviewees. Participants arriving on refugee visas received six months orientation and help accessing services when they arrived. Based on the ongoing needs of WoM participants, the level and duration of this support was inadequate. WoM coordinators and community professionals indicated that sponsored humanitarian arrivals received significantly less support as they were considered a private responsibility; so these people were dependent on the time and skills of family members who might themselves still have settlement issues.

The key settlement needs and orientation issues of participants related to wellbeing, access to health and community services; financial inclusion and access to housing; mobility, public access and social inclusion, childcare, and English tuition which was perceived as a pathway to employment and participation in life in Australia.

Wellbeing, access to health and community services

The wellbeing of refugees and their families was a major issue. Many women reported experiencing depression. Several were referred by refugee support and health agencies which deal extensively with post traumatic stress disorder and provide counselling for victims of torture and trauma. Since many participants were adding to their families, post-natal depression was also an issue. A refugee counsellor said that WoM provided a point of referral for clients with social and orientation needs. External support for these practical needs meant that professional staff could focus, for example, on providing counselling.

Relationship problems were likely to be linked to refugee trauma, settlement and orientation stress, pregnancy and having young families. Adjusting to a different culture was a further factor. One refugee said that her husband did not like her leaving the house and was very controlling but that she embraced the way of life in Australia and the greater freedom afforded to women. One mentor reported that domestic violence had been an issue for the woman she visited.

Local and prompt access to health services was an issue, particularly in the outermost northern suburbs such as Craigieburn. Community professionals highlighted the poor access to care, reporting there was only one refugee health nurse to ensure that new arrivals receive a full health assessment, and check for risk factors such as exposure to disease in their home country. There was a five-year waiting time for community dental services and no prioritisation of refugees (contrary to the Primary Health demand management framework, February 2008). For those who could travel to another community dentist some distance away, the waiting period was still six months. A nine-month wait for speech therapy meant children with communication difficulties must wait almost a full school year before treatment. One more positive observation by Coordinator 3 was that primary schools provided children with access to optometry and dental services.

For cultural reasons, participants travelled considerable distances to see female health professionals, because there were few working locally.

Beyond the women's own health needs, many reported that their children or partners suffered health issues, which also increased their role as carers at home. Making appointments and travelling some distance to them was daunting and time-consuming. In Wave 1, mentors supported these needs by providing transport and moral support at medical appointments, but due to the associated risks and the demands on their time, this practice was ceased in Wave 2. Nonetheless,

home visits often included the participants talking about their health and wellbeing, and that of family members.

> *I had an operation on my hand and it was really difficult for me because I don't have anyone. I have children but they study and another child doesn't know the language. I'm waiting to do another operation once I have recovered from this one … [But] the main issue is I need some psychological support because [of] my mental health, I have depression. I also need someone to come and visit me because when I talk to someone about my problems I feel relieved.* (Leah, refugee)
>
> *Everyone [from WoM] needed to help me at that time. Before I had a baby I [had] depression but it [got] worse and worse. Before I have a lot of friends but I lost all my friends, I don't have anyone here now. I don't know what happened to me. I take the kids to school and I come back and I sit at home, I don't have any relationship with anyone. Before I am friendly with anyone, have laugh, talk, share with anyone, go outside. But more than one year, 24 hours [a day I] sit at home, and I don't have anyone to talk with me. That's why I need help and I get help. I'm OK now, I'm strong. I feel better.*
>
> *[However] if I want to go out, it is hard for me. My husband is very controlling, there is no trust between me and him. It is hard for me to go outside. I make a plan to be quiet, to look after myself and my children until they are growing.* (Taifa, refugee)
>
> *I can't go over there quite as often as I'd like to. The main reason is she's got her ex-partner living at her house with her and he's got some health problems. I don't think he likes it when I'm there and I don't think he appreciates when I ring either. The situation is [the participant] is feeling she needs to help him because her children constantly say: 'Where's Dad, we want Dad'. That's one of the reasons why she's got him there but I do have some concerns about all that.* (Amy, mentor)
>
> *Maybe the program can address the issues we are facing here as a community. We are far from all the facilities, from the big hospitals, from especially women's services. Like when I gave birth to my child I thought I was going to deliver in the road on my way to the hospital because it is too far.* (Atalya, refugee)

Financial services and access to housing

Financial difficulties impacted many of the participants. Some had been professionals in their country of origin and accustomed to a higher standard of living. While learning English and getting employment was a priority for many, in the interim their income was from government payments. Much of this was absorbed by rent; and lack of affordable housing was identified as a major issue by a local settlement worker and the WoM coordinators. One observed that extended family sometimes tried to arrange housing before they arrived, but refugees found these rents too high to sustain. One participant had been paying $1500 per month in rent, leaving only $350 to buy food, and pay other bills.

Refugees were also vulnerable to being exploited by real estate agents and landlords. One couple were not asked to complete a condition report when they moved into their rental property and, unfamiliar with the Australian tenancy system, they did not know to ask. When they were leaving, the agent sought to retain their bond, claiming they had damaged the property. The same couple had earlier reported a dripping tap which went unrepaired for three months. When they received a large water bill, their poor language skills and the need for an interpreter made it difficult to argue their case to the water company. The WoM coordinator provided support during this period and the couple were assisted through legal aid.

Many of the women lacked the money for bus and train fares to attend appointments. Tickets were supplied at least once through WoM so that participants (accompanied by their mentors) could access community facilities.

Language presented a barrier to dealing with financial institutions, while low income and lack of a credit rating made it difficult to secure mainstream loans. The coordinator provided referral information about BSL's financial inclusion programs at Craigieburn as well as Spectrum at Broadmeadows where loans officers spoke Arabic and Chaldean, so no interpreter was required.

Mobility, public access and social inclusion

WoM participants often reported social isolation, some commenting that they rarely left the house. In part this related to inadequate orientation which reduced mobility, access to public spaces and services and social inclusion.

Transport

A story told by one of the refugees illustrated the need for orientation assistance. Just 10 days after Maysa arrived in Australia, she got on the wrong bus and became horribly lost. Lacking the English to ask for help, she ended up sitting in the street crying. Finally she rang her brother, but not knowing where she was, Maysa had to describe her surroundings so that he could work out where to pick her up. While she can laugh now about it, she says she will never forget that day.

While government settlement services include some orientation, participants in WoM still felt the need for someone to show them how to how use public transport and travel with them a few times. This introduced them and their children to new places and experiences. Coordinator 3 supplied mentors with timetables and where appropriate, transport guides in Arabic, but they still had to learn some English, and other skills had to be learnt to read timetables and maps and operate ticket machines. Beyond these practical skills, having support helped participants' confidence, building independence and opening up a new world.

However, community professionals and WoM coordinators noted that public transport in Craigieburn was poor. Bus stops were widely spaced and many lacked shelters, and routes did not always provide easy access to services like hospitals. These transport issues were compounded by the considerable distance between the refugees' homes and the Craigieburn shops, services in Broadmeadows and the CBD. Several participants said they wanted to obtain their driver's licence and purchase a car so they could travel further afield.

> *They taught me how to be mobile, use the train tram buses, how to buy the ticket, where to go. I know my way all around Melbourne now.* (Ishtar, refugee)
>
> *[WoM] is definitely helping. With both [clients I referred] … they felt quite overwhelmed with the appointments they have to go to. Having someone come in and take them to one or two appointments just takes the pressure off trying to find out where that is [and] how to get there, the psychological relief of having someone else assist.* (Refugee counsellor)
>
> *The car is really essential in this country. There are a lot of places I would love to go but can't because I don't know how or where to get there. I have to wait for public transport or the bus which is not that practical and there are quite a lot of words I can't understand. When people speak to me, I can't answer. I have to think of the words, whether I can understand them or not. That is not that easy, that's why I am planning to study to better the English and then buy a car.* (Maysa, refugee)

Information and public access

Beyond transport, participants needed orientation support to help them access shops, community services and public facilities. This is important for their inclusion in the broader community.

Language represented a considerable barrier to communication. Many women lacked their own bi-lingual dictionary, having access only in English classes, and thus could not take a dictionary when shopping or visiting services. For this reason during Wave 2, Arabic–English dictionaries were supplied to those who needed them.

Some refugees said they did not go to the shops alone, partly due to lack of confidence and not feeling safe. This made them reliant on their husbands and other relatives. WoM mentors took them shopping and supported them in dealing with Centrelink. Unfamiliar with the Internet and having never visited their local library, the women wanted to learn how to look for jobs online and were excited by the prospect of borrowing books in their own language. Mentors helped them join the library so they could borrow books on their own later.

The women's limited access to public places such as libraries also impacted on their children. One mentor took one of the refugee women to the local swimming pool and with support from the coordinator, arranged swimming lessons and bathers for her children. In their country of origin the family had lived far from the sea and their children had never swum before. In Australia learning to swim became important for children's social participation and safety.

Another participant was worried about her elderly mother who remained in Iraq alone. She and her husband were also struggling to send ongoing financial assistance. With support from EMC staff, the mentor provided information about sponsored immigration, visited the Refugee Immigration Legal Centre and helped to complete the forms. This assistance provided a great sense of hope and comfort.

> *[My mentor] took us to a shopping centre and then to the swimming pool. I do not go by myself, I don't know how to get there.* (Zafina, refugee)
>
> *I didn't know how to use the Internet because of the war situation. [My mentor] took me and showed me how to use the library which is near Centrelink. [Now] I know how to look on the Internet and find job … [My mentors] taught me how to solve problems with Centrelink and how many hours I am entitled to work while I am a carer for my husband … If I have any problem in my life she tell me how to do the right [thing].* (Ishtar, refugee)
>
> *I helped her get a computer and with some issues regarding her phone bills. She'd like to move soon but doesn't have access to the Internet so it is hard to try and find out what's on the market—what's available—and have transport to get to inspections.* (Amy, mentor)
>
> *It was very useful because [my mentor] took me in her car before I moved to the area … she took me to the new area to get familiar with what's happening there, she showed me the language school, she showed me the buses, she showed me the transport, she showed me the facilities there. That was really good.*
>
> *For the last 7 years I've been trying to bring my mother over and I couldn't and I didn't know how. There are so many forms to be filled, the process is long. [My mentor and I] spoke about that … We saw the solicitor or migration agent … There is a lot of Internet searching, we are busy with this topic.* (Atalya, refugee)

Social inclusion

The participants were not well connected with local social and support groups. One participant said she would like to attend a multicultural women's group where people could practise their English together. One coordinator affirmed the social support role of playgroups, such as those run by Orana Family Services, but none of the WoM participants were involved and transport might have been an obstacle.

In addition, few participants had been able to visit attractions around Melbourne. For this reason, social activities were offered free to participants and mentors every 4–6 weeks. These included:

- a cooking activity at Dallas Neighbourhood House
- china painting at Dallas Neighbourhood House
- a picnic at Kinglake National Park
- a trip to Daylesford Lake, gallery, Hepburn Mineral Springs and a lavender farm
- a trip to Melbourne Zoo
- a visit to Eureka Skydeck for a bird's eye view of Melbourne landmarks, shopping at craft markets and lunch at a café
- a drive through the Dandenong Ranges National Park, to William Ricketts Sanctuary and a meal at a café
- a World Refugee Day event, at Broadmeadows Town Hall
- an outing to Collingwood Children's Farm, lunch at Abbotsford Convent and a visit to a shop selling Christmas trees and decorations.

For those able to attend, these activities lifted their spirits. The activities were also enjoyed by mentors. One said she had lived in Australia for over a decade but had never had the opportunity to visit such places either.

> *For me I need to go and do something, but for now I don't have time to go to the TAFE and do a course because my kid is too little. If I want to put them in the child care it is very expensive ... Before I did not know about the women's groups. If I sit inside for 24 hour I don't know about outside what is going on. If you go to woman's group you learn many things. I can't sit at home, it makes me more depressed to sit at home always.* (Taifa, refugee)
>
> *They used to take us out on picnics, to a lot of nice places like the museum, churches. They used to tell us about it, what's been happening in the past. Telling us beautiful things about the beautiful places they have been to. It was a really, really nice experience. They showed us the nature in Australia, they showed us everything, how [the way of] life is.* (Maysa, refugee)
>
> *[Reflecting on a trip to Mt Dandenong and to a café] I think this is really important and it has changed my mood.* (Leah, refugee)
>
> *I was going to ask them if it is possible [for others] to join or come [on social activities]. Last Christmas a good friend of mine was here alone with four children, her husband was overseas. When [the coordinator] said you can invite a friend, I asked my friend to come with her children. When we went there we found out they had Christmas presents for the children. Do you know it has been a year now and whenever they see me they say: 'Thanks Auntie for the trip and the presents'. Even my friend keeps thanking me for giving her the opportunity to join, they loved it and were so excited.* (Atalya, refugee)

Child care

Access to child care and preschool education was problematic. This issue was identified more by mentors and coordinators than the refugees themselves, some of whom were resistant to being separated from their children. These attachment issues were a consequence of past trauma and differing cultural norms concerning the role of mothers. Several mentors said they located occasional childcare for their match but mothers did not want to take up the places. One mentor who also worked helping new arrivals and their children settle into school observed that children who have not spent time in care away from their parents experience greater difficulty transitioning into kindergarten and school.

Lack of opportunity to play and socialise was identified as a further issue. One mentor observed that the home of the refugee woman she visited was devoid of toys and she worried that the children were not able to engage in play. WoM social activities including children addressed this need to some extent. Trips to the Melbourne Zoo and Collingwood Children's Farm enabled children to socialise, compare notes on what animals were called in different languages and run around freely and safely.

Coordinators excluded children from other social activities to enable 'the women to have adult time together'. This could be an excellent opportunity to leave the house and leave the responsibilities of mothering for a day. However, attachment issues made this problematic for some women. Others lacked family babysitters and two of the coordinators found occasional child care to be in short supply in Craigieburn, particularly on weekends and in the evenings. As a result, some participants missed out on social activities.

Reflecting on the program, Coordinator 1 believed that there would be scope to take children on activities supervised by a bilingual childcare worker (e.g. Arabic or Assyrian speaker from Iraq). This would introduce mothers and their children to a playgroup-type situation. Subsequent activities could then involve leaving children at a centre with the worker to aid the transition into child care and early childhood education. She also believed WoM could include a component helping refugee women become engaged in their local school community.

> *For me sometimes you will miss out because you don't have anyone to mind your children, especially if they are under 10. The last time for example when I went, I asked my husband to babysit the children to allow me to go to the trip … If they allow us to bring our children probably women will go more often because sometimes if you don't have anyone to mind them you, [you] have to look after the children so you miss out.* (Leah, refugee)
>
> *Because of my children are very attached to me, I could not participate in any of these excursions. Even [though the coordinator] tried to find childcare, they are very attached. I couldn't.* (Yafa, refugee)

I took her to a couple of the [childcare] centres in her area but I don't think she was very interested. [Now] her daughter [is starting kindergarten and] is going to have some troubles separating from mum because she hasn't had any formal experience without mum, no experience at a daycare or childcare centre. [When I invited her] she said at first she would like to come to playgroup but then she said she didn't want to do that either. When the children were younger she didn't have a car. I did say I could come and pick her up and drop her off but she never took up the offer. You know what it's like, you can't push too much. (Rashida, mentor)

Some of the women wouldn't come on outings because they didn't want to leave the children anywhere … [However, at Collingwood Children's Farm] people were saying the Assyrian word for the animals and the children were coming and asking: 'What's that?' They really looked happy. When I first met them they were quite traumatised and scared, and had just come to Australia. They are much happier now. (Coordinator 3)

English as a pathway to employment and participation in life in Australia

The English language was perceived as the biggest barrier to participation in life in Australia, so learning English was a priority. The women expressed frustration at the difficulty they faced in communicating in banks, Centrelink and at their children's schools. They saw English as the key to using computers, obtaining their driver's licence, employment and independence.

English classes were time consuming part of some refugees' lives, some studying 3–4 hours a day, four days a week. Some would have liked to have local English classes with a good student-to-teacher ratio and classes to fit school times. One community development worker reported that this was now being addressed through an agreement to deliver classes in community sports facilities.

Coordinator 1 noted that some women spoke only their first language at home and in their community and studying with others from the same language group reduced their use of English. Participants appreciated the chance to practice their English through the WoM. It became clear that there was a demand for home English tutoring, and by the end of WoM, six mentors had retrained as home English tutors and would remain with their matches. A further three were on a waiting list to complete the training in 2010. In the later stages of the pilot, mentors helped the refugees to use dictionaries, timetables and maps.

Once participants learned more English, finding work was a priority. Several had attended university and or held professional jobs in their home countries, and were keen to find work aligned with their past work experience and interests. Many participants were multi-lingual, and one was interested in becoming an interpreter. Coordinator 1 observed that some women had sewing or catering skills which could generate a small income but were uncertain how much they could earn before this impacted their income support.

Participants were keen to learn about life in Australia from their mentors. Asked what they liked about Australia, refugee women tended to say 'everything'. More specifically they loved the laws, peace, freedom and tolerance. However, social isolation limited their opportunities to learn about Australia. Aside from appointments with refugee and health professionals, many did not have the chance to talk to people from outside their ethnic community. WoM provided contact with the new culture via the mentors who shared photos of their families, talked about what they did on weekends and answered questions. Many refugees were curious about where Australians went at night, what

they cooked for dinner and did at Christmas time and on weekends. As time progressed, Coordinator 3 observed that the refugees began to see themselves as part of that culture.

If I have a problem at the bank I cannot correct the situation because first of all I cannot go there, I don't know how to go there and the main issue here is the language. I don't know how to ask or express myself so that's why I find these times very tough for me. (Leah, refugee)

The language school I have to drive to Broadmeadows. When you go to Broadmeadows it is too crowded and takes a long time. You have to pick the children up from school. My [language] school finishes at 4.30 … so I never finish my class. I have to leave earlier to be able to pick the children up from school because there is no [local] English classes and I can assure you that we have a big Iraqi community in this area who need the services. [Now] I have a 6-month-old baby and now it is hard for me to go back to study. I know it's not a miracle, you can study the language but it takes time. The other issues are manageable and OK. The only barrier and the biggest barrier is the language. (Atalya, refugee)

[WoM] gives her an opportunity to practise her English. When I go there, we greet one another. Then she tells me about her week and what she's done, which means she has to think about what she is saying so I can understand. Then I tell her about what I've done during the week, so we have a conversation. Then if I've got any information to give her we spend time going through that. The last time I had some bus timetables, so we went through those, made sure she understood where the buses went. (Amy, mentor)

I am on my own and don't have any children. My husband passed away. It was difficult to be on my own, thinking of my past experiences in life and getting worried, getting stressed. I wanted to do something in life. Now I am going to English classes, studying for about three hours a day or a bit more to keep busy … I am really happy in Australia. The only thing that is bothering me is the lack of English. I am trying to learn as much as possible. [I would] like a computer but I need more English [and] a car to be able to move on my own and drive wherever I want. For the time being I need better English language and a licence. That will come sooner or later. (Maysa, refugee)

I wish in the future that I'll be confident enough to leave my home to go out and to learn from the community. (Leah, refugee)

Refugee and mentor getting to know the goats at the Collingwood Children's Farm

4 The model: basic elements

The previous section described aspects of WoM as they met the needs of refugee women. This section documents the operational model, which is most easily understood under the rubrics of community engagement, mentors and matching.

Community engagement

Intensive community engagement was required to establish WoM in Hume. This involved participation in local professional networks and council initiatives, the establishment of volunteer recruitment mechanisms and refugee referral pathways and the development of a media strategy.

Business

In Set-up Stage, efforts were made to involve local business through sponsorship or assistance in the recruitment of volunteers. Posters were placed in the local leisure centre, supermarket, newsagency and bakery. A local café inserted a special offer in WoM advertising materials. The most significant engagement of business was by diversified property group, Stockland, which was responsible for the Highlands development in Craigieburn. Stockland's 2008 Community Spirit Program provided funding for the social activities component of WoM. Business sponsorship was limited by WoM being a small pilot in its formative stages so this ceased to be a focus in Wave 2. However, community professionals interviewed saw scope for future sponsorship and donation by both local CALD businesses and larger entities keen to demonstrate social responsibility. They saw this also as an opportunity to engage another part of the community which wouldn't otherwise be involved in volunteering or refugee initiatives.

Community sector and local government

While EMC and BSL are well-recognised in the community sector, establishing WoM in Hume required considerable engagement in local professional networks, including the Hume Workers Network on Multicultural Issues coordinated by the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region, the Hume Refugee Health and Wellbeing Network coordinated by Dianella Community Health, the

Northern Schools Refugee Action Network coordinated by Foundation House and the Hume-Moreland Volunteer Network. At meetings, WoM coordinators presented information about the pilot, shared professional knowledge and contributed to planning of events in the sector, such as Refugee Week celebrations. In addition, they met with various local health and community agencies, cultural and religious groups to promote the pilot.

Engagement with council occurred through providing feedback on the needs of refugees at a Craigieburn Community Renewal meeting, participation in the launch of the Hume Volunteer Gateway and contributing two case studies: one in relation to the Hume Gateway, the other a Link Community Transport case study on the public transport needs in Craigieburn.

Volunteer recruitment and refugee participant referral

Community networking provided access to agencies able to assist with the recruitment of volunteer mentors and the referral of participants. However, establishing recruitment and referral mechanisms was problematic. Most referrals were from refugee and health service agencies such as Dianella Community Health Centre, Foundation House and AMES Settlement (Adult Migrant English Service). However, coordinators reported that referral was sporadic and numbers low. In one coordinator's view, it would have been better to promote the WoM through one or two key agencies and create stronger mechanisms for more regular referral.

In Set-up and Wave 1 stages, the coordinator conducted extensive outreach in the agencies and clubs of different ethnic communities for the purpose of recruiting mentors and participants along ethnolinguistic lines. However, success was limited, possibly because volunteering was not a cultural tradition or people's ongoing settlement meant that volunteering was not feasible. Coordinator 1 believed that greater promotion of the benefits of volunteering and engagement of these groups in social activities would increase the number of volunteers and contribute to WoM's sustainability.

In Wave 2, recruitment through the Hume Gateway, an initiative to link community members with volunteering opportunities, produced excellent results when 11 people expressed interest in volunteering in WoM. This was the single greatest source of volunteers in 2009, but occurred just prior to the final WoM volunteer training session. Thus a number of the new volunteers had to be referred to other programs. Still, five volunteers were able to undertake WoM training.

In reflecting on the amount of community engagement and establishment effort required, one coordinator observed that this work consumed much of the time of a short-term pilot. This must be considered in planning future programs.

Media strategy

A media strategy was developed by the initial coordinator as part of the broader communication and dissemination plan in 2007. WoM was widely advertised in local businesses, clubs and through community agencies. Press releases in 2008 called for volunteers and promoted Refugee Week. The program received steady media coverage in local newspapers such as the *Hume Leader* and *Hume City Star*, in council community guides and magazines, and BSL publications (see Appendix).

Mentors

Volunteer mentors played a critical role and were the mainstay of the pilot. This section examines the characteristics of the mentors, why they volunteered, the training and support they received and their reflections on WoM.

Profile

Two-thirds of the mentors[6] lived in Craigieburn or nearby, the remainder residing in other suburbs to the north of Melbourne. Most had their own transport. Two-thirds spoke a language other than English, but only one-third spoke one of the participant languages (Arabic, Assyrian or Turkish).

The education levels of mentors varied: one-third had a Year 12 education or less, one-third held a certificate or diploma and the remaining third had attended university. Just under half of the mentors were currently studying or had experience in an occupation oriented toward helping others, for example as teachers, nurses, social workers or in roles supporting the disabled. Other mentors worked in retail and in office and administrative roles. Only a minority of mentors were engaged in full-time employment, while one-third worked part-time and the remainder were retired, students or unemployed. Several received Centrelink income support such as Newstart or Youth Allowance.

Reasons for volunteering

For Anglo-Australian mentors, their knowledge of other cultures and experience of overseas travel encouraged them to volunteer. They believed this information and experience had made them more sensitive to cultural difference and settlement needs.

Lifestage was important: several mentors said that their children were older, had gone to school or left home. This change in routine and the perception of having more time was conducive to volunteering. Other volunteers were retirees, WoM providing the opportunity to continue using their work skills in a voluntary capacity.

For at least three mentors interviewed, volunteering had been a regular part of their adult life and they had volunteered in several different countries. Many overseas-born mentors said they became involved because they remembered the challenges of settling into a new country and wanted to now help others, particularly refugees. Other mentors talked about wanting to ‘give back’ or try new things, one describing how the Hume Gateway had helped her identify WoM as a suitable volunteer opportunity.

Some had a strong personal interest in community work and saw voluntary mentoring roles as well-aligned with their formal studies, current work or employment aspirations.

Finally, as Coordinator 1 and a community worker observed, some of the mentors had experienced isolation themselves. These mentors tended to be older women or less recent migrants who lacked social contacts. For some living in Craigieburn, geographical isolation and limited public transport were contributing factors. Volunteering enabled them to meet people from other cultures and build relationships.

[6] The characteristics of mentors have been derived from Wave 1 and 2 recruitment forms (N = 24).

It just happened at the right time for me. With the children settled in school I had time on my hands. (Barb, mentor)

Being a mentor, friend to somebody of a different culture and learning about their culture as they are learning about our culture. I enjoy that. After working in a very stressful, busy job you miss the communication part of it … I retired three years ago … We've been very fortunate so I wanted to give back something back to the community. I'd been looking at different volunteering things … the council had a session and I did a one-to-one interview with them where they went through different volunteer positions to find out what I was interested in. (Sue, mentor)

Because I like to help others. I am a retired teacher from Sri Lanka, I like to be with small children and aged people. I like to help other nationality people. (Amirtha, refugee)

[My participant] said: 'When the kids are a bit grown I'm going to go out there and help other women as well. Just like you' … She knew that she was being helped and she wants to give back the help she received when she has the opportunity in the future. (Liz, mentor)

I've just completed a course in international development. [WoM has given me] insights into different cultural issues and political issues—all the sorts of things that surround why people become refugees and the support networks they need afterwards … You know just getting my feet wet in terms of that, it's been hugely beneficial, especially because of the field of work I'm wanting to move into. (Amy, mentor)

Recruitment and training

Volunteer mentors registered their interest and completed an interview with the coordinator. The initial training curriculum consisted of five sessions or 20 hours compulsory accredited training, followed by eight optional modules. However mentors' work and family responsibilities meant that in practice the training had to be limited to 6–8 hours. This was delivered one or two intensive sessions timed to suit the majority of recruits.

In Wave 1, mentor training was held twice, with training modules taught by NMIT, Foundation House and the WoM coordinator. Some modules were combined with volunteer training for the GtC mentoring program. These sessions covered home visits and volunteer responsibilities, communication skills, settlement and refugee needs, as well as providing some information on Turkish and Iraqi culture. According to the coordinator, the reliability of trainers and the quality of content varied. Mentors suggested the training was too theoretical whereas more practical training including mentoring scenarios, home visits and information about telephone interpreters would have been beneficial.

For Wave 2 in 2009, new training modules and a volunteer booklet were developed[7]. The new six-hour training program covered mentor induction and orientation, refugee experience, cross-cultural communication and working with interpreters. Training was provided in-house by the coordinator in small groups. While this flexibility enabled more recruits to complete their training, it absorbed a considerable amount of the coordinator's time. Feedback from mentors trained in this period was largely positive. They remarked that the training was sufficient for their needs, covered the refugee experience and provided information about cultural differences and customs. A couple of mentors said their study or work provided them with foundation knowledge, but felt the training might not have been in-depth enough for 'other' recruits lacking such knowledge and experience. Other

[7] A WoM training and volunteer resource package is being developed by the Ecumenical Migration Centre.

feedback indicated more training on Iraqi culture and referral to relevant BSL services such as child care would have been helpful.

Support

Mentor support varied during WoM. In Wave 1, the coordinator contacted mentors by telephone to provide debriefing, support and broker assistance for the refugee women, for example transport to appointments or taking children to school. Feedback from some mentors indicated a good rapport with the coordinator and the personal support was appreciated, even if they were unable or unwilling to provide the intensive support that the coordinator sought on behalf of the refugees. However mentors who had less regular contact with the coordinator left the pilot. Mentors were also encouraged to maintain a communications journal to document home visits and emergent needs. The extent to which journals were used varied and infrequent collection made them ineffective tools for communicating immediate needs.

In Wave 2, a more formal approach was adopted. Mentors were required to complete a one-page fortnightly report summarising participant interaction. These reports were collected by a volunteer who provided a summary to the coordinator, marking issues for follow-up. However mentors' non-completion or failure to return reports promptly made the reporting process labour-intensive. With the resignation of the volunteer, Coordinator 3 collected mentors' reports herself by phone, providing debriefing. She observed that a high level of support was required when volunteers were visiting the homes of refugees facing complex barriers. While this proved the most efficient way to record and respond to mentor needs, it added considerably to the coordinator's workload.

Social activities provided further support for mentors, as they could attend with their refugee 'match' and interact with the coordinator. Apart from these, meetings with volunteers were irregular. During 2009, the coordinator noted the need for a monthly volunteer meeting and some mentors believed these would have been valuable. However, scheduling meetings to suit the mentors was problematic. Phone and email were the main forms of contact with volunteers but workload meant issues were not always addressed in a timely manner.

The referral of WoM participants to other agencies was an area in which mentors required additional support. In Wave 1 a local service directory was developed, so mentors could refer refugee women to the agencies listed. Coordinators encouraged mentors to take on this role. However, mentors needed clearer referral procedures and training to build their confidence to contact services.

Mentors' exit and referral

A number of mentors dropped out of the pilot, partly due to turnover of coordinators. In Wave 1, thank-you letters and certificates were given to mentors on International Volunteer Day, but the plan to conduct exit interviews proved unrealistic. Four evaluation interviews were undertaken at the coordinator's request by the researcher in April 2009, confirmed the need for exit procedures. For example, one mentor expressed interest in staying in contact with her participant as a friend, but was not sure whether this 'was allowed' based on earlier WoM documentation. She said she would have liked support in moving from an intensive helping relationship to a 'normal friendship'. She added that her match had previously suffered physical abuse and that emotional abuse was continuing. She had been unable to pass this information on to the coordinator who went on leave and later resigned. In Wave 2, exit procedures commenced in September 2009. The coordinator held a meeting for mentor debriefing and to discuss the volunteering opportunities

available in 2010. Mentors also discussed the closure of WoM with participants during home visits. Despite these efforts, at the November evaluation interviews, a number of mentors and participants expressed confusion about what was happening after 2009.

In response to demand for continued interaction, the coordinator organised the referral of both mentors and refugees into the Northern AMEP Home Tutor Program. This was labour-intensive: the coordinator had to determine whether the refugee women were eligible (i.e. how many hours of their free AMEP English tuition they had remaining), and organise Foundation House training for the mentors on the refugee experience and needs as well as home English tutor training at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre (both prerequisites for AMEP). All 12 volunteers completed the Foundation House Training. Six completed the home tutor training in November, exchanging contact details so they could support each other in 2010. A further three mentors are on the waiting list to complete this training in 2010.

In December 2009, a thank-you dinner was held, with letters of appreciation and certificates presented to the mentors.

Mentors' reflections

Mentors were asked what they had learned or felt they gained from WoM. They reflected that WoM had increased their understanding of refugee issues and needs, their empathy and compassion. Several expressed their great admiration for the refugees. Many mentors wanted to stay in contact either as friends or through the AMEP Home Tutor Program

One or two commented on the high level of communication skills required in the role and being careful, for example, about using idioms. Several described their introduction to new cultures and customs, for example, the appropriate physical contact in greetings, eye contact, shoe removal, being offered food or drinks and customs when someone dies.

> *It makes you really open your eyes to what does happen. Most people wouldn't see—we saw some films of refugee camps and things like that, and it's just something that you don't see. It just really opened my eyes … we should have more compassion everyday. We really should. I know we don't. Everyone should get a chance to see some of these training videos, honestly. It makes you realise that you are very lucky to be able to stay in the country you are born in. Yeah, a bit of empathy, bit of compassion for these people that come to a new country and [have to] start their lives all over again … I learnt how strong these ladies are, who come out to this country. The strength of character they have is amazing.* (Barb, mentor)
>
> *I've studied it but it's different from having it on paper to the actual experience … It's provided me with more insight—there's no stock-standard refugee. You start to realise each situation is different and has its own unique needs and requirements and need for support. It's given me insight into those finer details. [The relationship with the participant] will continue even after the pilot has ceased. We've got on really well and she is someone I really respect … The greatest benefit is the friendship that's come out of it.* (Amy, mentor)
>
> *I've grown as a person. Just hearing from other people what they went through and how they overcame all those situations in their lives … Coming to a new country and a new culture is really a challenge. You can either grow or it can stifle your personality as an individual. [My participant] said she is not happy to stay the way she is, she wants to do something more in her life. It inspired me and challenged me to hear that, despite the difficulty she was going through, she was able to think of the future.* (Liz, mentor)

Staffing

WoM involved considerable establishment work, community engagement, refugee referral and support; mentor recruitment, training and support; and the organisation of social activities[8]. Effective coordination of these tasks requires large amounts of time and diverse skill sets. However, WoM had one part-time coordinator supported by volunteers. The coordination role was unrealistic and coordinators worked far beyond the hours they were paid. This was a factor in the resignations of coordinators 1 and 2.

While staff retention issues seem endemic in community agencies, staff changes affecting WoM were unusually high. During the pilot's 28 months of operation, the EMC Manager changed once, project supervision changed three times and the WoM coordinator changed three times.

Commendable efforts were made to minimise disruption for mentors and refugees. However, changes of staff inevitably produced the following continuity issues:

- The differing skills professional styles of the first two coordinators resulted in rather different models.
- Contact with Hume professional networks, community agencies and government varied in extent and emphasis. Community workers interviewed tended to associate the pilot with one specific coordinator at a point in time.

Volunteers and participants established working relationships with coordinators, and then had to start again with someone new. In reflecting on WoM's design and staffing, coordinators highlighted the need to allow sufficient time and resources for the lengthy Set-up Stage, and observed that coordinating volunteers was an entire job in itself. As part of her university studies, Coordinator 3 researched the model, structure and staffing of other mentoring programs. Her report recommended that mentoring programs have a full-time coordinator to better support both mentors and mentees, ensuring that the assessment of refugee needs and mentor recruitment processes are thorough, and that mentors receive regular supervision and ongoing training (Haeusler 2010 unpub.). Coordinator 2 observed that other larger programs had several teams of staff, with distinct roles such as recruiting and training volunteers, referring participants, and monitoring matches.

Successive coordinators emphasised that it took time to reach a point where the program was operating well. At the time of its closure, Coordinator 3 observed that WoM 'was just starting to take flight.'

Pilot statistics

Figures are available on the participation of refugees and mentors, their retention in the program and overall costs.

Participation

Mentor and refugee participant statistics are recorded in Table 4.1. In the first calendar year, expressions of interest were obtained by a 38 people, of whom 17 were trained as mentors. Fourteen were later matched with 13 refugee participants. The other recruits dropped out before another training course could be run.

[8] Organising social activities was time-consuming for coordinators. Activities had to suit a range of ages, fitness and pregnancy, and were restricted by budget. Invitations had to be translated, and arrangements made for halal food, bilingual dictionaries and interpreters, time and space for prayer, and nappy changing.

In 2009, 26 expressions of interest were received from potential volunteers, but 10 arrived after the deadline and so were referred to other programs. Nine new mentors were trained and five mentors from the previous year continued in the program. By the end of 2009, 14 volunteers had been matched with a total 13 refugee participants.

Table 4.1 Women on the Move: pilot outcomes

	Pilot stage			
Measure	**Set-up Stage**	**Wave 1**	**Wave 2**	**Total**
	September 2007–March 2008	**April–December2008**	**January–December2009**	
Expressions of interest by potential mentors	n.a	38	26	64
Mentors trained	n.a	17	9	26
Mentors matched/rematched	n.a	14	14	28
Refugees matched	n.a	13	13	26
Cost	$28,364	$52,063	$58,703	$139,130

Source: Mentor and participant figures from 2008 End of Year Report, August and November 2009 progress reports, and interview with Coordinator 3. Costs from BSL Accounts Department.

Retention

Retention of both mentors and refugees was an issue. Of the 28 mentors matched and 26 refugees engaged over the 28-month pilot, 12 mentors and 10 refugees were still involved in November 2009. Some of the difficulties of match retention are discussed in the next section.

Both mentors and refugees expressed regret at WoM's closure, keen to maintain contact in some capacity. Six mentors completed tutor training and would continue with their matches in the Northern AMEP Home Tutor Program and a further 3 were waiting to complete their training in 2010.

Cost

WoM was funded by the Scanlon Foundation and a smaller grant from Stockland. Of the total project cost of $139,130, the Scanlon Foundation funded $136,266 and Stockland funded $2,864.

Coordinator (left) presenting certificate to mentor at graduation dinner

5 The model: critical aspects

In this section, several critical aspects of the WoM model will be explored: matching, cross-cultural interaction, community connectedness and benefits of the model.

Matching

Matching is important to the success of any mentoring program. According to the coordinators, matching refugees with mentors and match retention was one of the most difficult aspects of the WoM pilot, and it must be acknowledged that many matches did not succeed. Critical to matching and the retention was managing the expectations of participants in relation to these relationships, considerations about common interests and the role of place in thinking about community.

Expectations

Many refugee–mentor matches did not succeed in WoM, match difficulties occurring when mentors' and participants' expectations differed.

1. In negotiating the mentoring relationship, supply and demand difficulties arose when there was:

- low or no demand by the participant for what the mentor was offering. For example, some mentors sought to provide English language support or close friendship. However, some participants did not want this or had these needs met elsewhere.
- demand for more support than the mentor was able to supply. This included being contacted too frequently, at short notice and for extra assistance such as transporting children to and from school.

Some cancellations of appointments were undoubtedly due to participants feeling uncomfortable with arranged activities.

2. Competing priorities were a further issue. Most mentors and participants had multiple demands on their time including work, family responsibilities, study, volunteering and attending medical appointments. Difficulty in coordinating the schedules resulted in the cancellation of home visits

and social activities. This issue was heightened when two mentors were matched to one participant and there were three schedules to be aligned.

3. Lack of understanding or acceptance of WoM by the participant's family was a further factor. While some refugee women adapted quickly and welcomed helpers from outside the family, husbands found this more difficult. In a few instances, 'gatekeeping' occurred: mentors were told they had called the wrong number, not able to visit the home when others were there, made to feel unwelcome or asked to leave. Cultural expectations about the role and place of women and mothers, as well as marital conflict, were issues.

When these difficulties could not be overcome, they resulted in frustration, confusion and disappointment, if not rejection. Mentors and participants were either rematched, or in some cases dropped out.

Shortlived matches are a risk when dealing with already vulnerable refugee women, and particularly those with little other support and suffering depression. While screening applicants and conducting interviews can assist, it does not guarantee successful matches. Well-qualified mentor candidates with professional, cultural and linguistic experience had good intentions but little time. Given the aim of being inclusive, volunteers with psychological conditions were not excluded but ill health later led to the withdrawal of one mentor.

> *I haven't been in the program that much, just when I need help.* (Taifa, refugee)
>
> *[On visits to the post office and shops] All these things [participant] could have definitely done on her own and coped very well, but hopefully I provided a little bit of moral support perhaps.* (Barb, mentor)
>
> *One client felt the [mentor] was engaging too much with her and was feeling a bit uncomfortable. That issue can occur with any volunteer program, people overstepping boundaries. Also where there is a language barrier it not being clear what the client's willing to do or how much engagement the client wants. (Settlement worker*)
>
> *We lost a few people with over-enthusiastic volunteers.* (Coordinator 3)
>
> *That's one of the reasons I've had to, not break away, but its one of the reasons why I don't do as much with her as I'd like to. I feel sometimes I might come on to be a little bit pushy in terms of 'Hey let's do this' and 'Hey let's do that'. She seems enthusiastic at first but each time it's almost going to happen she will back out.* (Rashida, mentor)
>
> *The relatives were a bit suspicious of us, questioning us [about] what we were doing in the house. We were saying to them, 'We are here to help out your family member', but they couldn't understand why we have to be there or to represent the Brotherhood. We told them we were volunteers of the Brotherhood and still they were not very satisfied with our answers. [Eventually we ended up not visiting anymore], there were so many excuses [about why we couldn't come]. It was unfair to us and she didn't really give us an honest answer about why she didn't want to see us anymore.* (Liz, mentor)

Factors in matching

Wave 1: Two mentors and ethnolinguistic matches

During Wave 1, each refugee woman was matched with two mentors, taking into account age, children and marital status. Where possible ethnolinguistic matches were made, with at least one of

the mentors sharing the language and/or culture of the refugee. Of the 14 volunteers matched during 2008, four spoke Arabic and five spoke Turkish.

Advantages of this two-person approach were that mentors had support on visits. By contrast, one CALD mentor found later changes problematic because for cultural and safety reasons, she did not go on visits alone. Another mentor reported that her match did not speak any English and her children did not like interpreting, and concluded it would be better for the woman to be matched with someone from the same language group. One mentor who spoke the same language as her match was strongly supportive of this approach because it allowed them to develop a deeper relationship than would otherwise have been possible. For similar reasons she saw the benefits of having a cultural liaison to help parents and children integrate into the school community.

However, the matching method used in Wave 1 was problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it proved difficult to recruit volunteers along ethnolinguistic lines. Coordinators observed that Arabic and Turkish cultures lacked strong traditions of volunteering. Coordinator 1 believed that the key to attracting these volunteers was engagement through social activities and emphasis on relationships (which are a focal aspect of their culture). Supporting this, several perceived their role as friendship rather than mentoring and so declined to submit fortnightly reports.

Coordinators also observed that Wave 1 volunteers had considerable study, work and family responsibilities and sometimes ongoing settlement issues, which made participation difficult. Another problem in matching two mentors to each participant was that the mentor who did not speak the same language often felt left out of conversations which were conducted in Turkish or Arabic. Finally, scheduling joint meetings was difficult.

> *[The participants' children disliked staying home t5o interpret so] for this kind of women who doesn't speak English, it would be better to get a volunteer from her own language.* (Gabriella, mentor)
>
> *I could have been partnered up with someone else, but none of the ladies had as good English skills, and it would be more difficult trying to visit a lady with no English skills and basically we would be sitting there and trying to communicate, it would be difficult. So I thought: 'No, no'.* (Barb, mentor)
>
> *Interpreters are excellent possibly for medical situations but when it comes to this kind of community work, you can't use an interpreter ... At the beginning of the program [the other mentor] and I went over together and I think she felt a little bit left out because we were talking in Turkish a lot of the time … I think the person that's helping them needs to be one of them … [New arrivals] probably feel a lot happier around people who know what they've been through. I think it makes a world of difference.* (Rashida, mentor)
>
> *I didn't find that either cross-cultural or ethnolinguistic matches was more successful than the other. What it tended to be was the quality of the match and the personalities of the individuals. When we did get people who spoke Arabic who were really good volunteers that was an incredible asset. But we didn't have a sufficient supply of Arabic volunteers whose availability was high … Most of the other Arabic-speaking volunteers were really overcommitted with their families, studies and jobs, and still making their way in Australia … The priority shifted to the people who had the time available to do the work, [rather] than language skills, because we found that if you've got language but not time, the participants were no better off.* (Coordinator 2)

Wave 2: Commitment and common interests

Given these limitations, commitment and common interests were the focus in recruitment of mentors and matching in Wave 2. A six-month commitment was required from volunteer mentors although this proved difficult to enforce. Ability to commit to training and regular home visits was seen as more important than language. Communication was more challenging in cross-cultural matches, but while mentors initially used translators, they were later able to conduct home visits without them. In the interviews, mentors described the strategies they used to communicate in English, for example, speaking slowly, explaining things in different ways, using actions and body language. As improving their English was a primary concern for many refugees, the opportunity to practise was welcomed. When asked about communicating, none of the refugee women said they would have preferred a mentor who spoke the same language, but several said how much they valued their match. The Wave 2 matching model also fostered cultural exchange. Many participants shared information about their home country and how they became a refugee. Mentors in turn talked about their families and their experience of everyday life in Australia.

Common interests were seen as important in these matches. The personality of both mentors and participants was considered by coordinators, one observing that extroverted mentors could be 'off-putting' to refugee women who were introverts or depressed. Likewise, mentors who were perceived as 'over-enthusiastic' or 'pushy' could cause women to withdraw, although there were exceptions where this energy lifted the spirits of the women they visited.

Coordinators sought to match women who shared a similar lifestage, interests or values, so as to build a common language based on shared experience of study, work, motherhood and the day to day, for example, cooking meals. Women with young children or grandchildren were matched, as were university graduates, and people with similar occupational fields such as health.

> *She put effort to make it easier for me by using simple language and by talking slowly and if anything is not clear she try to explain it to me. For me my English is not bad as long as you speak softly and slowly. There are a few words I would have missed or not understand, but in general I can understand.* (Atalya, refugee)
>
> *She very helpful, very understanding, very patient. She talks slowly and uses English. She did not use an interpreter to improve my English. [On whether she would prefer someone from the same country] No, she was very good and I learnt a lot of new things from her.* (Yafa, refugee)
>
> *No I wouldn't have preferred Iraqi people because I feel at ease with [my mentors]. They are beautiful people, I like them very much.* (Maysa, refugee)
>
> [From an Anglo background talking about her Iraqi match]: *She is from a background like me. She is quite studious. She has a law degree and an economics degree ... being at university is something we had in common, learning different things. Her children were lovely, she has the most beautiful personality, it is really easy to get on with her anyway. When I'd come over she'd always make different foods … we've been in the kitchen cooking together and that's fun. Personal beliefs and approaches to life have come out, and we found out we shared similar approaches to things.* (Amy, mentor)

Place

During both waves, place was an important dimension of the pilot. Coordinators sought to recruit local female mentors to help newcomers settle in their community, initially in Craigieburn but later in Hume. While some matches resided in the same suburb, other considerations in the matching process

meant a few mentors travelled more than 20 minutes. Two mentors interviewed said they did not drive, one saying she relied on her husband to take her to home visits, another saying the journey on public transport took an hour. For two mentors living further away, it was difficult to provide the level of settlement support because they were themselves unfamiliar with local services.

In other instances, location had little effect. One recruited mentor never met her match despite living two blocks away. In another case, two refugee women lived 30 metres apart but despite attempts by mentors, never met. On the other hand, where mentors had a car, time and enough in common with their participant, strong friendships had formed.

Reflection

Based on interviews with coordinators, mentors and refugees, a good match involves:

- jointly understood purpose for the mentor–participant relationship
- acceptance of mentoring aims by the refugee's family
- negotiated terms, for example, the frequency/duration of meetings, extent of help offered, willingness to share personal information
- shared commitment to keep meetings and undertake agreed activities
- defined duration for the relationship, and possibly commitment to a minimum period
- shared interests of mentor and refugee on which to base the relationship, for example, children, study, work or worldview.

Even with these factors considered, coordinators emphasised that matching was time-consuming and uncertain.

Cross-cultural interaction

Building cross-cultural community interaction was a key objective of WoM. It sought to encourage volunteering by members of the host community, build interest and awareness in other cultures, and cross-cultural communication skills. Beyond individual volunteers, it also sought to engage the local business community. At the same time, through the friendship and settlement assistance offered, WoM sought to help socially isolated refugee women integrate into the local community.

These objectives relate loosely to the concept of social cohesion discussed in the introduction. Social cohesion occurs in a group willing to work toward shared goals and the continuous 'process of achieving social harmony'. Measurement of community cohesion examines people's sense of belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance and worth (Markus 2008, p.8).

While there was not scope in this evaluation for a detailed exploration of these domains, interviews with refugees, mentors and community professionals explored issues of welcome, discrimination, tolerance and cultural sensitivity.

Interviewees largely perceived the Broadmeadows area as tolerant and accepting of difference as a consequence of its culturally diverse population: the overseas birth rate for the Statistical Local Area is 37 per cent compared to 29 per cent in the Hume overall (Hume City Council 2009). However, fringe areas like Craigieburn differed, one community professional explaining that until the nineties, Craigieburn had been a satellite town whose residents were largely Anglo-Australian factory workers and 1950s Italian migrants who farmed market gardens. New suburbs joined

Craigieburn to Melbourne and were settled by second generation and new migrants. This led to some animosity from older residents who felt they were not benefiting from these changes.

Most of the refugee women interviewed said they loved Australia, it was impossible to dislike anything about it, and that the host community was friendly and helpful. However, their lives often revolved around home and caring for children and their social contact was limited to shopping (often accompanied by relatives), medical appointments and English classes. Given their relative isolation and the language barrier, community engagement was superficial. For this reason, WoM participants might not experience racism unless it was blatant. Only two of the women had negative experiences, one feeling she was scrutinised because of the colour of her skin, another encountering difficulties at her child's new school where a staff member showed a lack of patience and sensitivity.

While most mentors perceived the Australian community to be fairly tolerant and accepting, two observed elements of racism and intolerance, particularly toward those who did not speak English. Similarly, one community professional observed racist attitudes among local residents, adding that while these views were talked about they were not articulated to newcomers themselves. However some mentors and most community professionals believed that the Hume host community, and Australians more broadly, lacked knowledge of refugees and had little contact with new arrivals. They saw this as the cause of racism and cultural insensitivity, observing that when contact was made, understanding and sensitivity grew. These views reflect findings from earlier EMC research in Craigieburn (Frape 2006 unpub.) which also highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange in everyday life. One community professional noted BSL's Family Day Care Service as one such example, where the predominantly CALD childcare workers were appreciated by parents in the host community.

Pilots like WoM were also perceived as positive measures in addressing community tolerance and cross-cultural communication. New arrivals who otherwise found it difficult to meet people outside of their ethnic group felt welcomed and were able to learn more about life in Australia, while mentors felt they benefited greatly from their participation.

However, it must be acknowledged that most mentors interviewed came to the pilot with an interest in, and experience of, other cultures. Some had personal experience of dislocation and resettlement. They were largely a self-selecting group, already empathetic and thus not the community members who would most benefit from greater tolerance.

> *It's not discrimination as such but sometimes people don't understand that you are not skilled in the language and you can't address the issue the way you want to. It could be a silly thing. Once I went to my school office, some schools only sell you the logo so you buy the logo and you attach it to your children's clothes. You don't have to buy the uniform from the school so I wasn't sure because my daughter was new and starting prep. The [school receptionist] didn't understand what I meant, she thought I was doing it wrong, she became nervous … she became furious … She made me feel like that, like I was stupid … She recognised afterwards that she wasn't right in her behaviour and she overreacted … The principal even apologised to my husband. It's not discrimination but some people do not take the time or are not patient enough to give you time to explain things to them.*
> (Atalya, refugee)

I think many don't even think about [refugee adjustment issues] unless they are involved with somebody. It's not something that probably even crosses their mind. (Sue, mentor)

I'm not sure that a lot of Australians are very culturally sensitive, if they don't know a person or have the interaction with people from different cultures they tend to be a bit more averse to it … I don't think it's the case with everybody, I wouldn't include myself in that group, I'm someone who does try to be a bit more understanding and learn … In larger Melbourne and Australia as well, [some people have the attitude] 'if you don't speak the language I'm not going to help you out' … I think they do struggle to give the time to the newcomers that they deserve. I think that's a cultural thing and a reflection on larger society. (Amy, mentor)

Once they get to know people, they are more pragmatic than they are overtly racist. I think the more one-to-one contact that people have and the more experience that people have of refugees, because they are just people, the more experience they have of different people, the greater their tolerance and understanding of difference as well. It's crucial really to get more interaction. If mentoring is one pathway, that's great (Community development worker)

I think they sense the goodwill and intention of the volunteer that really comes across. That in itself is really helpful for someone who has just arrived in the country … [In addition] it's a really great way of reducing racism and increasing tolerance. If communities do volunteer and get to know a refugee individual or family, I think that's how we get along, and that's really important. If person A, born in Australia, meets person B, a refugee, and volunteers to support them and know what they've been through and understand their culture, I think that's a really great recipe for a more sensitive and understanding Australia. (Refugee counsellor)

I think how we build communities is through the support of programs such as WOM. It creates that environment to help people [community members / volunteers] help those people whose needs are greater than theirs. That's what builds communities. (Volunteer coordinator)

Community connectedness and participation

Beyond tolerance, social connectedness was a further benefit for participants and mentors alike. One refugee had moved to Hume and missed the strong sense of community she experienced in another outer northern suburb. Similarly, a retired mentor living in a commuter suburb described how the only contact she had with her neighbours was waving to them as they drove off to work.

WoM was able to engage volunteers, particularly with recruitment assistance from initiatives such as the Hume Volunteer Gateway. However some demographic factors were seen as an impediment to success. Much of the community was busy balancing work, study and young families, struggling to pay their mortgages and often commuting long distances. Some had ongoing settlement issues of their own. This was perceived to reduce their capacity for other activities like volunteering. Coordinator 2 suggested that it might have been easier to operate the pilot in an area like Fitzroy because of its higher density housing and socio-economically diverse population. Alternatively she suggested that eastern suburbs with new refugee groups, higher socioeconomic profile and levels of volunteerism might also have presented an easier location for establishing a program.

In our culture, the neighbours are like your family, you share together how you feel, you share everything together. Here everyone is like you live in jail. Nobody can knock on your door, even nobody can ask you how you feel. This I don't like in Australia. I don't have any relationship with anyone [in my new suburb]. In [old my suburb] it is different, all of my neighbours we know each other, Albanian, Serbian, Chinese, Islamic. The kids played together, we walked sometimes in the evening. When I come to [new suburb] most of them is Lebanese and Turkish, Iraqi and everyone is by himself. It is very, very hard for me. (Taifa, refugee)

Our area is mostly Sri Lankans and other communities, other people are going for work and we don't see them for long. Sometimes in the morning and evening they say hi, but they don't have time to chat with us. Sometimes when we go outside or we go to the shops, they will chat with us. (Amirtha, mentor)

It's difficult to get people to volunteer [in Craigieburn] … There are more households in Craigieburn where both parents work [and] and they have to travel so far to get employment. Because many residents have significant mortgages for brand new houses, more people within each household are working to make ends meet. The global financial crisis really hit Craigieburn hard, we've seen over a hundred jobs lost over this last six months. People's time to volunteer is a big challenge. (Community development worker)

Benefits

Many refugees and mentors observed that they had benefited from the pilot, and would recommend it to others, or had already done so.

I'm much more confident at the moment, even with Centrelink and with everybody … I depend on myself to go everywhere and if there are any problem I ask my mentors … This program is very good to join. It is very nice and good to learn about the Australian community. (Ishtar, refugee)

I thank you very much. I'm coping OK now, I'm learning the language, I'm learning my way through life. I go to the city to the doctors for the children and life is going OK. [WoM] is very helpful you know, I recommend to everyone. They help people to acclimatise and settle in Australia. (Yafa, refugee)

Now I feel more confident going around my local area. I can visit my brother's family, I can catch the public transport on my own. I go shopping on my own. The place I need to go, I can go on my own. In the past it was really difficult for me. Now I feel more confident. [About WoM] Of course it will be beneficial and it will be really good for people who have just arrived. It will guide them. It will lead them to a better life. (Maysa, refugee)

I have recommended [WoM] to a few people, those who are willing to volunteer in working with refugees and new arrivals in Australia as well. It's been something that I've been able to say, 'Hey, this is really good'. (Amy, mentor)

It's just the satisfaction of seeing another woman happy. I would recommend it to anyone. (Rashida, mentor)

Interviews with community professionals suggested demand by potential volunteers and refugee agencies for mentoring programs like WoM, with an emphasis on social support and practical assistance, as well as employment-orientated programs like Given the Chance. Government-funded

settlement assistance is limited in time (six months) and scope (basic orientation and getting to appointments) and migrant resource centres are limited by their funding in the types and extent of assistance they can provide. WoM meant that more intensive and longer term assistance could be provided, enabling other agencies to focus on counselling. It was also noted that other age-groups, such as young people were targeted through other programs but older women and widows in particular tended to be left behind.

Volunteer coordinators likewise noted demand by residents for opportunities like WoM, observing that it was a good way to support newcomers and build community understanding, and had the potential for participants to one day become volunteers.

Mentor (left) with refugee participant

6 Discussion

This discussion assesses the objectives of WoM. It then revisits the place of the model in light of the experience of the pilot.

Assessment of WoM objectives

The objectives of WoM were to increase the social connectedness of refugee women, build cross-cultural communication and establish opportunities for positive contribution by business, community groups and service providers.

1. Increasing the social connectedness of refugee women

WoM sought to increase the social connectedness of refugee women and address issues of isolation. Participants initially described feeling trapped in their homes, lacking support and someone to confide in. Mentors provided a listening ear, information and orientation support. They increased the women's mobility and access to public places, provided referral to other services such as financial programs and childcare, provided English language practice and information about life in Australia. Group activities provided a chance to visit significant sites within Victoria and learn about Australian history, culture and environment, as well as to socialise with other new arrivals and mentors.

Improving the social connectedness of refugees largely depended on the mentoring relationship and it must be acknowledged that many matches did not succeed. Critical success factors included effective negotiation and a shared understanding of the purpose and boundaries of the mentoring relationship; the existence of common interests between the mentor and participant; the cultural sensitivity of mentors; refugees' willingness to try new things and mentors' commitment to participate for an extended length of time.

Broader social connection beyond the mentoring relationship occurred, however, through increased access to services and public spaces. WoM participants were less socially connected than others in Hume due to language and settlement barriers. This may help to explain why their views about the

friendliness of the local community and the lack of discrimination, were largely positive and superficial.

Participants who continued until the end of Wave 2 appreciated the friendship and support they found in their mentor and many observed that they now felt more confident leaving the house. Many also said that once the pilot ended, they would continue their friendship or contact through participation via a home tutor program. On the basis of these findings, WoM achieved its objective of increasing the social connectedness of refugee women.

2. Cross-cultural communication

WoM sought to increase volunteer participation in Hume, build interest in other cultures and communication skills. In Wave 1, many matches occurred along ethnolinguistic lines so interaction was to some extent monocultural rather than cross-cultural. Ease of communication was a benefit of these matches. In Wave 2 most mentors were born in Australia or in a different country from their match. Mentors learned about the different cultures and customs of their matches and described the methods used to communicate. Participants appreciated these efforts and the chance to meet people outside their cultural group. One indication of the success of cross-cultural matches is that no participant interviewed would have preferred someone from their own culture. In fact, several participants indicated a thirst for knowledge and understanding about the Australian lifestyle.

Since the mentors were largely a self-selecting group, WoM could not be said directly to promote tolerance among groups who were less sympathetic to refugees. Mentors were already interested in other cultures and empathetic as a consequence of travel, formal study in the community sector and or their own migration experience.

Nonetheless, mentors reported that WoM increased their understanding of the needs of refugees and their compassion. They expressed their admiration of the refugees' strength in the face of adversity and felt privileged to hear their stories.

3. Engagement of business and community services

Coordinator 1 actively sought to engage businesses in WoM. However, beyond advertising in local shops the main achievement was obtaining the Stockland Community Spirit grant which covered the cost of social activities. However, subsequent coordinators did not pursue this objective due to other demands on their time and their view that business engagement was limited due to WoM being a small pilot in its formative stages.

WoM coordinators engaged extensively in Hume community networks, individual agencies and other community organisations concerned with refugee settlement or volunteering. This made a positive contribution to the sector and built local awareness of the pilot. The project succeeded in gaining coverage in council publications and local newspapers.

However, establishing and formalising referral and recruitment mechanisms was problematic. While links were forged with a few local refugee service agencies, one now a strong advocate of the WoM model, referral was regarded by coordinators as sporadic. The recruitment of mentors from the same ethnolinguistic community as participants also proved difficult and it was not until part way through Wave 2 that the Hume Gateway was launched and collaboration produced more volunteer mentors who were able to commit for a longer time. While some community engagement occurred, it took much longer than anticipated and this impeded progress. A longer Set-up Stage

would have been beneficial to ensure refugee referral and volunteer recruitment mechanisms were in place prior to the commencement of mentors and participants.

However all of these activities— the engagement of community, links with professionals, development of pilot resources and training—generated considerable program resources. To ensure these are not lost and that the WoM model is able to come to fruition, a longer operational phase of perhaps three years accompanied by further evaluation is needed.

Contribution of WoM

This evaluation indicates that as a generalist mentoring program which provides personal and settlement support to refugee women, the WoM model addresses a service gap. For the refugees eligible for full IHSS, the six months assistance is inadequate to address the multiple and complex problems of new arrivals and there are many ongoing and unmet needs. Onshore humanitarian applicants and Special Humanitarian Program entrants receive even less support. The participation in WoM of some women still suffering from social isolation and with ongoing orientation issues after many years residence in Australia is a further indication of this need.

Agencies contracted to deliver settlement services are limited in the assistance they can offer after the six months; and while migrant resource centres provide some support for five years after arrival, socially isolated women are difficult to engage. For agencies that offer trauma counselling, helping with urgent orientation needs can consume professionals' valuable time, so WoM provided a point of referral.

WoM engaged community volunteers to support the needs of both new refugees and those remaining isolated. The level of interest from prospective volunteers in Wave 2, indicate that there are residents seeking opportunities to engage with people from other cultures, 'give back,' contribute knowledge of their own settlement experience and or gain experience in community service. Not only did the mentors contribute many hours of unpaid personalised and practical service to their neighbours, but also WoM helped some volunteers to overcome their own social isolation.

While the WoM pilot experienced difficulties in relation to its establishment and the retention of matches, the benefit for both refugee women and the host community provides an indication of the model's potential.

Mentor (left) with participant at café

7 Recommendations

The literature review in the introduction of this report indicates that newly arrived refugees have complex needs and face barriers to settlement well beyond the six months assistance provided by the Commonwealth, and the importance of mentoring programs is acknowledged both in other research and in this evaluation. The following recommendations are made for the further development of the personal and settlement support model explored in WoM.

Developing a new program

1. Implement a new personal and settlement mentoring program in 2010

The WoM pilot addressed a services gap by providing valuable personal and settlement support to both new and less recent refugee arrivals suffering forms of social isolation, as well as engaging members of the host community. It is recommended that funding be sought for a personal and settlement mentoring program in 2010.

As a pilot, WoM's Set-up Stage developed substantial program resources and forged new networks. Project timelines required that the first intake of participants occurred before this process was complete. The program structure was adapted throughout the 28 months to improve outcomes, and it was only during the second half of Wave 2 that volunteer recruitment improved, mentoring relationships became more established and major improvements in refugees' adaptation to life in Australia were observed. This indicates that it takes considerable time and resources to set up a mentoring program, and for this work to come to fruition.

A new program will be able to capitalise on the momentum built by WoM and draw on the resources built, such as networks and program materials. Moreover, a three-year program would also allow sufficient time to develop the model and a longer mentoring phase to maximise outcomes.

However, the program model needs to be refined in accordance with the best practice principles documented in the introduction and the challenges and limitations of the pilot.

Model refinement

2. Refine the model

The pilot's name 'Women on the Move' is an idiom that evokes among English speakers connotations of mobility, development and progress. This has led to some confusion and presented ongoing communication difficulties for coordinators and interpreters. For non-English speakers and new arrivals, WoM does not explain the pilot's purpose and could easily be misinterpreted as a women's athletics club or a bus service.

Among those involved, the general purpose of WoM was well understood. However, each mentoring relationship depends on the background, characteristics and circumstances of both refugee participants and mentors. The personal capacity of mentors, as well as refugee needs and willingness to accept certain forms of assistance, produced individualised interactions. Issues of participant and mentor retention, supply and demand relate, at least in part, to difficulties in negotiating these individualised programs.

This suggests that further refinement of the model is required to provide an efficient and flexible delivery of a personalised program for participants.

3. Strengthen screening and assessment

A 'Participation Standards Policy' would be beneficial to establish some boundaries for the mentoring relationship. This could include, for example, a minimum of 12 months' participation, two contact hours per week, with a recognition of graduates on completion.

Entry screening and assessment also needs to be strengthened to screen out well-meaning but over-committed volunteers whose withdrawal negatively impacts on vulnerable women. Work, study, family and other responsibilities should be assessed. Given the community engagement aims of the pilot, prospective volunteers should not necessarily be excluded because of conditions such as well-managed mental illness. However, the assessment process should ensure that volunteers possess the skill, ability and resilience to make good mentors. If they do not, other opportunities such as volunteering at social activities or administrative duties should be offered.

Detailed referral forms are required so that coordinators have a good understanding of each refugee's background, needs and potential risk factors. Moreover assessment should explore what is sought from the mentoring relationship, the types of help that the refugees themselves want, its intensity and timing. For example, an assessment might identify that Participant A has a strong personal network and is not looking for close friendship and would like mentoring to be focussed on English language acquisition.

4. Identify streams of participation

Given the multiple aims of WoM, different streams could be developed. For example:

- friendship and settlement support
- task-specific participation, e.g. to improve English
- participation in social activities.

The stream approach would help to ensure the program meets refugees' diverse needs. It would also benefit volunteers with varying capacities. In the WoM pilot, volunteers were already

interested in other cultures and eager to support refugees. The different streams could thus be used to engage a broader cross-section of residents as volunteers at social activities. While training and monitoring would still be required, they could act as hosts, showing local attractions to newcomers while building their understanding of difference in a non-threatening situation. Likewise, social activities could be used to engage more established CALD community members in volunteering, increasing the sustainability of the program. Social activities could be used to help mothers transition their children into early childhood education, child care and school.

5. Explore opportunities to address refugee women's needs by linking with other BSL initiatives

There is scope to expand WoM to address the needs of refugee women through home English tutoring, providing an introduction to early childhood education, helping parents engage in schools, promoting financial inclusion or supporting women to move into the paid workforce. BSL programs which could be adapted for WoM or to which mentors and or participants could be referred include: Money Minded (financial inclusion), Parents as Career Transition Supports and Given the Chance (training and employment program).

6. Provide basic training for mentors and offer accredited supplementary modules

The initial WoM training package was reduced due to limited mentor availability, and in Wave 2 mentors identified areas where further training would have been beneficial. It is proposed that all mentors complete basic training and upskill with supplementary modules (as relevant to their match) later.

Basic training

- The refugee experience (e.g. trauma, camps, loss, grief and guilt)
- Sessions examining newcomers' culture, and highlighting key differences in Australia. Themes might include family relationships, gender roles, environment, the workplace.
- Effective mentoring and boundaries (e.g. what is mentoring and how to do it, accessing interpreters, making referrals to community agencies, the mentoring program's guidelines, requirements and availability of support)
- Orientation and basic settlement support (e.g. public transport, accessing public services, shopping)

Supplementary modules

- Social inclusion (e.g. social activities, local groups such as women's group and playgroups)
- Home English tutor training
- Personal support and listening skills
- Supporting parents to engage in the pre-school and school education of their children (e.g. starting school; literacy and numeracy; homework; liaising with teachers, post-school transitions)
- Banking, budgeting, accessing financial institutions
- The Australian labour market, work readiness and career options.

Basic training could draw on courses provided by Foundation House and Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre while supplementary modules could include other BSL training programs.

7. Strengthen mentor support, debriefing and exit process

Coordinator reports, mentor feedback and low retention rates support the need for a stronger system of mentor support, and for regular reporting. This should be included in the Participation Standards Policy for mentors. Fortnightly or monthly telephone meetings with the volunteer coordinator would help to document progress, and provide support with difficult issues. Periodic mentor meetings for debriefing and sharing strategies and practice should be held locally.

Mentor graduation ceremonies, as occurred in 2009, and an exit feedback mechanism are also recommended.

8. Supervise refugee support to address emerging issues

While the WoM model seeks to empower volunteers to support refugees, greater supervision by professional staff is required to monitor matches, address challenges in the mentoring relationship and improve refugee retention rates.

While mentors have a role in identifying participant needs and referring them to appropriate services, coordinators must better equip mentors to do this. In the Set-Up Stage, potential referral points (e.g. child care, family counselling, financial inclusion) need to be researched by program staff, contacts developed and mechanisms established. Matches must also be closely monitored to ensure that mentors are supported by qualified staff and referred to appropriate agencies in high-risk situations such those involving domestic violence.

Program staff should also identify and address broader needs. Throughout WoM, child care continued to be an issue for many refugees due to supply shortages and parent–child attachment. While staff worked with mentors seeking childcare providers, there is scope for staff to develop a larger response that might include collaboration with other BSL departments. For example, staff could work with BSL family daycare to cover weekend social activities using a provider from the same culture as the participants. Activities could be structured specifically to introduce mothers and their children to playgroups and childcare, support their transition into early childhood education, and increase women's access to English classes and employment.

Social activities were an excellent addition to WoM. One recommendation is that periodically, activities include participants' extended family, to increase understanding of the program.

A refugees' graduation ceremony like that offered for mentors in Wave 2 is recommended. This process could also be used to invite former refugee graduates to return and speak to newcomers about their settlement and experience of the program. Graduates could also become volunteers at social activities and later, mentors. Refugees should also be invited to take part in a feedback process to assist the program's further development.

Staff and resources

9. Fund adequate staffing and three distinct roles

The success of WoM depended on extensive community engagement, the development of referral and recruitment pathways, program resources and training, training of volunteers, inducting participants, monitoring matches, mentor support and social activities. Staffing of one 0.6 EFT

coordinator was inadequate to fulfil these tasks and an impediment to success. To operate effectively, at least three distinct staff roles need to be resourced. While the required staff level depends on program scale (i.e. numbers of participants and mentors), the minimum recommended staffing includes a:

- Program coordinator (0.6 EFT) with responsibility for program oversight, engagement with service providers, local government and business, establishment and maintenance of referral and recruitment pathways, participation in professional networks, advocacy and planning. Key skills include networking, program development and strategic planning.
- Volunteer coordinator (1.0 EFT) with responsibility for screening, assessing and inducting mentors, matching mentors with refugees, organising training sessions, providing volunteer support and debriefing.
- Refugee settlement worker (0.6 EFT) with responsibility for assessing participants, matching them with mentors, seeking periodic feedback, providing referral information to mentors regarding key needs and organising appropriate social activities. Key skills required include cultural understanding of the target population, fluency in one of the participant languages and experience in refugee settlement work.

Regular communication and information sharing between these staff would also be essential.

Building capacity, best practice and advocacy

10. Develop outcome measures and plan and resource an independent evaluation

The evaluation of the pilot primarily used a qualitative method. Hard outcome measures need to be developed for the proposed new program, e.g. spreadsheets tracking each participant's progress from commencement to graduation. As part of the planning process, an adequately resourced, independent evaluation needs to be scheduled from the start. The evaluation requires a mixed method design including quantitative measures, such as pre- and post participation surveys. While quantitative data alone would not reveal the complexity of refugee experience or the intrinsic benefits of mentoring, hard outcomes measures would complement and strengthen the qualitative analysis. Such an evaluation could help the case for future funding or policy reform.

11. Establish a network, minimum standards and best practice for refugee mentoring programs

Given the number of refugee mentoring programs in operation, EMC should establish a Victorian Refugee Mentoring Network to build the capacity of community agencies delivering them. Increased awareness of other programs would reduce duplication, facilitate the development of minimum standards frameworks and enable the sharing of best practice. Access to training could potentially be increased and costs reduced.

Participation in professional networks, the development of minimum standards and learning from best practice would strengthen applications to philanthropic, business and government funders.

12. Advocate the role of refugee mentoring to government

One role for the proposed network would be to advocate the role of refugee mentoring programs to government. This evaluation suggests there is a strong case for personal and settlement support mentoring programs which address key policy objectives and fill a gap in existing settlement services. Such programs:

- assist women at risk of isolation in connecting with the local community;
- offer volunteering opportunities (for which there is a demand) in both the Anglo-Australian CALD communities
- promote cross-cultural communication and social harmony.

Furthermore, the Multicultural Victoria Act's mandate for a whole-of-government response provides a supportive policy and considerable opportunity for advocacy.

Appendix: WoM in the press

Coverage of the Women on the Move pilot included:

- 'Women to take refugees under their wing' by Michelle Carnovale in the *Hume City Star*, 15 January 2008.
- 'Help for refugees' by Laura Banks in the *Hume Leader*, 15 January 2008.
- An interview on 28 April 2008 with community radio station, 3CR which has a strong social justice orientation.
- 'School bonds with parents' in the *Hume Leader*, 6 May 2008.
- An advertisement in the Hume City Council's publication, *Imagine, Explore, Discover*, Autumn/Winter 2008.
- A news item in the Brotherhood's newsletter, *In the Hood*, July 2008.
- An article in the Hume City Council's publication, *Imagine, Explore, Discover*, Summer 2009.
- 'Women on the move,' in Hume City Council community magazine, *Hume Pride,* Autumn 2009.
- 'Support for women' in the *Hume Leader*, 19 May 2009 newspaper.
- 'Women on the Move', in the Brotherhood's newsletter, *Building better lives*, Issue 35, June 2009.

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